



Title of meeting: Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
Date of meeting: 12/6/24
Subject: Ofsted Subject Report on RE
Report by: Justine Ball, Secondary RE Teaching and Learning Advisor

1 Purpose of report:

The purpose of this report is to enable SACRE to consider a summary of the Ofsted National Subject report for RE in England. The full report can be found here:
[Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/121212/Deep_and_meaningful?_ga=2.141111111.164111111.164111111.164111111)

Recommendations:

That SACRE notes the summary of the national report here.

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3 Executive Summary

This report seeks to update and inform SACRE of the Ofsted Subject Report for RE in England, which was published in April 2024. The previous Ofsted Subject Report for RE was published over ten years ago in 2013, with a research review for RE being published in 2021. A summary of the key findings for England are given below. All findings outlined in sections 3-9 inclusive are taken directly from the report. Key areas for Hampshire SACRE to consider are highlighted at the end of the summary.

4 Contextual information

The legal requirements governing RE are outlined in the Education Reform Act of 1988 and confirmed by the Education Acts of 1996 and 1998. RE is a statutory subject and part of the basic curriculum. The content of RE in maintained schools is determined at local authority level. The Local Authority must establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to produce and recommend a syllabus. Each local authority must convene an ASC to review its agreed syllabus at least every five years. An agreed syllabus should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teachings and



practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Education Reform Act 1988, Section 8(3))

5 Factors that contributed to better quality RE in England included:

- Strong teacher subject knowledge
- Access to professional development
- Regular time for RE lessons
- A well organised curriculum containing knowledge chosen by leaders to enable pupils to deepen their understanding term by term

6 The main findings for RE in England were:

- The RE curriculum often lacked sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world
- A superficially broad curriculum does not always provide pupils with the depth of knowledge they require for future study.....in cases where the curriculum prioritised depth of study, pupils learnt much more
- The RE curriculum rarely enabled pupils to systematically build disciplinary knowledge or personal knowledge
- The content of some secondary curriculums was restricted by what teachers considered pupils needed to know for public examinations at the end of key stage 4
- In the secondary phase, most statutory non-examined RE was limited and of a poor quality
- Where RE was weaker, the knowledge of traditions specified for pupils to learn was overly and uncritically compartmentalised
- What schools taught was rarely enough for pupils to make sense of religious and non religious traditions as they appear in the world
- There was a profound misconception among some leaders and teachers that "teaching from a neutral stance" equates to teaching a non-religious worldview. This is simply not the case
- In some schools, leaders were rightly focusing on developing the curriculum before considering assessment. However, even when leaders had systems of assessment in place, these rarely gave them the requisite assurance that pupils were learning and remembering more and increasingly complex content over time
- Long gaps between lessons hindered pupils' recall. When the timetable was organised so that pupils had regular RE lessons, they remembered more
- Although a few teachers had received subject-based professional development in RE, the overwhelming majority had not
- The report highlights that there are still no clear national expectations for RE which presents real challenges for schools.

7 The report provides key recommendations for RE in England. Schools should:



- ensure that there is a distinct curriculum in place for teaching RE at all key stages. They should make sure that this is rigorous and challenging and that it demonstrably builds on what pupils already know
- carefully select the knowledge they expect pupils to gain to make sense of a complex and diverse world. They should make sure that important content and concepts are clearly identified and sequenced. They should also make sure that curriculums do not contain oversimplifications of traditions, including, where appropriate, non-religious traditions
- balance the breadth and depth of study of religious and non-religious traditions to ensure that these are collectively enough for pupils to make sense of a complex world
- ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in RE over time. Leaders in secondary schools should make sure that the curriculum is designed to meet or exceed exam board specifications (rather than being driven by them)
- make sure that curriculums clearly identify how pupils will develop disciplinary and personal knowledge through the chosen substantive content

8 Teaching and assessment. Schools should:

- be ambitious for pupils to develop all aspects of knowledge: substantive, ways of knowing and personal knowledge. They should make sure that teachers have high expectations of what pupils will know and remember
- provide opportunities for pupils to review and build on important knowledge over time. They should make sure that pupils use the knowledge that they gained in previous years as the curriculum becomes increasingly more complex and demanding
- ensure that teaching specifically develops pupils' knowledge of the complexity of religious and non-religious traditions
- develop manageable assessment methods that move beyond the simple recall of factual information. They should check that pupils recall and understand the intended curriculum over time and that the domain of their knowledge is expanding

9 Systems at subject and school level. Schools should:

- ensure that all teachers have the subject and pedagogical knowledge that they need to teach RE well
- check that the time allocated for teaching RE at all key stages is used effectively so that pupils learn a curriculum that is both broad and deep
- organise the timetable for RE so that gaps between teaching are minimised
- ensure that the curriculum for statutory non-examined RE at key stages 4 and 5 is ambitious and consistently implemented. They should make sure that the RE content is clearly identified and builds on what pupils have learned at key stage 3



10 The Ofsted Subject Report Recommendations for others:

- The government should urgently update guidance for schools about its statutory expectations for RE. The government should also ensure that there is appropriate clarity about what is taught in RE, and when and where it is taught, for those schools where Ofsted inspects the subject. This would help schools and, particularly, leaders and teachers of RE
- Those involved in writing syllabuses and commercial curriculums should make sure that these enable pupils to build deep knowledge of the chosen religious and non-religious traditions. They should make sure that curriculums identify what pupils should learn and when. They should ensure that it is clear to teachers when pupils will revisit and review important content and concepts
- Those involved in commissioning and organising professional development should increase access to, and the range of, training available to all leaders and teachers, to improve their subject knowledge
- Those involved in training teachers and early career professional development should prioritise helping trainee teachers and those who are newer to the profession to gain the subject knowledge that they need
- Exam boards should recognise that the way in which schools use exam-style questions is not always appropriate. They should make sure that their communication with schools reflects this

11 Considerations for Portsmouth RE:

- The monitoring group considers the Ofsted reports for Portsmouth every term and the reports are generally positive and reflect high quality RE being taught in the main
- It is important for schools to remember that we have access to advisors along with free planning and advice for teachers
- Therefore, there is a **lot of support** out there for schools to engage with
- As a result of the report:
- It will be discussed in the primary networks
- **Two webinars** are being offered on Ofsted and RE in June and October
- It will form part of primary and secondary subject leader training going forward
- Discussed with Portsmouth SACRE MG
- To be discussed during future school visits
- Secondary schools using LDIV contacted and support offered
- Ask schools to get in touch if they haven't already

12 Conclusions

The approach of the Living Difference syllabus has been in existence for twenty years and contains comprehensive advice and research to help teachers plan and develop



high quality RE. RE in the local area has received many positive comments from Ofsted, which are evidenced in the termly Portsmouth Ofsted reports. In particular, the syllabus has always had a focus on depth in the curriculum, with the curriculum being focused on concepts that are taught through the pedagogy of the cycle of enquiry. This helps ensure that RE is high quality and addresses many of the key concerns raised in the subject report.

Key areas to consider going forward are the Ofsted comments regarding timings between lessons and the coverage of religious and non religious traditions in the curriculum being taught in a systematic way.