



Religious education 2020: purpose, progress and credibility

This is the first report since *Religious Education: Realising the Potential* in 2013. Evidence from inspection of schools and training providers shows that RE has improved dramatically and made significant steps towards good or outstanding in a majority of schools.

In six out of ten schools across the age range 4-16, the quality of RE teaching is good or outstanding. There is improved availability and access to high quality CPD relevant to the clearly defined demands of the subject. RE has been part of the National Curriculum for two years. Purpose and content are clear, pupil progression is straightforward, and the subject is flourishing.

Age group: 4–16

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Executive Summary

Teachers' understanding of the purpose of RE

In 7 out of 10 schools visited, teachers are clear that their core purpose in teaching RE is to promote religious literacy, defined as developing knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. As a result, the contribution that RE makes to the wider life of the school, and to pupils' overall education, is well understood by senior leadership teams and the wider school community.

Teachers were clear about how the content offered shows continuity, coherence and progression, including public examinations. Teachers are able to translate their sense of purpose into an effective curriculum with high quality teaching, learning and assessment. There is also evidence of RE teachers as a professional community having a strong commitment to a coherent vision of literacy on religion and belief.

Quality and depth of teachers' subject knowledge, curriculum planning and design

In six out of ten schools across the age range 4-16, the quality of RE teaching is good or outstanding, based upon a clear pathway for progression in knowledge, understanding and skills, supported by a suitable model of assessment, provided by the new NC document for RE. Purpose and content are clear and the subject is flourishing. The quality of specialist teaching is outstanding in eight out of ten schools across the age range 4-19. There is secure in-depth grasp of the subject knowledge due to the greater proportion of teachers with a degree in a closely related relevant subject and the promotion of subject knowledge enhancement courses by all ITE providers. There is excellent support for primary teachers to ensure that the subject expertise is in evidence from teachers. The effect of this and the NC has led to greater continuity between the Key Stages.

Assessment and pupil progress in RE

Clear, accurate and consistent assessment is linked closely to the progression steps in the new National Curriculum for RE and rooted in planning and schemes of work. Assessment methods are mostly reliable, straightforward, manageable and consistent. Very few teachers use the eight level scale or the two attainment targets. Diverse and inclusive forms of assessment demonstrate clear progression. Mixed method assessments test students' oral and written skills and are clearly, accurately and consistently applied, due to NC guidance. The introduction of pupil-panel dialogic 'vivas' as a part of coursework has been well received at all key stages. Teacher moderation throughout and in 'real time' (given the simplicity and transparency of the requirements) has cut marking workload outside of the classroom, resulting in a Vygotsky-esque 'intervention at the point of learning' model which has driven up results while raising the profile of educational research with teachers. The introduction of coursework portfolios has enabled students to 'bank' 60% of their GCSE or A-level grade prior to the written paper, where academic integrity was maintained in each of the three tiered papers.

Training, research and professional development

In most of the schools inspected, it is clear that subject leaders, subject specific teachers and generalist teachers show increased confidence in teaching RE. Teachers are encouraged and enabled to follow a rich and systematic programme of CPD, which involves not single, hit and run training days but a substantial series of days, with requirement for ideas to be explored, applied and evaluated between sessions. New forms of CPD show regular learning by teachers leading to improvement in RE teaching and learning. School leaders encourage the take-up of a wide variety of high quality professional development opportunities relevant to the demands of the subject.

In primary ITE, most trainees receive a minimum of eight hours' training in RE. Teachers show evidence of their engagement in research in the classroom and its impact on practice. As a result, pupils have a clear, confident grasp of the knowledge presented to them, and were able to talk about how they could improve in RE.

Secondary ITE provision ensures that trainees and teachers are involved in a professional and progressive dialogue around matters of pedagogy, knowledge and skills. In the best examples, this dialogue involves individual trainees and teachers in their wider communities of schools and universities, and draws on the resources of faith and belief communities. As a result, pupils show a high level of religious literacy and understanding of the subject material during observations. Recruitment into RE teaching has soared and retention levels are enviable.

Statutory mechanisms for RE

Following the Education Act 2018, there are statutory national expectations of RE, which are interpreted and implemented for all schools, including schools with a religious character. There are statutory local bodies with wide stakeholder involvement. In several areas, voluntary SACREs collaborate energetically with their regional counterparts and with statistical neighbours in different parts of the country. They also work with local curriculum resource panels in other subjects. In a significant number of schools, the abolition of the right of withdrawal has been effectively explained by Head Teachers, and parents have accepted it. RE is an entitlement for pupils from age 4 to 16 and is a popular and growing option at A level.