



Religious education 2020: excellence, stability and diversity

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 4-19, the quality of RE teaching is good or outstanding. A wide variety of practice, supported by a revived SACRE system and outside groups, has given rise to significant diversity of approaches, wide breadth of learning and many creative ways of defining pupil progress. Stimulated by a rich variety of CPD mainly from faith groups, the subject is flourishing.

Age group: 4–19

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Executive Summary

Teachers' understanding of the purpose of RE

In most schools, excellent RE teaching demonstrates how the subject makes a high quality contribution to the whole school priorities of SMSCD and values education. Evidence for this is found across the curriculum. There exists a strong divergence of opinions about the nature and purpose of RE, but in six out of ten schools the understanding is strong enough to underpin good or outstanding teaching. Teachers in primary and secondary schools pay close attention to their local agreed syllabus as a source of understanding the purpose, and use it in discussions with senior leaders and parents. The diversity of agreed syllabuses continues to be a key characteristic both in terms of subject content, principles of assessment and pedagogical approaches.

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

In six out of ten schools across the age range 4-19, the quality of RE teaching is good or outstanding. RE curriculum planning and curriculum design are improving in most schools. Subject specialist officers have facilitated collaboration between schools, local authorities and regions. Increases in the numbers of specialist teachers in secondary schools, and the introduction of primary subject specialisms, have led to a dramatic upturn in secure confident subject knowledge. DfE support for those with responsibility for the RE curriculum has encouraged head teachers in many schools to review and improve RE for all pupils, leading to rising standards of statutory provision. DfE identification of minimum hours for RE has resulted in more systematic and coherent planning.

Assessment and pupil progress in RE

In many agreed syllabuses, a flexible model of levelled progression combines AT1 and AT2 and is employed by schools to reflect their context and pupil needs. For example, in Syllabus A pupils can develop mastery level skills in an area of study chosen by the school, while in Syllabus B personal responses and spirituality are prioritised and celebrated as learning experiences relevant to assessment data. This diversity means that, while RE struggles to generate consistent assessment data nationally, its celebration of its pupils' achievements and their engagement with the content is lively and resonates well with communities.

Training, research and professional development

In most of the schools inspected, it is clear that subject leaders, subject specific teachers and generalist teachers have considerable enjoyment in teaching RE. Teachers are encouraged to create active, participatory learning experiences involving pupil voice. CPD is compulsory for all NC subjects. For RE, in an

open competitive market, CPD is provided mostly by faith groups and religiously oriented organisations wishing to support and enhance the teachers' presentation of their beliefs. In many but not all cases, teachers are able to engage critically with CPD and to demonstrate learning and improved practice.

In primary ITE, all trainees receive a minimum of 20 hours' training in RE, and this includes sampling several different syllabuses. As a result, trainees and teachers have a strong impression of the diversity of practice and enjoy the freedom to innovate.

Secondary ITE provision delivers expertise in pedagogy, skills and understanding of religion and belief, stimulating trainees' and teachers' understanding and practice. Recruitment and retention have soared.

Statutory mechanisms for RE

Following the Guidance document in 2017, local determination by SACREs has been reaffirmed, SACRE effectiveness is measured as part of local authority inspection, and local support for RE from faith communities is more systematic. A wide variety of practice has given rise to significant diversity of approaches, wide breadth of learning and many creative ways of defining pupil progress. The number of parents exercising the right to withdraw from RE has been locally and nationally measured since 2017 and has increased each year. The diversity of different practical approaches between local authorities, academies and free schools is considerable, and school leaders and RE teachers see this as a positive feature of a relaxed diverse society at ease with itself.