

Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2009



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Preface

The purpose of this document is to support the provision of high quality religious education (RE) in maintained schools in England by providing clear non-statutory guidance about its position within the curriculum and the roles of those who have a responsibility, involvement or interest in the subject. The guidance is intended for a variety of users. They include:

- local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences;
- governors, head teachers, curriculum planners, teachers and trainee teachers of RE and others in schools;
- educational agencies, advisers, inspectors and consultants;
- providers of Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development, trainers and mentors;
- representatives of religion and belief communities locally and nationally; and
- RE organisations, national and local.

Parents¹ who have particular rights and responsibilities regarding the RE of their children, and pupils who have an entitlement to good quality RE in schools, may find this guidance useful.

This guidance supersedes the guidance given on RE in Circular 1/94. It does not constitute an authoritative legal interpretation of the provisions of education legislation or other enactments and regulations; that is exclusively a matter for the courts.

¹ In this document reference to parents means reference to parents and guardians

1. Introduction

1.1 Why new guidance for religious education now?

Religious education (RE) is a very important subject in the school curriculum, and the Government is keen to ensure that it is of a high quality for all pupils. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has decided to issue this updated non-statutory guidance to support all those who deliver RE. The previous guidance on RE, contained in Circular 1/94 and issued in January 1994 following the Education Act of 1993, has gradually become dated as social, educational and legal changes have taken place.

1.2 Changes since the 1994 guidance was published

1.2.1 Changes in general legislation

A number of legislative changes within and beyond the world of education in both Britain and Europe have implications for RE. The Human Rights Act 1998, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, and the Equality Act 2006 contribute to the 'bigger picture' within which RE is provided in schools and experienced by children and young people.

1.2.2 Educational changes

Since 1994 there have been changes in both educational structures and in the curriculum. New types of school such as academies have come into existence and sixth-form colleges are now under a changed form of governance. Provisions for children's early years have been extended and contribute to an educational vision which now routinely caters for the needs of young people up to the age of 19.

Since 1997 educational provision has included the establishment of the first maintained Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools as voluntary-aided schools and the establishment of new Jewish VA maintained schools.

In the statutory curriculum, the introduction of citizenship as a subject has links with and implications for RE. The *Every Child Matters* agenda and the *Children's Plan* place increased emphasis on inclusion and on the development of the whole child or young person in social and emotional as well as cognitive terms.

Maintained schools now have a duty to promote community cohesion and the well-being of pupils at the school. The curriculum reviews of 2008/09 have important implications for all subjects including RE. The result – a first web-based curriculum – enables a more flexible and personalised approach to learning.

1.2.3 Religion and belief: the context for RE

Religion and belief have become more visible in public life locally, nationally and internationally. The rapid pace of development in scientific and medical technologies and the environmental debate continue to present new issues which raise religious, moral and social questions. The varying impacts of religion on society and public life are constantly brought to public attention through extensive media coverage. The internet enables learning about a range of beliefs and encourages participation in public discussion of issues in a new and revolutionary way.

The data on religious affiliation in the census of 2001 revealed the diversity of religion across England and Wales in twenty-first century society. It also confirmed that religion plays a role in the identities of many British people whilst there are also many others who identify themselves as being of no religious faith. This is the context in which children and young people are growing up.

2. Religious education – the legal framework

2.1 Legal basis of religious education in the curriculum of maintained schools

The curriculum of every maintained school in England must comprise a basic curriculum (religious education RE, sex education and the National Curriculum) and include provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except to those withdrawn by their parents (or by students withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 and over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. For further guidance on the right of withdrawal see Section 9.

The requirement above does not apply to pupils who are under compulsory school age, although there are many instances of good practice where RE is taught to such pupils. Nor does it apply to a maintained special school (in relation to which separate legislative provision is made).² Separate Regulations³ covering maintained special schools require them to ensure that so far as practicable a pupil receives RE .

RE is not part of the National Curriculum. Therefore it is not subject to nationally prescribed attainment targets, programmes of study or assessment arrangements.

2.2 The role and responsibility of the local authority

Each local authority (LA) must have a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and must from time to time convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to produce (or review within five years) an agreed syllabus (see Section 2.3 below). Once adopted by the LA, the agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught, and can include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages. The broad role of a SACRE is to support the effective provision of RE in schools in order to enrich all pupils' experience of RE.⁴

2.3 The agreed syllabus

A locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus of RE prepared under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996 and adopted by the LA under that Schedule. Every locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the

² Section 80, Education Act 2002

³ Regulation 5A, The Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Consolidation) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/3455

⁴ SACREs have a responsibility for both RE and collective worship. This document is only about their function in relation to RE. However, the information on membership and partnership with the LA would apply equally in relation to collective worship

teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.⁵ The law does not define what the principal religions represented in Great Britain are. ASCs can decide which principal religions represented in Great Britain, other than Christianity, are to be included in their agreed syllabus. Agreed syllabuses in any community school and any foundation, voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled school without a religious character may not require RE to be provided by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular religious denomination.⁶ This prohibition does not extend to the study of catechisms and formularies.

2.4 RE in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) highlights a number of standards which provide young children with patterns of learning and experiences which prepare them for the more formal programme of learning, including RE, they will follow in Key Stage 1.

The EYFS Standards include requirements that children should:

- in relation to their Personal, Emotional and Social Development:
 - respond to significant experiences, showing a range of feelings when appropriate;
 - have a developing awareness of their own needs, views and feelings, and be sensitive to the needs, views and feelings of others;
 - have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people;
 - understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs, that need to be treated with respect; and
 - understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect;
- and, in relation to their Knowledge and Understanding of the World:
 - begin to know about their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.

2.4 RE curriculum in different types of schools

In all maintained schools RE must be taught according to either the locally agreed syllabus, or in accordance with the school's designated denomination, or in certain cases the trust deed.

Details are set out below.

2.4.1 Community, foundation and voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools without a religious character

RE must be taught according to the locally agreed syllabus adopted by the LA by which the school is maintained.

⁵ Section 375, Education Act 1996

⁶ Para 3 of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

2.4.2 Foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character

RE provision in foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character will depend on parental preferences. Where the parent of any pupil at the school requests that RE is provided in accordance with provisions of the trust deed relating to the school or (where there is no provision in the trust deed, in accordance with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character) then the governors must make arrangements for securing that RE is provided to the pupil in accordance with the relevant religion for up to two periods a week unless there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so. For pupils whose parents have not made such a request, then RE is to be provided in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus.⁷

2.4.3 Voluntary-aided schools with a religious character

In these schools RE should be provided in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed relating to the school or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character or as described in the next sentence. Where the parent of any pupils at the school wishes the pupil to receive RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus and cannot reasonably conveniently send the pupil to a school where the syllabus is in use, then the governing body must make arrangements for RE to be provided in the school in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus unless there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so. If the LA is satisfied that the governing body are unwilling to make such arrangements, the LA must make them instead.⁸ It is open to the governors of a voluntary-aided school with a religious character to arrange that teachers of RE employed in such a school are members of the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character.⁹

In foundation and voluntary schools with a religious character, the governing body must make sure that any denominational RE is inspected at regular intervals. The person carrying out the inspection must prepare a report on the quality of denominational education. The person who conducts the inspection is chosen by the governing body, or by the foundation governors in the case of a voluntary-controlled school, in consultation with a person prescribed in relation to the relevant designated religion or denomination.

2.5 RE in academies

Academies are all-ability, state-funded schools managed by independent sponsors, established under Section 482 of the Education Act 1996. Some academies have a religious character. Academies' funding agreements require RE to be provided as part of their curriculum for all pupils, unless they are withdrawn by their parents. However, the precise requirements governing the nature and content of the RE curriculum is specified by the funding arrangement that exists between the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the individual academy.

⁷ Schedule 19, para 3, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

⁸ Schedule 19, para 4, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

⁹ Section 60(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

2.6 RE: a shared responsibility

Responsibility for RE, which has always been part of the school curriculum in England, is a shared one – between local and national bodies, and between religious and belief communities, educationalists and representatives of the LA. Parliament passes primary legislation regarding the provision of RE, so that it must be taught in all schools. Government and national agencies provide guidance and advice to SACREs and ASCs, such as the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (the Framework) and other supporting guidance. The Government supports the training and professional development of teachers involved in RE through provision of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). There is also national guidance and support material relevant to all subjects including RE, such as effective ways of building ICT into the curriculum.

At a local level, RE in community schools and (usually) in voluntary-controlled and foundation schools with a religious character is the responsibility of LAs and SACREs through locally agreed syllabuses. The syllabus is arrived at as a result of local teachers, members of different religions and beliefs and representatives of the LA working together on SACREs and ASCs. In this way, RE contributes to community involvement in schools and education, and to community development and cohesion. It gives local religious and belief communities a role in developing the RE curriculum and gives schools links with local bodies which can support their work. Guidance, support and training are provided at a local level.

A further expression of the shared responsibility for RE is the dual system of community schools and voluntary schools where the former have no designated religious character and most of the latter have a religious character and are supported by faith organisations. This dual system is at the heart of the school system in Britain. In voluntary-aided schools with a religious character governing bodies determine the RE curriculum, whereas voluntary-controlled and foundation schools with a religious character usually teach the locally agreed syllabus unless parents have requested that RE be taught in accordance with the original trust deed of the school. The agreement between representatives of major faith communities and Government is expressed in *Faith in the System*¹⁰ in July 2007: “The Government and providers of schools with a religious character believe that all faith schools should teach pupils about their own faith and foster awareness of the tenets of other faiths.”

¹⁰ <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFE-S-00496-2007>

Case study – A large LA

The LA wanted to ensure that in reviewing the Agreed Syllabus, any new syllabus should draw on the richness of religious life represented in the city, including many groups not always found as SACRE members (such as Black-led Christian churches). Preparations for the review of the syllabus began with meetings of a Faith Leaders Group. These meetings helped to ensure a clear ownership of the syllabus by Faith Communities and led to strong representation on both Committees A and B. The Syllabus has consequently emphasised the value of 'Learning from Faith', treats religious traditions as a primary resource for spiritual and moral development, and sets out dispositions required for a flourishing humanity. The delivery of the syllabus is being supported by a website and filmed material on DVDs designed to be used by teachers, faith communities and parents.

The interest generated by the new syllabus attracted active engagement from other Directorates within the authority. The Equalities and Human Resources Directorate, for example, with responsibility for Community Cohesion, recognised that the dispositions amounted to a framework of values shared well beyond the authority's school communities. The Strategic Partnership, the planning structure for the whole authority, has included some of the filmed material prepared for the Syllabus on its website. Based on this existing partnership of trust, the SACRE secured further resources from the council for the second stage of supporting the delivery of the Syllabus. Much of the success of the developments in RE is attributable to the strong interest amongst political and religious authorities, to consultation and to the fruitful collaboration between an influential and committed chairperson in the Conference and in SACRE with the members of local faith communities.

3. The importance of religious education

3.1 The importance of religious education in the curriculum

Section 78 (1) of the 2002 Education Act requires that the whole curriculum should be a balanced and broadly based curriculum which “promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life”. Learning about and from religions and beliefs through the distinct knowledge, understanding and skills contained in RE, plays an essential role in achieving these aims. Religious education (RE) should be taught in an objective and pluralistic manner, and not as indoctrination into a particular faith or belief. It is important that pupils learn about the concept of religion and belief and the part it plays in the spiritual, moral and cultural lives of people in a diverse society. Religion and belief have an impact on people’s values, attitudes, words and actions in their personal, family, work and social life in local, national and international contexts. The stability and harmony of families, communities and wider society where a plurality of religions and beliefs is to be found is highly important.

Importance of RE

RE provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views that offer answers to questions such as these. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development. It enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression, as well as of the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.

RE encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.

RE encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a diverse society and global community. RE has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning. It enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own. It promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

(Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, page 7; published by Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA 2004])¹¹

3.2 RE and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Pupils' spiritual development involves the growth of their sense of self, their unique potential, their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and their will to achieve. As their curiosity about themselves and their place in the world increases, they try to answer for themselves some of life's fundamental questions. They develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes they need to foster their own inner lives and non-material well-being.

RE makes a distinctive and essential contribution to spiritual development. It promotes discussion and reflection on key questions of meaning and truth, such as the origins of the universe, life after death, good and evil, and beliefs about God. It considers how religious and other beliefs and concepts may be expressed through the creative and expressive arts and related to the human and natural sciences, thereby contributing to personal and communal identity. RE looks at how religions and other world views perceive the value of human beings, and their relationships with one another, with the natural world, and with God. It enables pupils to develop a sense of belonging, and consider their own views and ideas on religious and spiritual issues.

¹¹ See section 4

Pupils' moral development involves pupils acquiring an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of moral conflict, a concern for others and the will to do what is right. They are able and willing to reflect on the consequences of their actions and learn how to forgive themselves and others. They develop the knowledge, skills and understanding, qualities and attitudes they need in order to make responsible moral decisions and act on them.

RE provides opportunities to promote moral development through engaging in such issues as truth, justice and trust. It explores the influence of family, friends and media on moral choices and how society is influenced by beliefs, teachings, guidance from religious leaders and sacred texts. In RE pupils are encouraged to consider what is of ultimate value through studying the key beliefs and teachings from religion about a range of ethical issues and developing a sense of conscience. RE promotes moral development through exploration of the springs of moral action, recognition of the importance of moral sense and a capacity to distinguish between responsibility to self, to others, to wider legal obligation and to ultimate frames of reference.

Pupils' social development involves pupils acquiring an understanding of the responsibilities and rights of being members of families and communities (local, national and global), and an ability to relate to others and to work with others for the common good. They display a sense of belonging and an increasing willingness to participate. They develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes they need to make an active contribution to the democratic process in each of their communities.

Pupils' cultural development involves pupils acquiring an understanding of cultural traditions and an ability to appreciate and respond to a variety of aesthetic experiences. They acquire a respect for their own culture and that of others, an interest in others' ways of doing things, and curiosity about differences. They develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes they need to understand, appreciate and contribute to culture.

QCA Guidance 1999

QCA produced additional guidance on spiritual and moral development in 2008. This can be found at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/personaldevelopment/moralandspiritual/index.aspx>

RE contributes to social development through considering how religious and other beliefs lead to particular actions and concerns, and by investigating social issues from religious perspectives. RE provides opportunities for pupils to articulate their own and others' ideas on a range of contemporary social issues.

RE provides opportunities to promote cultural development through enabling pupils to engage with people, literature, arts and resources from differing cultures. It considers the relationship between religion and cultures and how religions and beliefs contribute to and are influenced by cultural identity and practices. Effective RE promotes harmony between people of different religions and beliefs, and respect for all, by combating prejudice and discrimination, contributing positively to community cohesion and promoting awareness of how co-operation between people of different religions and beliefs can support the pursuit of the common good.

3.3 RE and personal development and well-being

“Whenever I come out of RE my head is exploding with questions and my whole body aches – this is not because I don’t understand – it is because I’m buzzing with new thoughts” (13-year-old girl, quoted in the Independent, 10 January 2008)

RE has the capacity to contribute significantly to schools’ statutory duty to promote well-being of pupils. Children, young people and adults need to be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. At its best, learning in RE engages the whole person, and is particularly relevant to well-being in the relational, emotional, social, moral, intellectual, economic and spiritual aspects of life. It gives young people the knowledge, skills and disposition to search for personal meaning and deepen their awareness of themselves and others, helping them to deal with setbacks. In RE pupils realise that religions and beliefs can be life-affirming or damaging, and they take opportunities to evaluate both kinds of commitment in order to help them make positive and healthy choices.

Children and young people need skills and attitudes to protect themselves, and others, from harm throughout their lives. Primary pupils study stories and myths that introduce them to concepts of good and evil, fear, courage, conflict and justice, in ways that are safe, enjoyable and yet exciting. All religions and beliefs provide such stories. Listening to these and other stories, exploring their meanings and responding to the questions they raise can contribute to young children’s mental and emotional well-being.

“I like the story of Rama and Sita, and painting hands. I like the part when the monster goes away.” (Pupil aged 6)

To help pupils lead safer, healthier and more fulfilled and productive lives, the study of issues such as crime and punishment, sex and relationships, addiction and dependency, or diet and body image can give secondary pupils a stronger understanding of the reasons for criminal or harmful behaviour, and its impact on individuals and society.

“RE is one of my favourite subjects and the reason for that is that most of the time in lessons, we discuss issues that make me look inside myself and think very deeply about the world, behaviour, my personality and my beliefs. I have learnt not only the facts about different religions but I have learnt a lot about myself.” (Student, aged 16)

RE at Key Stages 3 and 4 shares the key concept of identity with PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) and citizenship, enabling learning to tackle this at personal, religious, social and political levels appropriate to pupils’ ages. Activities such as ‘Black History Month’ and ‘Who do we think we are? Week’ can strengthen pupils’ sense of personal identity and belonging, thus giving them greater personal security and enjoyment of life.

12 This and other quotations from pupils are provided by courtesy of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE).

By taking part in learning activities such as speaking and listening, debate, investigating and evaluating beliefs and religious practice, exploring ultimate questions, speaking and listening in debates, taking part in role play or making oral responses to reflective experiences, pupils in RE are listened to, and learn to listen carefully to others. From regular experiences of this sort, they develop stronger self-awareness and self-esteem, as well as an understanding of the needs of others.

Schools should consider how RE contributes to the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*:

- offers information and insights on the impact of beliefs, practices and values, and whether they might be healthy or unhealthy;
- allows pupils to explore the value of safety in relation to attitudes to authority, property, relationships and the impact of ideas, and to develop social skills and empathy for others in considering these issues;
- challenges pupils in ways that stimulate them and give them an enjoyment of learning, a sense of achievement leading to better motivation, and a belief in their capacity to respond well to people and ideas;
- fosters a sense of self-awareness, belonging and identity that manifests itself in positive participation in school and community life; and
- raises issues of immediate and future relevance to pupils' economic well-being, for example attitudes to wealth and poverty, skills for living and working in a diverse society, the ethics of war, sustaining the planet, and the use of money.

3.4 RE and community cohesion

“Every school – whatever its intake and wherever it is located – is responsible for educating children and young people who will live and work in a country which is diverse in terms of cultures, religions or beliefs, ethnicities and social backgrounds.” (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF]¹³)

Community cohesion is promoted by working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.

RE provides a key context for children and young people to develop their understanding and appreciation of diversity through the study of religion and belief. It helps to promote shared values, respect for all, and to challenge racism and discrimination. This is often achieved by providing a high quality classroom experience of RE enriched by opportunities to meet with representatives from, and make visits to, religious and non-religious belief groups in the local area.

¹³ *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*, DCSF, July 2007; DCSF-00598-2007

Effective RE will promote community cohesion at each of the four levels outlined in DCSF guidance:

- the school community – RE provides a positive context within which the diversity of cultures, beliefs and values within the school community can be celebrated and explored;
- the community within which the school is located – RE provides opportunities to investigate the patterns of diversity of religion and belief within the local area and it is an important context within which links can be forged with different religious and non-religious belief groups in the local community;
- the UK community – a major focus of RE is the study of the diversity of religion and belief which exists with the UK and how this diversity influences national life; and
- the global community – RE involves the study of matters of global significance recognising the diversity of religion and belief and its impact on world issues.

Where RE provides an effective context to promote community cohesion it has a focus on “securing high standards of attainment for all pupils from all ethnic backgrounds, and of different socio-economic statuses, abilities and interests, ensuring that pupils are treated with respect and supported to achieve their full potential” (DCSF).¹⁴ In order to achieve this, pupils’ progress in the subject should be monitored carefully and any under-achievement by particular groups tackled.

In some of the best examples, RE goes further and provides an important context for building bridges into the local community as part of the school’s wider commitment to engagement and extended services. The Department for Communities and Local Government guidelines *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society* emphasises the important role that RE and Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) play in promoting community cohesion: “Effective Religious Education (RE) can play a key part in promoting interfaith understanding and dialogue and can address the prejudices brought about by a shallow knowledge of world religions and provides pupils with a safe forum for the discussion of controversial issues ... SACREs, where properly supported by the local authority, can act as powerful vehicles for building, appreciating and managing differences in beliefs and values in schools, education more widely and the local community. They are a partnership between faith communities in each local area and with the local authority and schools. SACREs are predominantly focused on education but are also a statutory group that can be consulted on inter faith issues, act as sounding boards or work in partnership on broader initiatives.”¹⁵

¹⁴ *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*, DCSF, July 2007; DCSF-00598-2007

¹⁵ *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*, page 96, DCLG 2008; ISBN: 978 1 4098-0315-7

Examples of good practice seen in schools include providing:

- opportunities to explore controversial issues related to religion and belief in the modern world – including media misrepresentations of religion;
- opportunities for representatives of ‘seldom heard’ religious communities to work with the school and develop confidence that their traditions are respected;
- opportunities for pupils with strong commitments to share their experience in a safe context and see that their faith or belief is valued and respected;
- learning outside the classroom and visitors to it, designed as opportunities for first-hand engagement with diversity religion and belief in the local area; and
- ‘off-timetable’ theme days or assemblies related to, for example, Holocaust Memorial Day – often working in partnership with other subjects, most notably citizenship.

Examples of particularly impressive practice are:

- One head teacher saw RE as a context for analysing patterns of religious diversity in the area, forging links with local mosques and between mosques and local churches, and using these links to develop extended school and family learning opportunities.
- A school with a mainly white mono-cultural intake had twinned with a school with a high percentage of pupils from the Muslim tradition to extend the curriculum enrichment opportunities for RE.
- Using focus RE theme days to extend opportunities for pupils to explore cultural diversity in more depth, using visitors, for example Indian dancers.
- A school with a mainly white ethnic intake investigated the range of parents with ‘global’ experience and invited them to contribute to RE and beyond; another had built links through a local interfaith network project.

In order to evaluate the way RE is contributing to this important aspect of school life, school leaders should ask themselves the following questions:

- Do pupils value and recognise the contribution RE makes to their understanding of different communities and ways of life, and to the concept of diversity?
- Do pupils have real opportunities to explore and gain first-hand experience of religious and cultural diversity?
- Does the school help pupils to deepen their understanding of their own beliefs and values within their own tradition alongside understanding those of others’?
- Does RE provide a context to build relationships with the communities in the local area including those groups with whom it is more difficult to forge links?
- Does RE provide a voice for religious and other minority groups within the school, developing a culture of mutual respect and harmony?
- Does the school treat religion and belief seriously and model ways of building respect?

- Does the school know enough about the diversity of religion and belief within the local community and does it explore ways of making links with those communities?
- In a largely mono-cultural school, how well is RE working to foster a broader awareness of cultural and religious diversity?
- Does the school provide enough opportunities for learning outside the classroom and enrichment activities to extend the potential of RE to promote community cohesion?

4. The non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education

4.1 The non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education

The publication of the first non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (the Framework) in 2004, whose principles have been endorsed by representatives of all major faith and belief communities and religious education (RE) associations, has provided the basis for a more coherent and consistent RE curriculum across the country. The Government's commitment to RE is enshrined in the Framework.¹⁶

Since its publication, the Framework has been used to produce illustrative programmes of study which are presented alongside the National Curriculum published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). This has enabled RE to keep in step with wider curriculum developments and support schools in planning an integrated and coherent curriculum. The Framework has also informed the criteria for GCSE and A level Religious Studies in England.

The Framework sets out non-statutory guidelines for RE in England. It provides information to help those with responsibility for the provision and quality of RE through the whole of the maintained system of education. It was written mainly for local authorities (LAs), Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) and Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs), but is also intended to be of use to the relevant authorities with responsibility for schools with a religious character and inform religious and secular communities about the scope of RE.

"The national framework is intended to benefit all pupils by helping to improve the quality of RE across the country."¹⁸

Though non-statutory, the Framework and its implementation are the basis of Government policy on RE. It represents an agreement on RE between all the major faith and belief communities and RE professional bodies in England. The Framework sets out the importance of RE and a rationale for the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that should be promoted across a breadth of study for each age group of pupils. It also sets out recommended programmes of study for RE, including an 8-level scale of attainment, for children and young people aged from 5 to 19, and suggested material for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

¹⁶ Charles Clarke, Foreword to NFRE 2004, *Faith in the System*, DCSF 2007; and Jim Knight's speech to NASACRE conference January 2007

¹⁷ *Non-statutory National Framework for RE*, page 5, QCA 2004

4.2 The breadth and depth of the RE curriculum

The Foreword to the Framework states that the Framework “makes clear the principles that schools should follow in the teaching of RE”.¹⁸ These principles are intended to guide the development of the RE curriculum through agreed syllabuses and in faith schools. They are also set out in the joint statement agreed by leaders of the main religious traditions in England in February 2006¹⁹ and reaffirmed in *Faith in the System*. “The Government and providers of schools with a religious character should teach pupils about their own faith and foster awareness of the tenets of other faiths.”²⁰ The leaders have reaffirmed “the commitment ... to using the principles of good religious education enunciated in the non statutory National Framework for RE when reviewing the RE curriculum for their schools and colleges.”²¹

It is important that legal requirements for RE are met (see Section 2), and that the RE curriculum is broad, balanced and rich. The breadth of RE should reflect the current diversity of religions and beliefs in Britain and the modern world. The depth of the subject should engage pupils, providing powerful, meaningful and positive learning experiences for them.

Breadth and depth in RE for all pupils can be achieved if the following are taken into account:

- pupils should develop understanding of concepts and mastery of skills to make sense of religion and belief, at an appropriate level of challenge for their age;
- RE should provide opportunities for pupils to develop positive attitudes and values and to reflect and relate their learning in RE to their own experience;
- there should be a wide ranging study of religion and belief across the key stages as a whole;
- not all religions and beliefs need to be studied at the same depth or in each Key Stage, but all that are studied should be studied in a way that is coherent and promotes progression;
- the study of religions and belief should reflect an appropriate balance between and within Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views, across the Key Stages as a whole; and
- the breadth of study should take account of the four levels of community cohesion which all maintained schools are now obliged to promote. Decisions about the religions to be studied should take account of the balance of religion within:
 - the school community;
 - the community within which the school is located;
 - the UK community; and
 - the global community.

¹⁸ *Non-statutory National Framework for RE*, page 3, QCA 2004

¹⁹ *The Role of Schools with a Religious Character in English Education and Society* (a joint vision statement of the Government and all the faiths with schools open or approved to open in the maintained sector)

²⁰ *Faith in the System*, page 10

²¹ *Faith in the System*, page 10

For Key Stages 1–3

To make sure the requirements are met and that the curriculum is broad and balanced, [the Framework recommends that:]

- Christianity should be studied throughout each key stage; and
- the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (here regarded as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) should be studied across the Key Stages.

It is important that ASCs and schools ensure that by the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have encountered all of these five principal religions in sufficient depth.

It is recommended that there are opportunities for all pupils to study

- other religious traditions such as the Bahá'í faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism; and
- secular philosophies such as humanism.

Pupils should also study how religions relate to each other, recognising both similarities and differences within and between religions. They should be encouraged to reflect on:

- the significance of inter-faith dialogue; and
- the important contribution religion can make to community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and discrimination.

(Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, page 12)

5. What Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and local authorities need to know

5.1 Local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences working in partnership

The partnership between local authorities (LAs) and their Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) is a key factor in the provision of successful religious education (RE) for all pupils. A positive joint approach allows a LA to draw on the strengths of local religious and belief groups and teachers as well as elected members. In many cases the partnership goes further than matters of the agreed syllabus, and makes an important contribution to the promotion of community cohesion (see 3.4 above). Ofsted report that “The most effective SACREs are those that have a strong and productive relationship with the LA, centred on a shared determination to support RE and collective worship and that schools should perform well in the only curriculum area entirely under local control”.²²

However, there is significant variability in the quality of this partnership. While there is much good practice, in too many cases the partnership is not working effectively. The SACRE Self Evaluation Tool, produced in 2005, included a useful description of an effective partnership.

In a highly effective SACRE, “members will have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, and will seek to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities. Meetings will be very purposeful and focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. There will be a very effective partnership with the LA, and SACREs will be well supported by subject specialist advice, training and funding. They will be very well informed about the quality and provision for RE ... in schools, and about wider LA and national priorities and developments. The process of reviewing, revising, implementing and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus will be very robust, ensuring that schools are well supported in their work.”

(*SACREs and Self-evaluation – a guide*, Ofsted, May 2005, HMI 2467)

²² Ofsted: *An evaluation of the work of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education*, November 2004, HMI 2269 paragraph 9. See also Qualifications and Curriculum Authority’s analyses of SACREs’ annual reports www.qca.org.uk/qca_7882.aspx

What makes for an effective partnership between an LA and its SACRE/ASC?

In evaluating the effectiveness of their partnership, LAs and their SACREs/ASCs should consider:

- Do the LA and its SACRE/ASC carry out their statutory duties?
- Is SACRE/ASC properly resourced and well supported by subject specialist advice and training?
- Do members of a SACRE/ASC have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, seeking to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities?
- Are SACRE/ASC meetings purposeful and focused on the major priorities of improving the quality of RE in schools?
- Is SACRE/ASC well informed about the quality of RE in schools and about wider LA and national priorities and developments affecting the subject?
- Has the LA adopted a high quality agreed syllabus: one that provides a good grounding for planning, teaching and learning in RE?
- Is there an effective process of reviewing, revising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus?
- How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to help teachers and schools raise standards in RE and the quality of RE teaching?
- How far does the SACRE contribute effectively to the community cohesion agenda by supporting inclusion in schools and improving social harmony in the community?

Case study

One SACRE has supported teaching and learning in RE through a project involving a course for primary, secondary and special schools, which enables schools to provide a certificate of achievement for children and young people, matching the colours of the rainbow with the eight levels of the local agreed syllabus/national framework for RE.

5.2 Role of local authorities

In addition to establishing a SACRE and, within five years of the adoption of a current agreed syllabus, an ASC, LAs should make sure that funding, expertise and structures are in place to support the provision of effective RE.

A LA must:

- establish a permanent body called a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE).²³ LAs must appoint representatives to each of four groups representing respectively:
 - Committee A Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations
 - Committee B The Church of England

²³ Section 390, Education Act 1996

Committee C Teacher associations

Committee D The local authority

- establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review the agreed syllabus for RE adopted by the LA.²⁴ This may have common membership with the SACRE but is a separate entity and must therefore be separately convened;
- appoint members of the committees represented on the ASC;²⁵
- ensure that the composition of committee A on an ASC and group A on a SACRE are representative of the principal religious traditions in the area. The statutory provisions recognise that there will be occasions when the interest of efficiency override the requirement for directly proportionate representation;²⁶
- take all reasonable steps when appointing a person to be a member of a committee of an ASC or group on a SACRE to represent any religion, denomination or association, to ensure the person appointed is representative of the religion, denomination or associations in question.²⁷ To ensure that persons being considered for appointment to SACREs and ASCs are representative it is normal for LAs to seek nominations from the organisations that have a right of representation on each of the groups or committees;
- LAs should seek nominations separately for membership of SACRE and the ASC, but can request that consideration be given nominating bodies to nominating the same individuals for membership of both the SACRE and the ASC;
- there is no statutory provision that limits membership of the LA group (SACRE) or committee (ASC) to elected members, and there is merit in considering including senior LA officers or others who may appropriately represent the LA; and
- fund a SACRE and an ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to convene each of these bodies.

A LA may:

- decide on matters to refer to its SACRE, including in particular methods of teaching, choice of teaching material and provision of teacher training;²⁸ and
- give its SACRE a role in the local statutory complaints procedure under Section 409 of the Education Act 1996.

²⁴ Schedule 31, para 2, Education Act 1996

²⁵ Schedule 31, para 4, Education Act 1996

²⁶ Section 390, Schedule 31, para 4, Education Act 1996

²⁷ Schedule 31, para 7, Education Act 1996; Section 392(2), Education Act 1996

²⁸ Section 391(1)(a), Education Act 1996

5.3 SACREs

5.3.1 Role of SACREs

The broad role of a SACRE is to support the effective provision of RE in schools in order to enrich the experience of RE for all pupils.²⁹

A SACRE must:

- advise the LA on RE given in accordance with an agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions as it may see fit;³⁰
- publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the LA, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the LA;³¹
- send a copy of the report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA);³² and
- meet in public unless confidential information would be disclosed.³³

A SACRE should also:

- monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus;
- provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; the SACRE cannot do this unless there are clear arrangements to provide it with the information it needs concerning the up-to-date situation with regard to RE in the schools using the agreed syllabus;
- provide advice to the LA and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training;
- in partnership with its LA, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality of the RE and the learning of pupils; and
- offer schools and the LA advice concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with changes in wider education.

A SACRE can require its LA to review the agreed syllabus, and if after discussion a vote is taken on this matter the LA group on SACRE is not entitled to cast a vote.³⁴ A majority decision by the three other committees is sufficient.

A SACRE may decide to advise the LA on matters related to its functions to the LA. Equally a LA may decide to refer matters to its SACRE.³⁵ These reciprocal powers emphasise the partnership

²⁹ SACREs have a responsibility for both RE and collective worship. This document is only about their function in relation to RE. However, the information on membership and partnership with the LA would apply equally in relation to collective worship

³⁰ Section 391(1)(a), Education Act 1996

³¹ Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996

³² Section 391(10), Education Act 1996

³³ The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994, SI 1994/1304

³⁴ Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

³⁵ Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

between the two bodies. Although the advice given by a SACRE carries no statutory force, the LA or school should always give careful consideration to advice offered.

SACREs are encouraged to develop their own role in working with inter-religious bodies in the locality to enhance the important contribution that the study of religion and belief can make to community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and discrimination.

5.3.2 Composition and membership of a SACRE

If a SACRE is to be effective, its membership needs to be as inclusive as possible and to reflect the priorities for RE and for education more broadly in the twenty-first century. SACREs are local bodies and so should ensure that the religions and beliefs of the local area are represented. Membership of SACREs must be as required by law, comprising four committees or groups mentioned in Section 5.2 above. A SACRE may also include co-opted members who are not members of any of the four groups,³⁶ although it is often useful to attach, informally, co-opted members to one of the SACRE groups. Members of a group may well wish to take into consideration the views of co-opted members before taking a vote. SACREs should also make sure that their membership reflects, where possible, the breadth of study of religions and beliefs referred to in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (the Framework) thus embodying a commitment to a RE which is inclusive, broad and balanced. It is therefore desirable that membership of a SACRE (through group membership or co-options) should include representatives who reflect both the diversity of religions and beliefs identified within the local agreed syllabus, and local commitment to inter-religious dialogue and community cohesion.

Case study

A LA reviewed the workings of its SACRE and identified as a problem the mutual lack of communication. The LA also realised that it was not making the most of the role RE could play in promoting community cohesion. It became clear that the SACRE needed more support if it was to operate effectively. The LA appointed a senior officer to attend SACRE meetings and report back to other council bodies, including its Race Equality service. It also prioritised the provision of expert support and appointed an adviser for RE, recognising the need for someone who could work with schools on behalf of the SACRE to inspire and challenge. The LA wanted to develop RE's contribution to community cohesion and encouraged this by supporting events for pupils such as a 'Beliefs and the Environment' week, a Young People's SACRE and a 'Religions and beliefs in our area' website. The LA drew on SACRE expertise by inviting some of its members to give talks to the LA's workforce on each of the faith and belief traditions represented; this included some traditions strong locally and others important from a national and global perspective. It encouraged SACRE's desire for inclusive membership whilst taking seriously the need to ensure representation of the local community. It supported a SACRE annual outreach event in the form of a lecture and refreshments, and the development of an effective SACRE website. It provided data for the SACRE to help it carry out the task of monitoring standards in RE.

³⁶ Section 390(3), Education Act 1996

SACREs have many opportunities to engage all of their members as stakeholders and ambassadors of RE. Increasingly LAs and SACREs are adopting innovative good practice by including representatives of pupils and students on their SACREs, or by having parallel Young People's SACREs.

Case study

The SACRE regularly participates in its LA's strategic development. In 2008 SACRE was consulted about:

- the Comprehensive Equalities Scheme (CES) 2008–11;
- the Community Strategy (SCS) 2007–20; and
- the Regeneration Strategy 2007–20.

Members' views were sought on key short-, medium- and long-term issues to be addressed and they were able to respond individually or to link the council to their faith communities for wider consultation.

SACRE members raised issues to be addressed, for example specific health, dietary and other needs of people of different faith (for example needs of women of different faiths to access a female doctor/dentist); working with local hospitals on health-related issues, including how to deal with the death of a patient from a particular faith, provision of burial sites, community safety and the particular needs of young people from their communities. SACRE was involved in the development of the borough's anti-bullying strategy in 2008, particularly bringing the needs of young people in schools being bullied because of their faith. In 2009 the SACRE supported a borough survey on community cohesion; the views and perspectives of faith members of the SACRE were sought on a range of issues to do with community cohesion in the area.

5.3.3 Decision making and workings of a SACRE

On any question to be decided by a SACRE its constituent groups each have a single vote. Co-opted members do not have a vote.³⁷ Decisions within a group do not require unanimity. Each group must regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock. Many SACREs have chosen to adopt a constitution to regulate their proceedings and ways of working.

³⁷ Section 390(7) and Section 391(4), Education Act 1996

Case study

A SACRE had several vacancies which needed to be filled and decided to carry out a review of membership in partnership with the LA. This brought to attention the fact that there were significant religion and belief communities in the area not currently represented on Group A, that there were no representatives of higher education on Group C, and that the voices of the young people most affected by the SACRE's work, the pupils, were entirely absent. It was decided that in the interests of effectiveness the membership should be expanded to include young people as well as a Bahá'í and a Humanist representative and somebody from a nearby university. Formal votes were very rarely necessary, and the SACRE and LA agreed that since the statutory requirement was for each group, not each individual representative, to have a single vote, there was no problem about these additional new members contributing to the decision making process.

5.4 Agreed Syllabus Conferences

5.4.1 Role and working of Agreed Syllabus Conferences

Every LA is required to establish and support an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). Its role is to produce and recommend an agreed syllabus for RE which meets legal requirements and is educationally sound, and then review it every five years. An ASC can specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus but it may not require schools to allocate particular time to RE in the curriculum. The guidance offered by the Framework provides a national benchmark for an ASC when revising its syllabus.

An ASC and any sub-committee it may appoint³⁸ must meet in public, subject to exceptions in relation to confidentiality.³⁹ Each of the four committees of a conference must cast its single vote in favour of a recommendation that an agreed syllabus be adopted by the LA before the LA can adopt that syllabus.⁴⁰ Any sub-committee of an ASC must include at least one member of each of its constituent committees.

5.4.2 Membership of an ASC

An ASC is required to be made up of four committees representing respectively:⁴¹

- A Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations
- B The Church of England
- C Teacher associations
- D The local authority

There is no provision for an ASC to include co-opted members, but this does not mean that advice cannot be sought beyond its membership. Some individuals might be invited to attend all

³⁸ Schedule 31, para 6, Education Act 1996

³⁹ Regulation 3 of S1 1994/1304

⁴⁰ Schedule 31, para 10, Education Act 1996

⁴¹ Section 390(2) Education Act 1996; Schedule 31, para 4, Education Act 1996

meetings of the conference, and of committees of the conference, in order for their advice to be available to members of the ASC. For an ASC to work effectively and produce a syllabus, it is important that its membership is as inclusive as the law allows.

5.4.3 Nature of an agreed syllabus

The local agreed syllabus must meet statutory requirements and reflect breadth and balance in RE, particularly in taking into account local characteristics and circumstances. To ensure the effective promotion of high quality RE for pupils, it is recommended that an agreed syllabus should:

- provide a clear structure which users find easy to follow and which highlights the contribution of RE to the curriculum;
- ensure that learning in RE has both continuity and progression;
- have clear statements about expected standards and assessment arrangements;
- provide clear guidance about the process of learning which should underpin effective planning of pupils' learning in RE;
- provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of differing ages and abilities; these should be progressive and demanding but realistic; and
- reflect curriculum developments nationally (such as the aims of the curriculum, the use of key concepts and ideas, the personal, learning and thinking skills) to ensure RE is part of a coherent curriculum for all pupils.

The Framework is the basis for the illustrative non-statutory programmes for RE set out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) alongside the National Curriculum. Both the Framework and the programmes of study, provide guidance on designing a RE curriculum for agreed syllabuses and for programmes of RE in schools with a religious character. To ensure a consistent entitlement to breadth and richness in RE for all pupils, and adherence to a coherent national set of standards, it is recommended that ASCs should use the illustrative programmes of study published by the QCA, as the basis for their development of the local syllabus. The ASC can interpret those programmes of study in the light of local circumstances, and to select appropriate content and construct learning experiences.⁴²

Syllabuses should enable schools to develop a balanced and inclusive approach to the organising of concepts, content, understanding, skills and attitudes.

⁴² Further guidance on this is to be found in *Using the framework to develop an agreed syllabus for RE*, published by QCA 2007, www.qca.org.uk/qca_7882.aspx

See also the aligned framework in the new curriculum, <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

Case study

This is how one ASC handled breadth and balance:

- Systematic study that looks at one or more religion or belief in detail, by exploring some of its key concepts, such as beliefs, teaching and sources, or values and commitments; for example a major unit in Year 5 on Christianity could include a study of how Christian worship and practice reflects the life and teachings of Jesus; or in a Year 9 unit on Judaism and Humanism, examples could focus on the beliefs, teachings and sources that motivate them to take social action to improve the world.
- Thematic study that looks at a question, concept or issue and explores it in relation to one or more religions or beliefs, by enquiring into how and why the questions are answered; for example a Year 4 unit on practices and ways of life could investigate how and why some people observe religious occasions at home, including Christian ways of marking Lent and Muslim ways of marking the month of Ramadan; or a Year 8 unit on environmental campaigners could look at the religious and non-religious values and commitments that lead some people to take action against roads, runways or the treatment of animals; or a Year 11 unit on fair trade, just war or ending life.
- Cross-curricular study that uses key concepts or processes from two or more subjects to engage pupils in a challenging exploration; for example a Year 6 unit could use the investigation processes in science and RE to generate questions about the concept of truth in relation to different accounts of the origin of the universe; or a Year 7 unit could address the historical concept of causation, the citizenship concept of rights and the RE concept of identity to investigate migration).

By offering a balance of all three, RE syllabuses and programmes will be successful in promoting pupils' understanding of the diversity of impacts that religion and belief has on individuals and communities. They can also promote pupils' awareness of the different kind of questions raised by religions and beliefs and how the various methods of study of religion and belief can answer them.

6. What school governors and head teachers need to know

6.1 All schools

Religious education (RE) must be part of the curriculum in all maintained schools. The requirements for the RE curriculum in different types of school are set out in Section 2.4 above. Schools need to ensure that RE is:

- of high standard where expectations are clear to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public;
- coherent and shows progression, particularly across the transitions of the Key Stages and post 16;
- contributing to the school's duty to promote community cohesion and high standards of achievement; and
- well understood by the school community who have confidence in the school's provision and achievement.

6.2 Responsibilities of governors and head teachers

Governing bodies and local authorities (LAs) have a duty to exercise their functions with a view to securing that RE is provided in the curriculum in maintained schools. A head teacher of any community, foundation or voluntary school must secure that RE is given as part of the school's basic curriculum. Academy Trusts are required by the academy's funding agreement to make sure RE is provided for all registered pupils attending the academy.

The head teacher must provide an annual report to parents or carers giving brief particulars of progress and achievements in all subjects including RE.⁴³

Effective RE requires positive leadership. Head teachers and governing bodies should ensure that pupils receive their full entitlement to high quality RE.

The head teacher and governing body must ensure that RE in schools meets the statutory requirements and should also make sure that:

- all pupils make progress in achieving the learning objectives of the RE curriculum;
- the subject is well led and effectively managed and that standards and achievement in RE and the quality of the provision are subject to regular and effective self-evaluation;

⁴³ Regulation 6 of the Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, SI 2005/1437

- those teaching RE are suitably qualified and trained in the subject and have regular and effective opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD);
- teachers are aware of their professional duty to promote pupils' understanding of religion and belief as part of the duty to promote community cohesion;
- where appropriate, pupils have opportunities to take courses leading to an accredited qualification in the subject;
- clear information is provided for parents on the RE curriculum and the right to withdraw;
- RE is resourced, staffed and timetabled in such a way as to enable the school to fulfil its legal obligations on RE and to enable pupils to make good progress; and
- where there are insufficient teachers in a school who are prepared to teach RE, the head teacher should ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to RE. In these circumstances, head teachers might wish to seek advice from their LA or Standing Advisory Council for Religious education (SACRE).

6.3 Teachers and school workforce

A well-trained and confident workforce is crucial in ensuring good quality RE. In addition to RE specialists, many other teachers will often help to teach RE. All teachers and other members of the children's workforce can contribute to the teaching of RE regardless of their personal beliefs.

School action plans should identify the CPD needs of staff in relation to RE. Depending on their status, schools may receive advice on staff development issues from the SACRE, LA advisory staff and/or other sources. The same bodies may offer training courses for serving teachers and other opportunities for professional development, as will a range of other providers.

In certain schools with a religious character there must be teachers who have been selected for their suitability to teach RE. Subject to that teachers must not be disqualified from employment or discriminated against in terms of pay or promotion on the grounds of their religious opinions or practice in participating or not participating in RE. These safeguards also apply to head teachers.⁴⁴ Head teachers have a duty to see that the law on RE is complied with in their school, but they cannot be penalised for not taking part in its provision.

In planning staffing and staff development, the governing body must take account of its duty to secure that RE is taught effectively. The provisions described above do not prevent the governing body from taking account of a candidate's willingness to teach RE in drawing up job descriptions for posts for which suitability to teach RE is a requirement, and in recommending and appointing teachers.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sections 58–60, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

⁴⁵ Section 58, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

7. What those who manage, plan, teach and support religious education need to know

7.1 Provision of religious education in the curriculum

Religious education (RE) must be provided in the curriculum of all maintained schools in accordance with the legal requirements set out in Section 2. These requirements do not specify any particular time allocation or pattern of curriculum organisation for any subject, including RE. However, all schools should ensure their provision for RE enables all pupils to make effective progress in achieving the learning outcomes of their RE curriculum.

7.2 Curriculum planning in RE

In deciding how best to make provision for RE, schools should follow the principles of good planning appropriate for any subject in the curriculum. Planning for RE should ensure all pupils' experience of RE is a high quality, coherent and progressive experience, and enables them to make good progress in their learning. Schools are encouraged to use models of delivery which best suit the needs of the pupils, meet the requirements of the curriculum, and fit within the context of the wider curriculum. Syllabus requirements should therefore not only specify the RE curriculum to be taught in schools, but also be sufficiently flexible to enable schools to match the pattern of provision to the needs of pupils and be an integral part of the wider curriculum. It is recommended that pupils have the opportunity to gain public recognition of their achievement in RE.

In planning their RE provision schools should give consideration to three key questions:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How will we organise the learning?
- How will we measure success?

In recent years, many schools have been exploring creative and flexible ways of delivering RE. In making decisions about the delivery of RE consideration should be given to the following:

- **Any implications the school's ethos, values and aims have for the provision of RE:** for example the school's specialist status, religious character, or the nature of the school's community.

- **The school's overall curriculum priorities:** each school will decide which subjects to give more time to and, within a subject, which aspects or skills to emphasise. The priority or emphasis might apply across the Key Stage, to particular year groups, to groups of pupils or to individuals. These decisions should be made with reference to considerations of ensuring that statutory requirements are met and taking due account of the contribution RE makes to raising standards and achievement, for example through promoting the skills of learning and contributing to performance data at GCSE and A level.
- **Whether RE will be taught separately, be combined with other subjects, or both:** schools are not required to teach subjects separately or to use their given titles, though there can be advantages in so doing. One subject can also be combined with another, or it can be taught in separate lessons, or a mixture of provision used, depending on the objectives of the curriculum being followed.
- **Whether RE will be taught every week, term or year in the Key Stage:** it is for schools to decide how to organise the teaching of RE. They should weigh the advantages of regular and coherent provision, say every week, against those of more flexible provision when more time can be allocated in one week, term or year than in another, as long as the programme of study required by the agreed syllabus is demonstrably covered. Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of their provision as part of their own self-evaluation process.
- **Curriculum design:** does the RE curriculum ensure an appropriate balance between RE-led units, whether systematic or thematic, and cross-curricular units?
- **How the organisation of the RE curriculum will be adapted to suit individual pupils with different abilities and needs:** for example, the needs of the most able pupils can be met by accelerating their learning, and the needs of less high-achieving pupils can be met by reinforcement techniques.
- **How the design of the RE curriculum will help pupils to make a smooth transfer from one Key Stage to the next and to make steady progress within a Key Stage:** for example through the provision of bridging units to support transition from Key Stage 2 to 3.
- **Curriculum enrichment:** what might need to be added to the RE curriculum to enrich pupils' learning in terms of, for example, fieldwork, learning outside the classroom, and special focus days.

In deciding on any particular model of curriculum delivery it is important to take account of the parental right of withdrawal.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See Section 9

Case study

In one secondary school, a decision was taken to re-organise the Year 7 curriculum for those students who arrived at the school with a low prior attainment and weaker basic skills. RE is taught with English, the other humanities subjects and ICT by two primary-trained teachers as part of an integrated studies programme. Subject topics are taught in blocked units for up to 6 periods a week for two or three weeks allowing strong links to be forged with literacy and the development of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills. The provision is leading to some outstanding practice in the teaching of RE. Very imaginative planning, careful preparation and the skilful interlinking of work developing literacy, oracy and key skills with RE is resulting in some high quality group work, discussion, and oral presentation by the students.

Case study

One primary school decided to experiment with an alternative model of delivery for RE. Previously they had taught six half-term units of RE in 45-minute lessons every week across the year. They moved to a model of fewer but more concentrated units in which RE was taught for up to 6 hours a week in two- or three-week blocks. This provided more sustained challenging learning and enabled the teachers to make much stronger links between RE and other areas of the curriculum, especially literacy. The quality of learning in RE improved significantly and pupils were able to take much more responsibility for their learning.

In monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision for RE, those responsible should examine the extent to which decisions on curriculum provision for RE have been based on a sound application of the principles of effective planning.

7.3 RE post 14

As RE remains statutory beyond the age of 14 for all students in schools, including students in sixth forms, except those withdrawn by their parents (or who withdraw themselves if they are aged 18 and over) it is important that it continues to be part of a coherent and meaningful curriculum that builds upon their prior learning. Beyond the age of 14 the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (the Framework) sets out a programme of study for students aged 14–19, part of which has become a non-statutory programme of study for Key Stage 4 in the revised secondary curriculum published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

“16–19 students do not need RE which is dishing out more of the same. We must incorporate a more dynamic and comprehensive approach to RE including ideas of promoting broader spirituality that’s not confined to religious expression.”

A Hindu Educationalist

RE for this age group should, among other aims, be relevant to students' needs and to the rest of their curriculum, and provide opportunities for students to:

- reflect on, express and justify their own opinions in light of their learning about religion and their study of religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual questions;
- develop their own values and attitudes in order to recognise their rights and responsibilities in light of their learning about religion;
- relate their learning to the wider world, gaining a sense of personal autonomy in preparation for adult life; and
- develop skills that are useful in a wide range of careers and in adult life generally, especially skills of critical enquiry, creative problem-solving, and communication in a variety of media.

Particular care also needs to be taken where pupils are following alternative curriculum pathways, for example college-based vocational programmes, where students at both Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms may find themselves studying partly in a school and partly in a college of further education. In such circumstances it remains the responsibility of the school at which a student is registered to ensure that the student receives the RE to which she or he is statutorily entitled (except in the case where parents or carers (or the students themselves if aged over 18) have exercised their right of withdrawal). Schools should ensure that appropriate provision for RE is made, and is coherent and of good quality. The school at which a student is registered may arrange with a further education college for the required RE to be provided, wholly or partly, at the college. It may be possible for aspects of statutory RE to be covered in the context of another subject or qualification, for example, GCSE, AS, A level, or the Diploma in Humanities and Social Sciences.

Case study

One school was faced with the problem that pupils on college based courses were missing every other RE lesson in a fortnight timetable. This fragmented their learning and severely limited their progress in the subject. In order to secure a more coherent RE experience, the school decided to make alternative provision for this group of pupils by organising a series of extra-curricular RE-related activities.

7.4 Qualifications

Since 1996 the number of students gaining qualifications in religious studies (RS) has quadrupled. The development of GCSE (Short Course) RS has revolutionised RE in Key Stage 4 in many schools. Similarly, the numbers of students taking A level RS more than doubled in the past ten years since the introduction of Advanced Subsidiary RS.

While there is no legal requirement that students must sit public examinations, it is increasingly the case that students from age 14 onwards are given the opportunity to have their learning and achievement in RE publicly recognised through the achievement of accredited qualifications. The Framework recommends that ASCs include in their agreed syllabuses a requirement that RE should be taught at the following ages through accredited qualifications so that schools provide:

- for all students aged 14–16, at least one course in RE or RS leading to an approved qualification;⁴⁷ and
- for all students aged 16–19, at least one course in RE or RS leading to an approved qualification⁴⁸ that represents progression from 14–16.

Accredited courses include courses leading to qualifications with the title ‘Religious studies’ and other approved courses that require the study of religion and ethics. The introduction of diplomas offers a unique opportunity to identify and contribute to students’ spiritual and moral development, and make appropriate links with the study of religion and belief.

7.5 Support for RE

7.5.1 Faith and belief communities

Members of religions and belief organisations can make a real contribution to RE both locally and nationally. By working with people whose beliefs they may or may not share in an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding, faith and belief representatives can act as models of community cohesion in action. They may also contribute a greater awareness of inter-religious perspectives as well as representing their own individual traditions.

At a national level, representatives of different denominations, religions and beliefs can contribute to the continuing improvement of RE by taking part in consultation on RE matters through membership of national bodies, working with others to produce resources such as web-based materials for school use, acting as consultants to publishers and responding to enquiries about their tradition from teachers.

At a local level, representatives of different denominations, religions and beliefs can serve as members of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) (see 3.3 and 3.4 above). This gives them opportunities to help make sure the RE curriculum deals accurately and sensitively with their own religious or belief tradition, and that any concerns about RE are raised and considered. They may, for example, raise awareness of sensitive issues when a SACRE is engaged in giving advice to schools on resources recommended for use in RE lessons. Membership of a SACRE or an ASC gives community members a chance to raise and respond to questions from their own community as well as to contribute to wider public understanding of its beliefs, practices and values.

⁴⁷ Under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000

⁴⁸ Under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000

Case study

Members of a Shi'a Muslim community wanted to contribute to a better public understanding of Islam and Muslims. They were already members of the local SACRE, since the local authority (LA) had from its inception realised that both Sunni and Shi'a Islam were quite strongly represented in its city. The imam (a religious minister at the mosque) was invited to attend key meetings of the ASC writing group and to make comments on draft material.

He was keen to develop positive relations further and offered the Islamic Centre as a venue for a SACRE meeting. Working with the local RE adviser, the community hosts a number of visits from schools including some by classes of pupils and others by groups of teachers as professional development activities. The imam consistently tries to make sure such visits are well adapted to the age or stage concerned by having a team of appropriate hosts, for example a mother of young children who could receive visits from younger primary children. He also developed PowerPoint presentations on the religious life and activities of the community adapted to different audiences, along with handouts and materials for teachers to take away. The community makes great efforts to make visitors feel welcome and provides refreshments for all who come.

Members of the Islamic Centre team also go as visiting speakers to schools including some in surrounding rural areas where there were no Muslim pupils or inhabitants. The Islamic Centre holds an open day annually and invites adults in a variety of public service roles, neighbours and work colleagues and members of other local religious groups to enable adults to experience the life of the mosque and ask questions about its community. The community also willingly welcomes and helps RE consultants to gather material for an education website about Shi'a Islam.

7.5.2 Learning outside the classroom

Local members of religions and belief groups have an enriching contribution to make in hosting visits at local centres, places of worship or sacred spaces. Schools value the opportunity of bringing learning to life by giving pupils chances to meet and talk with people from the tradition they are studying, having time to ask questions, experience an unfamiliar religious and cultural environment, and meet individuals who can respond to their thoughts and ideas. These visits contribute to pupils' spiritual development as well as giving many opportunities for exciting cross-curricular learning. Some centres have annual open days or events for the whole community so that adults as well as children can enjoy the opportunity to find out about a new perspective.

Providers hosting such visits are able to obtain the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge. The badge scheme enables schools and other users to more easily identify organisations which offer good quality learning opportunities, but it will also give providers a developmental framework through which to evaluate and develop their own learning provision.

Individuals or small teams may also be invited into schools to speak, answer questions or take part in panel discussions. Ideally, community members who take on such roles are those who have some experience of the age group concerned and who can work with the group's teacher to plan a visit which will marry well with the children's programme of learning. They will also need to be

reasonably confident about answering questions at a level which children can understand. Visitors should not replace regular teachers of RE.

Example: LOtC: Widening horizons of understanding

What were we trying to achieve?

- to build on the school's work on community cohesion; and
- to enrich and encourage pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning.

Who went? How many?

Fifty children from Years 3 and 4 participated in a series of visits. They were accompanied by three teachers. The school has a specialist hearing impaired unit and support staff also joined the trip to enable all children to benefit in full.

Preparation:

The school includes children from many different faiths, cultures and ethnic backgrounds who are used to working and learning together in school. However, the children have little external experience outside their own circle. There was detailed pre-visit preparation so that children were clear about behaviour and etiquette in the *Mandir* (Hindu Temple) and were ready with questions and ideas.

How did we organise the learning?

The Hindu faith tutor greeted the children at the *Mandir*. She helped pupils gain a feel for the sacred space and showed them some of the colourful and symbolic deities. With some structured guidance, children then had time to explore for themselves. In the final session they drew up questions in small groups and discussed similarities and differences with the other places they had visited. Just before they left the *Mandir*, as a gift those pupils who wanted to were given a taste of *prasad*. A key aim of the *Learning Outside the Classroom* manifesto is to "make learning more engaging and relevant". Children put this in their own way. "You get more education than sitting in classrooms. You get to interact with everything."

What was the impact of the experience?

The life and symbolism of a Hindu temple provided much stimulation and children were able to reflect on the meaning of the deities. "I like the one with Rama, Sita and Lakshman because it shows that people are one big community." Another pupil was inspired by Hanuman. "I liked the god who looks like a monkey because it was about helping other people and it made me think about helping others." The Inter-faith tutor made the point that "You can get so much more from a place that is live and running than you can in a classroom. The impact on the children today will be fresh for ever, I hope!"

Follow up:

Children were able to compare the faiths and cultures they had experienced. Pupils noted the variety of customs, the different significance of sacred texts, and how gender roles were fulfilled in different ways.

7.5.3 Professional RE associations

There are many professional associations dedicated to the provision of high quality RE in English schools, details of which can be found in the RE Directory.⁴⁹

7.5.4 The Religious Education Council

All major faith communities and professional RE associations are members of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC).⁵⁰ This body acts as an ‘umbrella’ group to represent the diverse groups and interests of the subject, and works in partnership with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

7.5.5 Government agencies

7.5.5.1 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) works with the DCSF to develop and deliver the Government’s policy on qualifications, curriculum and assessment. Core responsibilities for RE include:

- working with stakeholders and strategic partners, including SACREs and faith/belief communities, to develop and review the curriculum, so that pupils in every school have access to a high-quality curriculum; this includes receiving SACRE annual reports;
- developing and reviewing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), including GCSEs, A levels and the 14–19 Diploma; and
- providing guidance and support, in the context of the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, helping to build an education system that benefits all learners throughout their lives.

7.5.5.2 The Training and Development Agency

The Training and Development Agency (TDA) supports training in RE, during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and through Continuing Professional Development (CPD), by providing access to specialist subject knowledge for ITT tutors and mentors. This is delivered via the subject resource network RE-Net, established to support new and existing tutors, trainees, mentors, and teachers. RE-Net offer a range of services, from publishing relevant and up-to-date materials and resources on their website, running conferences and information sharing events, and providing an induction programme for new ITT tutors. To develop CPD opportunities for RE, RE-Net have provided a specific package of support and programme of professional development activity for RE tutors and teachers undertaking subject development or improvement projects in their own schools. This has been delivered through online materials and face-to-face mentor network events for those in the RE teacher education community.

⁴⁹ www.theredirectory.org.uk

⁵⁰ www.rec.org.uk

7.5.5.3 Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) works to support RE leaders and departments in Humanities Schools through their Lead Practitioner Programme and through middle-leadership development courses. These courses are designed to specifically address the additional responsibilities that the Head of a Specialist target-setting department has in a Humanities School. RE subject leaders will look at issues such as developing links with partner schools, businesses and the wider community. The Head of RE in a Humanities School will have a wider-reaching role where their subject is one of the three specialist subjects. They will be responsible for mentoring and coaching other subject leaders and on monitoring the impact of their specialist subject's reach across the school community. The SSAT provides further support, for example through downloadable resources through the SSAT Humanities website and regular email updates.

7.5.5.4 Ofsted

Ofsted inspects and reports on all maintained schools, academies, city colleges and some non-maintained schools in England. The inspections take place at intervals that are described in regulations. In inspecting a school under these regulations, Ofsted must report on the quality of the education provided, how far the education provided meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, the educational standards achieved, the quality of leadership and management, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, the contribution made to the well-being of pupils, and the contribution made by the school to community cohesion.

In addition, Ofsted inspects subjects as part of a three-year rolling programme. Each of the National Curriculum subjects, RE, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and business studies, are inspected in general terms and in relation to issues specific to each subject. In the case of RE, Ofsted inspects a sample of 30 primary and 30 secondary schools. In addition, a small number of additional visits can be undertaken to schools which are identified as having particularly good practice in the subject. The outcomes of this work feed into the HMCI Annual Report but also, once every three years, result in a substantial report on the subject.⁵¹

Subject visits are made to a cross-section of primary and secondary schools. Each includes an evaluation of achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and the leadership and management of the subject. In addition, the inspection programme focuses on specific issues relating to the subject to track the impact of recent initiatives and to investigate the need for future developments. The visits are followed by a brief letter to the school summarising the points made in the feedback and discussion at the end of the visit. The feedback letter is copied by Ofsted to the LA and SACRE, where appropriate, and is available to the next institutional inspection team. It is also published on the Ofsted website.

⁵¹ Denominational RE at schools with a religious character that can teach according to the tenets of their faith is inspected separately and additionally by the relevant religious authorities themselves under Section 48 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006

8. Information on parents' and pupils' entitlement

8.1 Parents

Parents and carers should be encouraged to take a positive interest in religious education (RE) as an integral part of their child's curriculum. This could take a number of forms:

- supporting the child in homework on RE;
- encouraging children and young people to ask and explore possible answers to questions about meaning and purpose in life, ethical issues and beliefs and values;
- offering to help in RE, for example visits to places of worship, sharing their experiences and expertise;
- considering taking part in debates or dialogues organised by the school; and
- attending Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) meetings as an observer, co-optee or elected member, and supporting SACREs in their work with community-based dialogue, Young Person's SACREs or community cohesion work.

Parents and carers are entitled to information on their child's RE, and this can be obtained from the local authority (LA) or school, as appropriate. They are entitled to have information from the school about what their child is taught according to statutory documents (the locally agreed syllabus or trust deed) and non-statutory schemes of work (produced by the school, LA or other relevant body). They are entitled to receive information on how their child is progressing in the subject.

8.2 Pupils

All pupils are entitled to receive RE as part of their broad and balanced curriculum at school. They should be helped to see the relevance of the subject and to enjoy studying it.

"I think RE is a very important subject. This is because it prepares us for the outside world. In the outside world we are not always going to be in an environment with people of our same background and culture."

"The situations we talk about are relevant in contemporary society. It's a subject that is appealing and informative – it helps you think about the present situation, you tend to hear other people's views and see what you think."

"I like that fact that you can express your beliefs with the trust that no one is laughing at you. Also the way you can learn about other religions without having to be involved in one yourself."⁵²

Schools should help make sure that children and young people exercise their responsibility as pupils to do their best. They should be encouraged to play a full part in their own learning in RE, for example:

- as learners, by deploying skills, asking questions and exploring answers;
- as individuals, using their own experience and backgrounds to reflect on questions of truth and morality and deeper meanings of life and death; and
- as citizens, promoting debate and dialogue, celebrating diversity, taking appropriate action, putting principles into action, for example as members of Young Person's SACREs.

9. The right of withdrawal

9.1 The right of withdrawal

The parent of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school may request that the pupil be excused from all or part of the religious education RE provided. However, much has changed since this right was enshrined in law. In the past the subject was religious *instruction* rather than religious *education* as it is now. Religion and belief have become more visible in public life in recent years, making it even more important that all pupils should have an opportunity to engage in RE. Schools should ensure that parents who wish to withdraw their children from RE are aware of the objectives and what is covered in the RE curriculum and that they are given the opportunity to discuss this, if they wish.

Whilst parents or carers have a right to withdraw children from the subject of RE, they should note that children may also encounter religions and beliefs in other parts of the curriculum from which there is no right of withdrawal. Every school has a duty to promote community cohesion and this includes helping pupils understand ideas about identity and diversity, including within a religious context and a context of non-religious beliefs.

Where a request for a withdrawal is made the school must comply and excuse the pupil until the request is rescinded. Though not legally required, it is good practice for a head teacher to invite parents to discuss their request with the school. Where a pupil has been withdrawn the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parent wishes the pupil to receive.⁵³ Such RE could be provided at the school in question, or the pupil could be sent to another school where such RE is provided if this is reasonably convenient. Where neither approach is practicable outside arrangements can be made to provide the pupil with RE of a kind which her or his parent wishes her or him to receive, the pupil may be withdrawn from school for a reasonable period of time to allow them to attend this external RE.

Outside arrangements for RE are allowed so long as the local authority (LA) are satisfied that any interference with the pupil's attendance at school resulting from the withdrawal will affect only the start or end of a school session. If the school is a secondary school and parents have withdrawn a pupil from RE provided at the school and asked for alternative RE to be provided in accordance with the tenets of a particular religion or denomination, if satisfactory arrangements cannot be made for that RE to be provided elsewhere and if arrangements can be made for that alternative RE to be provided at the school in circumstances where it is not funded by the school or the LA, then the LA must provide facilities for the alternative RE to be provided at the school unless there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so.⁵⁴

⁵³ Section 71(3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

⁵⁴ Schedule 19, para 2, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

In the case of a pupil at a maintained boarding school where a sixth form pupil, or the parents of a pupil below the sixth form, requests that the pupil be allowed to receive RE in accordance with the tenets of a particular religion or denomination outside of school hours the governing body must make arrangements to give the pupil a reasonable opportunity to attend such RE. The arrangements made by the governing body may include making facilities available at the school for this form of RE, but any such arrangements cannot be funded out of the school's budget share or by the LA.⁵⁵

9.2 Managing the right of withdrawal

The use of the right to withdraw should be at the instigation of parents (or students themselves if they are aged 18 and over), and should be in writing, and make clear whether it is from the whole of the subject or specific parts of it. Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from RE without influence from the school, although a school should ensure parents or carers are informed of this right. They should provide parents with information about the educational objectives and content of the RE syllabus. In this way parents can make an informed decision about whether or not to exercise their right of withdrawal. Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right must be respected, and where RE is integrated in the curriculum, the school will need to discuss the arrangements with the parents or carers to explore ways in which the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated. Where pupils are withdrawn from RE schools have a duty to supervise them though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Pupils will usually remain on school premises.

⁵⁵ Section 71, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

Case studies

In one school parents approached the head teacher with a request to discuss whether or not to withdraw their child from RE. The head teacher met with the parents and showed them a copy of the locally agreed syllabus together with the school's policy and scheme of work for RE. The parents were also invited to join an RE lesson to see how the school's policy worked in practice. This provided reassurance that the approach being adopted was one of genuine open enquiry which would respect the beliefs of all children. As a result, the parents decided not to exercise their right of withdrawal.

In another school in Year 7 RE is taught in blocked topics as part of an integrated studies programme along with English, history and geography, and citizenship. The teachers discussed the programme with the parents whose child was withdrawn from RE and agreed to vary some of the work to accommodate the parents' wishes. The pupil took a full and active part in the lessons but was provided with slightly modified resources and tasks. As a result the benefits of the integrated approach to teaching RE and the rights of the parents were both protected.

In a primary school a number of parents from a local Jehovah's Witness community expressed a wish to withdraw their children from RE. The head teacher met with representatives from the community including some of its leaders to explain the school's approach to the subject. As a result of the meeting, the school developed a relationship of trust with the community and was able to identify those aspects of the RE programme which the parents were happy for the children to join and those from which the children would be withdrawn – mainly around the celebration of Christmas.

Some questions for head teachers:

- Is the school careful to ensure that RE is of educational value to all children, whatever their belief background, thus reducing the likelihood of parental/carer requests for withdrawal?
- Does the school ensure that the nature, objectives and content of RE are shared with parents?
- Are parents or carers notified about plans for RE alongside general plans for the coming session for their child's class?
- Does the school have a procedure in place for parents or carers wishing to withdraw children from RE?
- Does the organisation of the curriculum allow parents to exercise the right of withdrawal?
- What practical implications arise from a request by parents to withdraw a child from RE and how might they be addressed?
- Are all who teach RE aware of the school's procedures?
- Are all teachers aware of their own right not to have to teach RE?

10. For further reference

1. ***Religious Education and Collective Worship*** (Circular 1/94) issued 31 January 1994
This document contained extensive guidance on the duty of Local Education Authorities, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education, Agreed Syllabus Conferences, regarding religious education and collective worship. This remains extant regarding guidance on collective worship. It can be referenced at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=8342
2. ***Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: a Reference Book for Schools***
This was published by the Council of Europe in 2007. It can be referenced at: Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN: 978-92-871-6223-6; <http://book.coe.int/EN/recherche.php>
3. ***The Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools***
This was published by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the text prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in 2007. The ISBN is 83-60190-48-8. It may be referenced at: www.osce.org/publications/odihr/2007/11/28314_993_en.pdf

The ten principles, with a brief introduction, are contained in the box below.

Whenever teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools is provided in OSCE participating states, the following ten guiding principles should be considered:

1. Teaching about religions and beliefs must be provided in ways that are fair, accurate and based on sound scholarship. Students should learn about religions and beliefs in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values.
2. Those who teach about religions and beliefs should have a commitment to religious freedom that contributes to a school environment and practices that foster protection of the rights of others in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding among members of the school community.
3. Teaching about religions and beliefs is a major responsibility of schools, but the manner in which this teaching takes place should not undermine or ignore the role of families and religious or belief organisations in transmitting values to successive generations.
4. Efforts should be made to establish advisory bodies at different levels that take an inclusive approach to involving different stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of curriculum and in the training of teachers.

5. Where a compulsory programme involving teaching about religions and beliefs is not sufficiently objective, efforts should be made to revise it to make it more balanced and impartial, but where this is not possible, or cannot be accomplished immediately, recognising opt-out rights may be a satisfactory solution for parents and pupils, provided that the opt-out arrangements are structured in a sensitive and non-discriminatory way.
6. Those who teach about religions and beliefs should be adequately educated to do so. Such teachers need to have the knowledge, attitude and skills to teach about religions and beliefs in a fair and balanced way. Teachers need not only subject-matter competence but pedagogical skills so that they can interact with students and help students interact with each other in sensitive and respectful ways.
7. Preparation of curricula, textbooks and educational materials for teaching about religions and beliefs should take into account religious and non-religious views in a way that is inclusive, fair, and respectful. Care should be taken to avoid inaccurate or prejudicial material, particularly when this reinforces negative stereotypes.
8. Curricula should be developed in accordance with recognised professional standards in order to ensure a balanced approach to study about religions and beliefs. Development and implementation of curricula should also include open and fair procedures that give all interested parties appropriate opportunities to offer comments and advice.
9. Quality curricula in the area of teaching about religions and beliefs can only contribute effectively to the educational aims of the *Toledo Guiding Principles* if teachers are professionally trained to use the curricula and receive ongoing training to further develop their knowledge and competences regarding this subject matter. Any basic teacher preparation should be framed and developed according to democratic and human rights principles and include insight into cultural and religious diversity in society.
10. Curricula focusing on teaching about religions and beliefs should give attention to key historical and contemporary developments pertaining to religion and belief, and reflect global and local issues. They should be sensitive to different local manifestations of religious and secular plurality found in schools and the communities they serve. Such sensitivities will help address the concerns of students, parents and other stakeholders in education.

4. *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*

This was published in July 2007 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.
Ref -00598-2007

5. *PSHE*

This stands for Personal Social Health and Economic Education. For further details see the National Curriculum Website:
<http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

6. *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*

These guidelines were published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2008 following extensive consultation. ISBN: 978 1 4098-0315-7

7. *The non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education*

This was published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Department for Education and Skills in 2004 following extensive consultation. ISBN 1-85838-574-1. It can be referenced at: www.qca.org.uk/qca_7886.aspx

8. *Faith in the System*

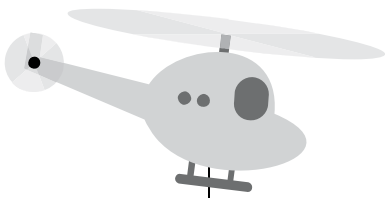
This was published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2007. ISBN 978-1-84478-955-9. It can be referenced at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-00496-2007>

9. *SACREs and Self-evaluation – a guide*

This was published by Ofsted in May 2005 HMI 2467

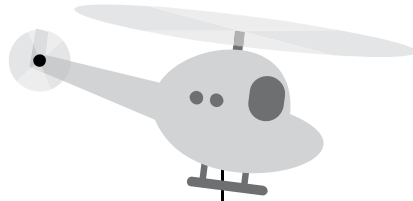
10. *Other useful websites for reference*

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Learning Outside the Classroom | www.lotc.org.uk/ |
| REC | www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk |
| NATRE | www.natre.org.uk |



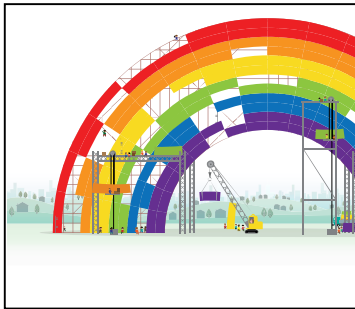
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