

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

The meeting will be held at **6.30 pm** on **16 June 2021**

This meeting will take place via Microsoft Teams.

Membership:

Committee A:

Mrs R Saul, Diocese of Brentwood, Roman Catholic Member
Mr J Hussein, Muslim Member
Ms H Kaur Takhtar, Sikh Member
Mr T Ojetola, Pentecostal Member
Mr A Kariyawasam, Buddhist Member
Ms S Perlmutter, Jewish Member
Vacancy, Hindu Member
Vacancy, Free Church Christian Member

Committee B:

Mr P Anderson, Church of England Member
Mrs L Fry, Church of England Member
Lola Olajide, Church of England Member
Vacancy, Church of England Member

Committee C:

Ms H Martins, Teachers' Associations
Ms J Culloty, Teachers' Associations
Ms A Jellicoe, Teachers' Associations
Ms D Webster, Teachers' Associations
Mrs C Pumfrey, Teachers' Associations
Vacancy, Teachers' Associations

Committee D:

Councillor G Collins
Councillor M Kerin
Vacancy, Local Authority

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

| | | |
|----------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence | |
| 2 | Minutes | 5 - 14 |
| | To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education meeting held on 6 January 2021. | |
| 3 | Items of Urgent Business | |
| | To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. | |
| 4 | Declarations of Interest | |
| 5 | Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chairs | |
| 6 | Reviewing the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education | 15 - 26 |
| 7 | GCSE entries and results in Thurrock 2020 | 27 - 42 |
| 8 | Ofsted Research Review on Religious Education 2021 | 43 - 56 |

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Kenna Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **10 June 2021**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education held on 6 January 2021 at 6.30 pm

- Committee A:** Mrs S Lawson, Mr A Kariyawasam and Mr T Ojetola
- Committee B:** Mr A Anderson and Mrs L Fry
- Committee C:** Ms Jellicoe and Mrs Pumfrey
- Committee D:** Councillor Kerin
- Apologies:** Ms J Culloty, Mrs H Kaur, Ms Webster and Councillor Collins.
- In Attendance:** Deborah Weston, Associate Advisor for Religious Education
Andrea Winstone, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

13. Minutes

The minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 4 November 2020 were approved as a correct record subject to noting the incorrect spelling of Mr Kariyawasam surname.

14. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

15. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19. What do stakeholders say about RE in Thurrock? *Thurrock's Youth Cabinet*

The Chair of SACRE explained one of the key responsibilities and duties of SACRE was overseeing, reviewing and issuing the agreed syllabus for the teaching of RE in Thurrock that cycle is about to start again I want the things that we are committed to doing is consulting widely with a whole range of stakeholders who have an interest in RE teaching within Thurrock prior to conducting that review and I'm delighted that some members of these cabinets have been able to come along to our meeting tonight.

He continued by explaining he had hoped to go round the Members of the Youth Cabinet and for them to answer any of the questions within the agenda which they thought they would like to answer.

During discussions Members heard how one Member of the Youth Cabinet spoke about her experiences of RE at Primary and Secondary School both of which were Roman Catholic Faith Schools and how they differed. She explained how she remembered RE in School being taught very cross curricular. She continued by stating she remembered when in Primary School RE was learning through artwork rather than through textbooks.

Councillor Kerin thanked the Youth Cabinet for attending the meeting and commented it was wonderful to hear their perspectives of RE in Schools. He asked from their point of view what how important did they and young people of their age group consider RE to be and their view on the UK becoming less religious but the world was becoming more religious, as he felt it was an interesting contrast.

Members heard how in terms of RE and the younger generation one member of the Youth Cabinet felt it was very dependent on the background young people came from and how religious their family was. She continued by stating as a generation she felt young people were becoming less religious as a society in terms of RE due to a limited focus.

It was commented that perhaps Religious Education was seen as a downfall by some pupils because it was not respected and was perceived as a subject that you had to do instead wanted to participate in, it was felt this could be due to the limited number of practical lessons and trips which other subjects could do.

Councillor Kerin followed up by asking what in the Young Cabinet's opinion did they think could assist in making RE more respected and a subject which young people wanted to study. He continued by linking his question to comment made about your background being important and what the Youth Cabinet thought could be put in place to make RE important regardless of whether you come from a religious background.

SACRE heard how a member of the Youth Cabinet felt if more young people had a religious background, then there would be different cultural backgrounds and perhaps an appreciation for different religions. She further mentioned how in years Eight and Nine they learnt about animal cruelty, sweatshops and Crime and Punishment, during which they learnt about the death penalty looking at different case studies, which made the lesson more interesting for some people as it wasn't just on religion.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education offered clarity for SACRE members in that the experience young people would have if they attended a school with a religious character would be very different from the experience of those who attend a community school. She continued by explaining a School of religious character didn't follow the same agreed syllabus as community schools.

The question 'In what jobs would you say, you could use your learning in RE?' was answered by a member of the Youth Cabinet observing that being a chef or having a cooking role would be related to RE as there are some religions who don't eat pork or beef, she continued to mention the role of being a Doctor because due to religious reasons a patient might decide against a blood transfusion or surgery.

Another Member of the Youth Cabinet mentioned she also attended a Catholic Primary School, however for her secondary school she attended a School with no religion so it was interesting to see the difference between the two. She continued by stating in the Catholic primary school there was a strong focus on Catholicism, with two lessons on another faith, she highlighted that as Catholic she found the subject easy to learn however for secondary school during GCSE Religious Studies (RS) there were a few similarities but also quite different, where she enjoyed a range of different religions opposed to just Christianity.

SACRE Members heard how one of the Youth Cabinet Members felt it depended on the school you attended as different schools did different things, for example her previous school was a grammar school and her current school was a normal school (community/academy) where they did less trips or practical lessons than in Grammar School. She continued to mention they visited a historical museum in another country which was really interesting where she learnt a lot about the extent of religious studies and the origins in the past linked to religious studies.

Mrs Saul took the opportunity to thank the young people for taking the time today to come and talk about their experience of religious education, she stated she thought it was really important that SACRE heard from their point of view how they experienced RE in school. She continued by explaining she was a headteacher in a primary school, so delivered the curriculum to pupils but commented it was really nice to hear their views having experienced RE in schools and was nice to hear that they enjoyed a practical approach to learning about religion.

Ms Kaur echoed members' thanks to the Youth Cabinet, she then asked apart from Judaism and Islam did anyone study the Sikh Religion and what did they feel was needed to enable young people to feel more stimulated in the RE lessons?

It was discussed how one member of the Youth Cabinet explained she didn't study the Sikh religion in depth, she commented they had one lesson and then went back to learning about Christianity. She further commented she felt it was taught quite late and wasn't sure if the teachers really knew as much about the Sikh Religion.

She continued when more contemporary topics were discussed where a debate could take place the subject seemed really popular. It was highlighted that if given the chance to have discussions and debates into lessons then

young people were more engaged and willing to have their say, rather than just taught the theory side of the lesson.

The Chair of SACRE stated he was going to finish the discussion by asking members of the Youth Cabinet 'If you're in charge of the RE curriculum what would you change?' He asked if there were any other questions before moving on from Members of SACRE.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education ask 'what extent you recognise the religious or non-religious beliefs of your own family in the teaching you receive in RE, so if you get taught about the traditions that you recognise whether they be non-religious beliefs or religious beliefs to what extent do you recognise it and what you're being taught'.

It was commented that at Secondary School one member of the Youth Cabinet when studying learnt about Christianity and Catholicism in particular however what she would practice in church and how her family practiced Catholicism, she felt there was disparity in that when being taught at school her religion was taught as quite orthodox and quite rigid, which was not how she experience her faith at home.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education stated it was helpful to hear from the Youth Cabinet as they were the ones who were being taught in the local schools. She queried if the Youth Cabinet thought it was possible the subject knowledge of teachers was that they may be trying to deliver the textbook view of the religion and maybe don't have a deep understanding of the religion when you're having the discussions, so maybe Schools could to look for expertise within the community to invite visitors into schools to talk knowledgeable about different religions because it was important to get the right views and understanding and not to get misconceptions.

Members of the Youth Cabinet were then given the opportunity to ask questions of SACRE during which it was sought, what was SACRE's role and what were they hoping to achieve by speaking to the Youth Cabinet. The Chair of SACRE explained speaking with the Youth Cabinet was one example of how SACRE were trying to listen to young people and to hear their experiences and view on Religious Education. He continued to explain this was the first time the annual youth conference was unable to run, due to Covid 19.

The Chair of the SACRE highlighted one of the reasons Members of the Youth Cabinet were invited to come along and speak with SACRE was because members were about to start the process of reviewing the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus and this was the time their comments could really make a difference.

It was then sought as to what was SACRE's goal for future and what were members trying to get out of conversations with the Youth Cabinet. Councillor Kerin stated he had been really interested in the discussions and asked that

moving forward it was made a regular occurrence to invite the Youth Cabinet to SACRE meetings.

The Chair thanked the Youth Cabinet for their attendance and cooperation in discussions.

16. Review of Thurrock SACRE Terms of Reference

The Chair of SACRE Phil Anderson presented the item and in doing so explained the terms of reference were to be amended and updated before being presented the annual council for approval.

During discussions it was highlighted the Free Church Federal Council had an education section known as the Free Church Education Group. Members also decided after reading through the Terms of Reference point 9 quorum to remove the line regarding less than a third of the total membership at present, this meant that as long as one member from each committee was present SACRE was quorate.

The Chair of SACRE sought the views of Councillor Kerin with regards to increasing the membership of Committee D and including substitutions. Councillor Kerin explained since being part of SACRE that appeared to be a struggle to find Elected Members to be part of the Committee. He stated he felt keeping at the membership at three Elected Members covered each political party and agreed that having three substitutes as nominated by Annual Council was a good idea.

RESOLVED

That SACRE agree the revised Constitution of Thurrock SACRE as set out in Appendix 1.

17. Spirited Arts - Local and National Competition 2021

Associate Advisor for Religious Education offered Members of SACRE a verbal update with regards to the spiritual competition. She informed members that Sue Lampkin had set up a portal online for schools to register their interest in SACRE's local competition, with the competition being announced in the Headteacher's bulletin which was circulated to all local schools.

During discussions it was enquired as to whether prizes could be donated by local businesses linked to the arts or a spiritual connection could be sought for winners of the competition. Members also discussed the uses of social media and local media to advertise and highlight the competition to all children in the borough. It was commented but the country was in a national lockdown due to the pandemic this work could be set by schools for children to complete at home.

The Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND commented the Headteacher's bulletin as discussed would be going out at the end of January (2021) and advised that parents would not be able to access the portal at present, this would be schools only. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education stated they had asked for two entries per school age group and that the results would be declared at the summer term.

Members of SACRE commented this was a nice thing for schools to engage with SACRE on as well as encouraging remote learning during this hard time. It was queried as to the age groups the pieces of work would come in from. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education confirmed there would be a prize for early years, KS1, lower KS2 and KS2.

The Chair stated he was looking forward to seeing the work produced by the young people of the borough and wish them all good luck.

RESOLVED that SACRE Members noted the update from the Associate Advisor for Religious Education.

18. Update on National Developments and Opportunities

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education presented the report to members which detailed the key national developments impacting on Religious Education and sought SACRE views and suggested actions.

Members heard how on the 10 October 2019, the government announced that Colin Bloom had been appointed as the faith engagement advisor at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and that he was launching a review interfaith engagement. It was commented that his first engagement advisor Mr Bloom was leading a review into how best the government should engage with faith groups in England.

It was advised that before Christmas a consultation had launched to seek views and propose changes for GCSE and A-level examinations. The introduction to this consultation explained that student education had been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education commented that the Lincoln diocese board of education was to hold the RE symposium virtually on 23 February 2021 and this was the first of its kind within the UK to bring RE teachers creative, and policy makers together to focus on the potential impact of creative processes on the development of religious and world views literacy.

SACRE were advised following the disappointing news that bursaries had been cut from most subjects including Religious Education, it was really good news that Religious Education had been selected for funded subject knowledge enhancement courses. Members heard the funding would be available from April 2021 and that hopefully would support those people

wishing to apply to teach Religious Education but who did not have a first degree within the subject.

It was suggested that the subject knowledge enhancement courses be shared with all schools for information and this was agreed by Members.

RESOLVED:

That SACRE members:

- **Review the information collected (Appendix 1)**
- **Evaluate the relevance of each section for RE in Thurrock**
- **Consider the suggested actions**

20. What do stakeholders say about RE in Thurrock?

The Chair of SACRE took members through the second part of the report which was to agree which stakeholders SACRE needed to consult with as part of its monitoring work and to inform the revision of the agreed syllabus. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education suggested the following stakeholders as a starting point for SACRE to consult with:

- Schools and Academies
- The Local Authority
- NASCARE
- The Youth Cabinet
- The Regional School's Commissioner

It was suggested that perhaps within schools Headteacher or RE Leads would be good stakeholders to speak with as teachers were on the front line and were teaching the curriculum which was supported by the agreed syllabus. Members further suggested that retired Religious Education teachers also be contacted for their views.

RESOLVED that SACRE:

- 1.1 Engage in a discussion firstly with young people from the Youth Cabinet (starter questions are provided in appendix A) and then with each other about Religious Education in Thurrock and its links to promoting tolerance and respect.**
- 1.2 Agree what other stakeholders it needs to consult as part of its monitoring work and to inform the revision of the Agreed Syllabus.**

21. Annual Report 2019-2020 Thurrock SACRE

The Chair of SACRE introduced the annual report for 2019/2022 to members explaining he had spoken with the previous Chair Rev. John Guest who was happy for the report to be presented in the current Chair's name. He continued by stating he felt it was important that Rev. Guest was acknowledged within the report for all of his hard work and it was important that SACRE's thanks to him also be acknowledged. The Chair then opened up for any comments and questions on the Annual Report.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education stated the only issue within the report was that the Department for Education was not publishing exam results for 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, and therefore instead of the results being reported, the number of entries for those students taking RE exams could be noted instead. Members agreed with this and asked that the Associate Advisor contact schools to seek this information.

The Chair commented that in the past Councillor Kerin had kindly offered to present the report on behalf of SACRE at Full Council, and enquired if he was happy to continue to do this. Councillor Kerin confirmed he was happy to present the report to Elected Members at Full Council and would liaise with the Chair and Democratic Services for a convenient date.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That SACRE accept this report as an accurate record of its work for the period September 2019 – July 2020**
- 1.2 Requests that the Assistant Director Education and Skills continues to include discussions about RE provision in the scheduled discussions with senior leadership teams**
- 1.3 Requests that the school effectiveness team include a review of schools' provision for RE and Collective Worship as part of their annual conversations. Specifically, that they consider:**
 - **the impact on pupil outcomes of the combination of subjects such as RE, RSE, Citizenship and PSHE**
 - **the level of training provided to those teaching RE especially when they have no previous experience of teaching the subject**
 - **the impact on pupil attainment of pupils being entered for a GCSE at the end of year 10**
 - **whether or not the amount of time dedicated to RE on school timetables was sufficient for pupils to meet the aims of either the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus or, in the case of**

academy schools, either the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus or one that is 'equally broad and ambitious' as expected by the DfE and Ofsted

The meeting finished at 8.04pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

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|--|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 16 June 2021 | | ITEM: 6 |
| Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | | |
| Reviewing the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Non-Key | |
| Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills | | |
| Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

This report introduces the process by which SACRE and its Agreed Syllabus Conference will review the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (2016).

1. Recommendation(s)

That SACRE Members:

- **Convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference**
- **Agree to begin the process of reviewing the agreed syllabus by conducting a survey of teachers**
- **Agree the proposed timeline**
- **Consider some of the options for the review presented in Appendix 1 from RE Today and the supplemental pdf (model b)**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Every Local Authority is required to establish and support an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

An ASC must:

- Produce and recommend to the LA an agreed syllabus for RE which is educationally sound and meets legal requirements.
- Institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus within five years of the last review, and subsequently every five years after the completion of each further review

- With any sub-committee it may appoint, 1 meet in public, subject to exceptions in relation to confidentiality²
- Unanimously recommend a syllabus for adoption by the LA (each committee having a single vote) - there are provisions for the Secretary of State to become involved where an ASC is not unanimous³
- Include on any sub-committee at least one member of each of its constituent committees.
- An ASC may specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus. In recommending a syllabus the ASC may not specify the amount of curriculum time that must be allocated to RE by schools, but they may provide an estimate of how much time their syllabus would require, to help schools to plan their timetable.

2.2 Membership of an ASC

An ASC is required to be made up of four committees

- Committee A – Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the opinion of the LA, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area;
- Committee B - the Church of England
- Committee C - teacher associations
- Committee D - the Local Authority

There is no legal provision for an ASC to include co-opted members, but it can seek the advice it considers appropriate from those it considers appropriate, to inform the development of effective RE provision in its area.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The current Agreed Syllabus for Thurrock was implemented in schools in September 2016. It is now due. This discussion will inform that process
- 3.2 This discussion will help members to agree the stakeholders it needs to consult to inform the Agreed Syllabus Review and to strengthen its monitoring role.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Monitoring of provision for RE and reviewing the Agreed Syllabus are key elements of the remit of SACRE and its Agreed Syllabus Conference.

1 Schedule 31(6), Education Act 1996

2 Regulation 3, S1 1994/1304

3 Schedule 31(10), Education Act 1996

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the first element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance, Corporate Finance

Funding for the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education is provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant, Central Schools Services Block.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

The legal requirements:

- SACRE must review its RE Agreed Syllabus every five years.
- An Agreed Syllabus Conference is to be convened to conduct that review.

An agreed syllabus must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.' Education Act (1996 Section 375 (3))/School Standards and Framework Act (1998, Schedule 19,para.5)

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

SACRE will continue to dedicate time for the discussion of the way in which religious education can help improve the level of community cohesion in Thurrock. The current Agreed Syllabus is specific about the expected outcomes of teaching of religious education in this respect. The teaching of RE should help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. Appendices to the Report

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Agreed Syllabus: options from RE Today
- Appendix 2 - Syllabus model B

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

Thurrock Agreed Syllabus: options from RE Today

Background

The legal requirements:

- SACRE must review its RE Agreed Syllabus every five years
- An Agreed Syllabus Conference is to be set up to conduct the review

An agreed syllabus must '*reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.*'

Education Act (1996 Section 375 (3))/School Standards and Framework Act (1998, Schedule 19, para.5)

The need for a high-quality syllabus

The provision of a clear, well-structured, up-to-date and professional agreed syllabus is probably the single most important function of SACRE. Combined with on-going implementation training and resources, a new syllabus offers the possibility of raising achievement in RE in all local schools. It is also essential to consider how this relates to new inspection requirements, to developments in assessment and in teaching and learning, revised GCSEs, the National Report from the Commission on RE, the 'British Values' agenda, and all related educational change.

Ofsted's Subject specialist RE reports 2010 and 2013 highlight the need for syllabuses to:

- be clear about expected knowledge and understanding about religion(s) and belief(s)
- support and empower teachers to plan effectively
- offer coherent progression across the ages and key stages
- support clear and focused assessment, useful for raising standards
- encourage enquiry-based RE.

Implications of the 2019 Ofsted Framework

The 2019 Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) places great emphasis on curriculum planning. It asks schools what the thinking is behind their curriculum plan for the school – their **intent**. It then examines how they **implement** it – including a context and narrative for its implementation in the school. And then it examines the **impact** of their curriculum on pupils. An agreed syllabus needs to be able to support schools in all three. It needs to have a good rationale for its structure; it needs to be operable in diverse school settings; it needs to show schools how they can see what impact the syllabus is having on pupil achievement.

One key issue that arises from this is the need to show progression in terms of knowledge and understanding at different phases – across a single year, across a phase and across the whole school. For example, recent Ofsted reports emphasise the importance of teachers being able to articulate and justify the choices they have made for what content they study, when and why e.g.

Leaders need to make sure that all subject plans provide the opportunity for pupils to apply and deepen their knowledge.

Without this support, schools face strong criticism: e.g.

The way in which a series of lessons is planned in geography, religious education, music and art does not help pupils to build on what they already know and can do.

A syllabus also needs to have coherence across primary and secondary schools, so that pupils can build on prior learning. This is essential for pupils to be able to embed learning so that they can recall what they have learnt. The Ofsted Framework defines learning:

Learning happens when there is a change in long-term memory. If there is no change in long-term memory, learning has not taken place.

It is no longer adequate for pupils to have a selection of single encounters with RE content – a single unit on one theme, or one religion, and then not to be revisited. However interesting and engaging these units might be, pupils are unlikely to be able to recall what they have learnt. A syllabus needs to enable schools to plan coherently to ensure that pupils encounter content (in the form of core concepts, for example) a number of times, through primary and secondary schools.

Commission on RE National Report 2018

Since the development of the syllabus model A (2015), the model used by Thurrock, the RE Council has published the result of a two-year commission into RE. Among its recommendations are:

- A change of name for the subject, from *Religious Education* to *Religion and Worldviews*
- The removal of the responsibility for SACREs to produce a local agreed syllabus
- Instead, to have a national statement of entitlement and national example programme of study, upon which Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews (the body replacing the reconstituted SACRE) can base local guidance and support.

The Report has had a positive response from the RE community, in general, although there remain some strong differences of opinion. Its impact on the role of SACREs is limited as yet. The Department for Education gave a lukewarm response to it, and indicated that there would be no time or inclination for any legal change for the foreseeable future. This means that SACREs retain the requirement to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference and decide upon development of an agreed syllabus.

The RE Council is seeing this as part of a long process, however, and even though there is not any immediate structural change, the Report is having an impact on how people think about the content and purpose of RE, and may well end up having an impact on the structures of RE too. Schools are now taking notice of this and are beginning to adapt the RE that they teach.

Implications for SACREs

It would be wise to consider the impact of the description of our subject as outlined in the Commission Report. Whether or not we wish to embrace the name change, there may be some adjustments (at least) that we could make to RE. On the other hand, the national conversation being held among RE professionals may not reach quickly down to the classroom. It is part of SACRE's role to mediate this impact, as it sees fit.

Decisions to take:

- There is the opportunity to make some amendments to the current model, and SACRE should consider the options below.
- There are funding implications for each of the options. It is better that these do not drive the decisions – better to decide what is the best option for the teachers and then pursue the funding!

The options for SACRE include:

- a) **SACRE renews the licence with RE Today, which includes a supplement to insert into the 2016-2021 folder, delivered electronically.** This supplement includes updates on, for example, the Commission Report, tighter requirements at KS4 and 5, assessment, OFSTED, EYFS and some additional guidance. This relicensing would include a 'relaunch' conference, to support teachers with ideas and resources.
- b) **SACRE could adopt RE Today's more recent Syllabus Model B.** This syllabus shares some DNA with the current Thurrock syllabus, but offers a more systematic approach, incorporating questions from the Understanding Christianity resource being used in many schools, and a revised assessment model.

- c) **SACRE could commission a bespoke new syllabus from RE Today.** This could reflect the Commission on RE national report recommendations closely, exemplifying its new direction for Religion and Worldviews.

Option A

Renew licence with RE Today syllabus (model A) plus supplement

The Thurrock syllabus was written by RE Today. It has been adopted by over 15 other local authorities, with very positive feedback as to its effectiveness.

This syllabus provides the minimum for a SACRE / LA to fulfil its legal requirement.

- The licence renewal would include a slight update to the 2016 syllabus – including new dates, a few corrections and potentially an updated Foreword.
- It would also include a **supplement**. This would be produced electronically, so that it can be sent around to all schools together with the updated syllabus.

The supplement would include, for example:

Syllabus Model A+

This updates Model A, including:

- Updated EYFS outcomes, in line with 2020 EYFS Profile
- Guidance on curriculum design
- Guidance on idea of worldviews (in line with CoRE - institutional/personal)
- Additional questions:
 - o L2.5a How do people from religious and non-religious communities celebrate key festivals? (multidisciplinary approach)
 - o L2.10 How do family life and festivals show what matters to Jewish people?
 - o U2.9 What can be done to reduce racism? Can religion help?
 - o U2.10 Green religion? How and why should religious communities do more to care for the Earth?
 - o 3 systematic units for KS3: Islam, Sikhi, Buddhism
- Expanded SEND guidance
- Revised and rewritten guidance on assessment
- Local demographic information

Appendices on:

- cultural capital
- creating a coherent curriculum
- types of knowledge (in line with Ofsted Subject Review - substantive knowledge, ways of knowing, personal knowledge)
- introduction to knowledge organisers
- keywords and core concepts
- descriptions of achievement for pupils with SEND working below national curriculum outcomes
- planning RE in special school settings

Online support including:

- Knowledge organisers
- Sample long-term plans
- Guidance on religious and non-religious worldviews (religions guide, do's and don'ts etc)

Advantages:

- All schools receive an updated digital copy of the 120+ page document, in full colour, plus the supplement
- Supplement offers useful updates and additional guidance, to enhance and promote good learning in RE.

- No difficulty with it being ready for summer 2021, depending on when SACRE make a decision, SACRE will need to re-launch conferences for the update. RE Today would run these conferences.
- There is scope for some additional unit questions to extend options for teachers
- Support materials schools have purchased already continue to be relevant
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary
- Note that the units of work for the 2016 syllabus are still available for schools to purchase, if they missed out first time around.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

Disadvantages:

- Little involvement from local teachers or SACRE on the content and style.
- Local RE is less prominent (though Thurrock can insert additional appendices if desired)
- If the Commission Report recommendations are put into action, the syllabus will not reflect its fullest extent.

Details and likely costs

Syllabus licence renewal includes cost of update and supplement

Option B

Adopt RE Today's more recent syllabus model B

In 2017, RE Today developed a new syllabus model. It has some questions that are very similar to the Thurrock syllabus, but its approach is different.

Features:

- The syllabus follows a more systematic approach to the study of religions, in contrast to the more thematic approach of Thurrock. This means that most questions address one religion at a time. For example, in each year a class will generally study two religions separately before addressing a thematic question in the summer term, allowing them to build on their learning through the year.
- The syllabus follows a coherent teaching and learning approach, with clear assessment outcomes for each unit and each phase.
- The syllabus contains additional guidance on religions and worldviews, and is accompanied by a selection of units of work that can be purchased by SACRE for its schools, or by schools themselves.
- This syllabus incorporates key questions from the Understanding Christianity resource that is currently in use in many Church of England and community schools.

This syllabus would include some of the key updates from Option A.

Advantages:

- The systematic approach is more in sympathy with a knowledge-rich curriculum, and its spiral curriculum reflects the contemporary emphasis on embedding pupils' knowledge and understanding in their long-term memory. This idea of curriculum coherence ties in well with new Ofsted emphases.
- This syllabus is a substantial move forward for RE for pupils and for teachers.
- Many schools using Understanding Christianity would be delivering the agreed syllabus as they use it; and schools who have not discovered Understanding Christianity would benefit from the structural coherence of the study of Christianity in the syllabus.
- RE Today have received trust funding which means that community schools can attend 3 part training on the Understanding Christianity resource at an amazingly low cost and community schools attending this training will have the resource at no cost to them.
- The syllabus includes additional scope for the examination of non-religious worldviews, in line with the Commission Report 2018.

- Syllabus is ready for summer 2021 launches.
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

Disadvantages:

- A substantial change of syllabus may not be welcomed by schools, who are just getting used to the current one, even though the syllabus Model B has been greeted very positively by schools in other LAs.

Option C: Bespoke review

SACRE could fulfil statutory duties by requiring a local review of the agreed syllabus. This would involve a process something like this:

- an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) set up, over-seeing the review;
- a survey of teachers;
- initial drafts by the adviser / a consultant;
- teacher working groups to feed into the process of reviewing the drafts;
- re-writing by adviser;
- approval from ASC, SACRE and the Local Authority;
- design and production of text and/or online version.

This would need to be launched with either a schools conference day or a series of hub CPD sessions, to provide training and resources to enable teachers to implement the syllabus in their schools. A syllabus with strong implementation training plus support will be far more effective than one with no training.

The production of support materials can extend the value of the revised syllabus. A good syllabus can provide the drive, coherence and context for RE, with sample or full units of work exemplifying the syllabus. They are not an alternative to the statutory syllabus but can enhance teaching and learning by providing teachers with additional suggestions and guidance.

The key reason to consider this would be if SACRE believes that it should create a syllabus that reflects the description of the subject of Religion and Worldviews from the 2018 Commission Report.

Relevant recent examples:

RE Today Services have had recent involvement with SACREs and Local Authorities in, for example, Sandwell, Bedford, Bedfordshire and Luton, and Gloucestershire, who have used RE Today to develop a bespoke syllabus. No one else has yet written a syllabus based on the 2018 Commission Report, so this would be ground-breaking.

Advantages:

- Involvement of local teachers strengthens the commitment to the syllabus, maybe resulting in greater buy-in for the revised syllabus
- The process is a form of professional development for those involved, who can then support local schools in the implementation process.
- The syllabus can reflect the local area closely.
- The syllabus could set the standard for post-Commission syllabuses, with national impact

Disadvantages:

- Costs are considerably greater than options a-b.
- Duplication of work with other local SACREs.

Likely costs must include:

- Establishing, managing and supporting the review process,
- Running teacher consultations, including supply cover for teacher working party

- Setting the parameters for writing review materials, and developing local applications of national materials; writing time, drafting and redrafting services
- Production supervision
- Supply cover
- Production costs: editorial, design, print.

Likely costs: In our experience, bespoke syllabus writing can cost between £20-30,000

Potential timeline

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Summer Term 2021 | Agreed Syllabus Conference convened to begin the process of reviewing the syllabus SACRE survey of primary, secondary and SEND teachers |
| Autumn term 2021 | Survey results analysed Principles agreed Draft of SACRE generated pages presented to SACRE; amended after comments Agreed Syllabus Conference comment on draft pages Agreed Syllabus Conference approve and recommend to Thurrock Council Thurrock Council approval sought |
| May/June 2021 | Design and production process |
| Late June/ Early July 2021 | Agreed Syllabus launch conferences, primary and secondary Local group support |
| September 2021 onwards | Agreed syllabus implemented in schools On-going local group support |
| | |

Licence

All licence prices are subject to VAT.

The licence includes:

- **Permission for each school to use the syllabus** – including photocopying within school for classroom use
- The syllabus will be **provided to schools as a PDF, via a password protected area** of the RE Today website. The syllabus cannot be made available for public access – this is a breach of the licence conditions. It is the responsibility of the SACRE to ensure all licences schools are compliant.
- **Licences are per school**, not bundled per academy chain, for example
- A **hard copy** of the syllabus will be provided for each school if you choose to adopt model B
- A **hard copy** of the supplement will be provided for each school if you relicence model A
- A **summary document will be supplied as a PDF** to the SACRE/LA to host as a publicly available document on their website
- Licence also includes **essential updates from RE Today** during the five-year licence period. These will be available electronically, not in print.
- The syllabus remains the copyright of RE Today.

Option 2 Syllabus model B

Syllabus model B is a newly developed model with a more systematic approach compared to the more thematic approach of syllabus model A. The agreement is to buy a five-year licence with RE Today.* Additional support resources are also available to purchase.

Features of model B

The syllabus offers:

- A more systematic approach to the study of religions, in contrast to the more thematic approach of option A. This means that most questions address one religion at a time. For example, in each year a class will generally study two religions separately before addressing a thematic question in the summer term, allowing them to build on their learning through the year.
- A coherent teaching and learning approach, with clear assessment outcomes for each unit and each phase.
- Additional guidance on religions and worldviews, and is accompanied by a selection of units of work, available for purchase.
- Incorporation of key questions from the Understanding Christianity resource currently in use in many Church of England and community schools.

In addition to the sections found in model A, syllabus model B includes these further features:

- Teaching and learning approach
- Spiral curriculum
- Core concepts identified for each unit, building on prior learning
- End-of-unit and end-of-phase outcomes for coherent assessment
- Background knowledge on core concepts in world religions and non-religious worldviews
- Demographics of religion and belief in local area.

Advantages:

- The systematic approach reflects a knowledge-rich curriculum, and its spiral curriculum reflects the contemporary emphasis on embedding pupils' knowledge and understanding in their long-term memory. This idea of curriculum coherence ties in well with new Ofsted emphases, with focus on the sequencing of concepts for effective learning.
- Many schools using Understanding Christianity will be delivering the agreed syllabus as they use it; and schools that have not adopted Understanding Christianity will benefit from the structural coherence of the study of Christianity in the syllabus.
- The syllabus includes additional scope for the examination of non-religious worldviews, in line with the Commission on RE national report 2018.
- Ongoing support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the five-year review period if required.
- SACRE can write and insert its own foreword and introduction.
- SACRE can create additional local appendices (although these are the responsibility of SACRE to print and insert).

- Additional support is available in the form of a scheme of work for units other than Christianity – 20 primary units of work and 11 secondary units, available for purchase by SACRE for its schools, or by schools themselves.
- LAs and SACREs can work with RE Today to recoup a significant proportion of their costs through entrepreneurial launch events for schools. We have wide experience of the effectiveness of this, including premium rates for local academies. Further detailed examples available.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

Disadvantages:

- Limited involvement from local teachers or SACRE on the content and style.
- Local RE is less prominent (although SACRE can insert its own local introduction and appendices to the syllabus).

*Details of what the licence includes, as well as FOI and copyright information can be found on p.11.

The RE teaching and learning approach.

This syllabus is designed to support schools in developing and delivering excellence in RE. It responds to national calls for deepening pupils' knowledge about religions and for developing their 'religious literacy'.¹¹ It does this by studying one religion at a time ('systematic' units), and then including 'thematic' units, which build on learning by comparing the religions, beliefs and practices studied.

In order to support teachers in exploring the selected beliefs, this syllabus sets out an underlying teaching and learning approach, whereby pupils encounter core concepts in religions and beliefs in a coherent way, developing their understanding and their ability to handle questions of religion and belief.

The teaching and learning approach has three core elements, which are woven together to provide breadth and balance within teaching and learning about religions and beliefs, underpinning the aims of RE outlined on p.8. Teaching and learning in the classroom will encompass all three elements, allowing for overlap between elements as suits the religion, concept and question being explored.

These elements set the context for open exploration of religion and belief. They offer a structure through which pupils can encounter diverse religious traditions alongside non-religious worldviews – which reflect the backgrounds of many pupils in our schools. The elements present a broad and flexible strategy that allows for different traditions to be treated with integrity. These elements offer a route through each unit while also allowing for a range of questions reflecting different approaches, for example, from religious studies, philosophy, sociology, ethics and theology.

Making sense of beliefs
Identifying and making sense of core religious and non-religious beliefs and concepts; understanding what these beliefs mean within their traditions; recognising how and why sources of authority (such as texts) are used, expressed and interpreted in different ways, and developing skills of interpretation.

Making connections
Evaluating, reflecting on and connecting the beliefs and practices studied; allowing pupils to challenge ideas studied, and the ideas studied to challenge pupils' thinking; discerning possible connections between these and pupils' own lives and ways of understanding the world.

Understanding the impact
Examining how and why people put their beliefs into action in diverse ways, within their everyday lives, within their communities and in the wider world.

11 e.g. OFSTED (2013) Religious Education: Realising the Potential. Clarke, C. and Woodhead, L. (2019) A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools. London, Westminster Faith Debates; Dintam, A. and Shaw, M. (2019) RE for Real: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief. London, Goldsmiths University of London/Cultural St. Gabriels; Commission of Religion and Belief (2015) Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good. The Woolf Institute. © RE Today 2020

Unit overview

| KS2 (Connecting) | Upper KS2 (Connecting) | KS3 (Applying/Interpreting) |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews</p> <p>L2.1 What do Christians learn from the creation story? [Creation/Fall]</p> <p>L2.2 What is it like for someone to follow God? [People of God]</p> <p>L2.3 What is the 'Trinity' and why is it important for Christians? [God/Incarnation]</p> <p>L2.4 What kind of world did Jesus want? [Gospel]</p> <p>L2.5 Why do Christians call the day Jesus died 'Good Friday'? [Salvation]</p> <p>L2.6 For Christians, what was the impact of Pentecost? [Kingdom of God]</p> | <p>U2.1 What does it mean if Christians believe God is holy and loving? [God]</p> <p>U2.2 Creation and science: conflicting or complementary? [Creation]</p> <p>U2.3 Why do Christians believe Jesus was the Messiah? [Incarnation]</p> <p>U2.4 How do Christians decide how to live? 'What would Jesus do?' [Gospel]</p> <p>U2.5 What do Christians believe Jesus did to 'save' people? [Salvation]</p> <p>U2.6 For Christians, what kind of king is Jesus? [Kingdom of God]</p> | <p>3.1 What does it mean for God as Trinity? [God]</p> <p>3.2 Should Christians be atheist? [Creation]</p> <p>3.3 Why are people good? [Incarnation]</p> <p>3.4 Does the world need people of God?</p> <p>3.5 What do people do who are good? [Gospel]</p> <p>3.6 Why do Christians believe in Earth? [Incarnation]</p> <p>3.7 What is so radical about Jesus? [Kingdom of God]</p> |
| <p>Buddhism: Buddha Dharma Sangha</p> | <p>U2.7 Why do Hindus want to be good? [karma/dharma/samsara/moksha]</p> <p>U2.8 What does it mean to be a Muslim in Britain today? [Tawhid/iman/badiah]</p> | <p>3.8 The Buddha: how and why and teachings have meaning for [Buddha/dharma/sangha]</p> <p>3.9 Why don't Hindus want to be and what do they do about it? [Samsara/karma/dharma]</p> <p>3.10 What is good and what is challenge being a Muslim teenager in Britain today? [Tawhid/iman/badiah]</p> |

Agreed Syllabus for RE 2020–2025

| Religion/belief | FS (Discovering) | KS1 (Exploring) | Lower KS2 (Connecting) | Upper KS2 (Connecting) | KS3 (Applying/Interpreting) |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Judaism: God Torah The People and the Land</p> <p>Sikhism: God Values (Nam Simran, kirat karna, vand chhakra, seva) The Gurus Panth (community)</p> <p>Non-religious worldviews</p> <p>Thematic</p> | <p>F4 Being special: where do we belong?</p> <p>F5 Which places are special and why?</p> <p>F6 Which stories are special and why?</p> | <p>1.7 Who is Jewish and how do they live? [God/Torah/People]</p> <p>1.8 What makes some places sacred to believers?</p> <p>1.9 How should we care for others and the world, and why does it matter?</p> <p>1.10 What does it mean to belong to a faith community?</p> | <p>L2.10 How do festivals and family life show what matters to Jewish people? [God/Torah/People/the Land]</p> <p>L2.11 How and why do people mark the significant events of life?</p> <p>L2.12 How and why do people try to make the world a better place?</p> | <p>U2.9 Why is the Torah so important to Jewish people? [God/Torah]</p> <p>U2.10 What matters most to Humanists and Christians?</p> <p>U2.11 Why do some people believe in God and some people don't?</p> <p>U2.12 How does God get hard?</p> | <p>3.11 What is good and what is challenging about being a Jewish teenager in the UK today? [People and the Land]</p> <p>3.12 How are Sikh teachings on equality and service put into practice today? [God/the Gurus/values/Panth]</p> <p>3.13 What difference does it make to be an atheist or agnostic in Britain today?</p> <p>3.14 Good, bad, right, wrong: how do I decide?</p> |

Unit: 1.10 What does it mean to belong to a faith community?

The principal aim of religious education is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that pupils can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and ways of living.

Learning outcomes (intended to enable pupils to achieve end of key stage outcomes):
Teachers will enable pupils to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:

- Recognise that loving others is important in lots of communities about loving other people
- Give an account of what happens at a traditional Christian Jewish or Muslim welcome ceremony, and suggest actions and symbols mean
- Identify at least two ways people belong to each other

Understand the impact:

- Identify at least two ways people belong to each other

Teachers can select content for learning:
Teachers can select content from these examples, and add more of their own to enable pupils to achieve the end of key stage outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:

- Talk about stories of people who belong to groups. Find out about groups to which pupils belong, including their own.
- Find out about some symbols of 'belonging' used in Christianity and at least one other religion, and what they mean.
- Connect to teachings about how people should love each other too, e.g. Jesus told his friends that 'Love everybody' (Mark 12:30–31), Jewish teaching: note that Jesus is quoting the older Jewish commandment: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). Note that Jesus is quoting the older Jewish commandment: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). Note that Jesus is quoting the older Jewish commandment: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18).

Unit L2.12 How and why do people try to make the world a better place?

The principal aim of religious education is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that pupils can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and ways of living.

Learning outcomes (intended to enable pupils to achieve end of key stage outcomes):
Teachers will enable pupils to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:

- Make sense of belief:
 - Identify some beliefs about why the world is not always a good place (e.g. Christian ideas of sin)
 - Make links between religious beliefs and teachings and why people try to live and make the world a better place
- Understand the impact:
 - Make simple links between teachings about how to live and ways in which people try to make the world a better place (e.g. ikkun alam and the charity Tzedek)
 - Describe some examples of how people try to live (e.g. individuals and organisations)
 - Identify some differences in how people put their beliefs into action
- Make connections:
 - Raise questions and suggest answers about why the world is not always a good place, and what are the best ways of making it better
 - Identify some differences between some commands for living from religious traditions and pupils' own ideas

Teachers can select content from these examples, and add more of their own to enable pupils to achieve the outcomes.

Throughout this unit, make connections with pupils' learning from earlier in the year: what have they already learned about how believers try to live? Why do believers want to follow the commands and teachings of their traditions?

- Think about some of the ways in which the world is not such a good place: you could start small and local, and end up big and global e.g. from upsetting people in the dinner queue through to messing up the environment. Talk about why people are not always as good as they could be. Connect with Units L2.1 and L2.4 which explore the idea for Christians (and Jews) that people prefer to do their own thing rather than obey the Creator (sin) and so keep needing to say sorry and ask for help. Recall that Christians believe God helps them through the Holy Spirit (see Unit L2.1). Muslims believe people do good and bad deeds, and also need God's mercy.
- Religions suggest that people need help and guidance to live in the right way. Explore teachings which act as guides for living within two religious traditions studied during the year, and a non-religious belief system, e.g. the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–21), Deuteronomy 5:1–22), the Two Commandments of Jesus (Mark 12:28–34) and the 'Golden Rule' (Matthew 7:12). Note that the Golden Rule is important in many traditions including for Humanists. Work out what people must have been doing if they needed to be given those rules. Do people still behave like that? What difference would it make if people keep these guides for living? How would it make the world a better place?
- Explore some ideas and individuals that help inspire people to make the world a better place. Choose from the following ideas:
 - The Jewish teaching of ikkun alam (mending the world) and tzedaka (charity); find some examples of Jewish charities who try to make the world better; what do they do and why? (e.g. Tzedek, Jewish Child's Day); find out about how the Jewish new year festival for trees (Tu B'Shevat) and how that can 'mend the world'.
 - The Muslim belief in charity (zakat) and how Muslims give charity; use some examples of charities such as Islamic-Relief.org.uk or www.muslimrelief.org.uk. Consider how Muslims give charity; how and why they help to make the world a better place.
 - Explore the lives of inspirational Christians (and Jews) and their contribution to making the world a better place.
 - Explore the lives of inspirational Humanists and their contribution to making the world a better place.
 - Compare the work of Christian Aid and Islamic Relief: can they change the world?
 - Compare the work of Humanists who use to guide their ways of living? Many use the Golden Rule (which is common across many religions too), using reason, listening to conscience. Look at some inspiring Humanists who fight for human rights (e.g. Anne Besant fought for women's rights) and why they did this. Look at the work of the secular charity, Oxfam. How have they used their beliefs to help others? (e.g. Anne Besant fought for women's rights) and why they did this. Look at the work of the secular charity, Oxfam. How have they used their beliefs to help others?

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 16 June 2021 | ITEM: 7 |
| Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | |
| GCSE entries and results in Thurrock 2020 | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Non-Key |
| Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills | |
| Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services | |
| This report is Public | |

Executive Summary

SACRE monitors provision for Religious Education in its local area where RE is delivered in accordance with the local Agreed Syllabus. This is part of the statutory duties of a SACRE. Thurrock introduced a new Agreed Syllabus in 2016 and regularly monitors data on provision for the subject to establish how effective the new syllabus has been in meeting its aim to raise standards of RE.

Thurrock appears in position 49 out of 150 local authorities when ranked according to entries for GCSE RS. The highest ranked authority enters 77% and the lowest 11%. The average point score for all subjects in Thurrock Schools is around 2 points (half a GCSE grade) lower than the national average. This finding is consistent with the national trend in that in LAs entering higher proportions of candidates for GCSE RS pupils tend to perform better overall than in lower entering local authorities.

This report compares GCSE entries and results for Religious Studies with national data and explores the extent to which the trends for schools in Thurrock reflects those nationally.

1. Recommendation(s):

That SACRE:

- **Informs school leaders, multi-academy trusts and governors about the findings of this research and**
- **Requests that they consider how the study of Religious Education as part of a broad and balanced curriculum appears to have an impact on pupil attainment overall.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 *From DfE website: "Public Examinations in England were cancelled for the summer of 2020 and pupils were instead awarded centre assessed grade. An analysis of the data shows that pupil level attainment statistics increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This almost certainly reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. As a result, the 2019/20 data cannot be considered comparable to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance."*
- 2.2 For this reason, the Secretary of State for Education made a commitment not to publish school level data for the summer 2020 season, however, local authority level data is available which is the focus of this report. In table 1 and 2 below, Local Authorities are ranked according to the percentage of pupils who were entered for GCSE RS Full course in 2020 and the commentary that follows, presents an analysis of the characteristics of the highest and lowest 20 of 150 local authorities.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Thurrock requires that all schools that adopt this syllabus follow a national accredited course throughout key stage 4. In the past, the short course was a popular means of meeting this requirement, especially because the teaching time was only one hour a week. Since 2014 however, entries for RS short course have declined rapidly, almost certainly because this qualification was removed from the list of those that count towards performance tables.
- 3.2 The impact on RE in Thurrock and elsewhere, was that schools following the short course, could either:
- Attempt to deliver a full course on short course time;
 - Make changes to the timetable so that a full course could be delivered in years 10-11
 - Begin GCSE in year 9 and deliver it over three years instead of two
 - Begin GCSE in year 9 and deliver it over two years, entering early at the end of year 10
 - Make GCSE RS an optional GCSE with the remaining pupils not following the Agreed Syllabus requirements
 - Replace Agreed Syllabus provision with a minimal level of provision via tutorials, combined sessions with PSHEe / Citizenship etc.

Perhaps inevitably, the result of this change in government policy has been that fewer children in Thurrock and elsewhere are now receiving their

entitlement to a comprehensive religious education. National data¹ also shows that provision in Academy Schools is a significant concern with around 50% reporting no timetable provision for year 11 at all. In schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies, the figure is 38.5%.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 SACRE has advised the local authority about its concerns but for a number of reasons, there has been very little change. This report suggests that it may be possible to change the narrative with non-compliant schools in a way that might have an impact. Rather than arguing for more provision for RE on the basis of statutory / contractual requirements, this report suggests the case is made for RE as part of an independent broad and balanced curriculum. The data presents appear to suggest that where schools do not provide adequate RE provision, the trend is weaker attainment in all the main performance indicators and a particularly negative impact on pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance, Corporate Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the actions recommended in this report, if approved will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

¹ <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/NATRE%20SWF%20report%20-data%20pub%202020%20.pdf>

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in s391 of the Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools which do not have a religious character and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit.

This report asks that SACRE considers the attached research and informs school leaders of the findings in order that they can make an informed decision about provision for RE.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

The aim of this report is to address SACRE concerns about pupils in Thurrock who are not currently receiving their entitlement to Religious Education. Higher standards in the teaching of RE will help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 - GCSE Religious Studies in 2020

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

GCSE Religious Studies in 2020

How might entry rates for GCSE RS impact on pupil performance across the curriculum?

Pupils in LAs with the highest rate of entry for GCSE Religious Studies perform the equivalent of one and a half grades higher on average than those in LAs with the lowest rates of entry.

Context: From DfE website: *"Public Examinations in England were cancelled for the summer of 2020 and pupils were instead awarded centre assessed grade. An analysis of the data shows that pupil level attainment statistics increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This almost certainly reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. As a result, the 2019/20 data cannot be considered comparable to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance."*

For this reason, the Secretary of State for Education made a commitment not to publish school level data for the summer 2020 season, however, local authority level data is available which is the focus of this report. In table 1 and 2 below, Local Authorities are ranked according to the percentage of pupils who were entered for GCSE RS Full course in 2020 and the commentary that follows, presents an analysis of the characteristics of the highest and lowest 20 of 150 local authorities.

It is striking that the proportion of the Year 11 cohort entered for GCSE RS in 200 varies from 11% to 77%. Some of this variation can be explained by the fact that in the authorities with the top rates of entry, the proportion of pupils being educated in schools with a religious character is greater, but at only 7 percentage points above the national average, this factor can only be a small element of the explanation.

What do we know about the 20 local authorities that recorded the highest levels of entry for RS GCSE?

The average:

1. number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds in these local authorities is **18 percentage points above** the national average,
2. number of children in the authority being educated in a school with a religious character is **7 percentage points above** the national average,
3. entry of pupils in schools in these local authorities for GCSE RS is **40 percentage points higher** than the national average,
4. attainment of grades 9-4 in RS is **2 percentage points above** the national average,
5. attainment 8 score is **2 points above** the national average,
6. point score (APS) for EBacc subjects is **0.20 points above** the national average,
7. number of pupils entered for the EBacc in these local authorities is **7 percentage points higher** than the national average,
8. number of pupils that attained grades 9-4 for the English Baccalaureate is **6 percentage points above** the national average,
9. number of pupils entitled to claim free school meals is **0.8% percentage points lower** than the national average,
- 10 - 8 of the Local Authorities in the top 20 were London Boroughs

| | Number of secondary schools | % pupils in non-selective schools | % White British | % BAME | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character | % achieving 9-4 Full course RS (of those entered) | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils | Average EBacc APS score per pupil | Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate | % of pupils achieving 9-4 in English Baccalaureate | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals | % entering Full course |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|------------------------|
| 1 | 23 | 87% | 5% | 95% | 10% | 85% | 53.1 | 4.8 | 65% | 41.0% | 4,079 | 22% | 77% |
| 2 | 9 | 100% | 30% | 70% | 36% | 85% | 53.1 | 4.8 | 50% | 40.8% | 1,555 | 18% | 75% |
| 3 | 13 | 77% | 25% | 75% | 52% | 90% | 56.1 | 5.2 | 67% | 52.1% | 1,458 | 20% | 74% |
| 4 | 13 | 92% | 9% | 91% | 15% | 80% | 53.4 | 4.9 | 65% | 46.1% | 2,334 | 14% | 74% |
| 5 | 6 | 100% | 20% | 80% | 56% | 89% | 58.0 | 5.1 | 43% | 35.7% | 899 | 23% | 71% |
| 6 | 15 | 53% | 14% | 86% | 26% | 83% | 55.9 | 4.9 | 47% | 36.5% | 1,958 | 11% | 69% |
| 7 | 16 | 94% | 14% | 86% | 24% | 83% | 53.5 | 4.9 | 56% | 44.1% | 3,043 | 17% | 68% |
| 8 | 20 | 90% | 9% | 91% | 17% | 83% | 50.1 | 4.5 | 54% | 36.3% | 3,082 | 37% | 68% |
| 9 | 18 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 34% | 69% | 47.6 | 4.1 | 35% | 27.0% | 2,945 | 17% | 63% |
| 10 | 9 | 100% | 86% | 14% | 38% | 76% | 54.0 | 4.8 | 46% | 35.0% | 1,755 | 9% | 63% |
| 11 | 15 | 93% | 9% | 91% | 24% | 88% | 53.1 | 4.9 | 66% | 46.9% | 3,078 | 14% | 62% |
| 12 | 39 | 87% | 91% | 9% | 20% | 73% | 50.0 | 4.3 | 30% | 23.0% | 5,109 | 11% | 62% |
| 13 | 13 | 77% | 87% | 13% | 38% | 78% | 48.6 | 4.2 | 33% | 23.6% | 2,032 | 19% | 60% |
| 14 | 10 | 90% | 81% | 19% | 0% | 77% | 51.9 | 4.6 | 52% | 37.9% | 1,856 | 8% | 60% |
| 15 | 15 | 53% | 53% | 47% | 8% | 70% | 48.7 | 4.2 | 34% | 23.5% | 1,943 | 13% | 59% |
| 16 | 20 | 85% | 25% | 75% | 19% | 75% | 46.2 | 4.0 | 34% | 23.2% | 3,898 | 19% | 58% |
| 17 | 10 | 100% | 64% | 36% | 14% | 85% | 55.9 | 5.0 | 53% | 43.2% | 1,675 | 7% | 58% |
| 18 | 9 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 41% | 77% | 45.9 | 3.9 | 25% | 20.3% | 1,639 | 22% | 58% |
| 19 | 20 | 85% | 58% | 42% | 51% | 74% | 48.3 | 4.2 | 34% | 26.6% | 3,549 | 20% | 57% |
| 20 | 11 | 73% | 43% | 57% | 18% | 86% | 58.9 | 5.5 | 64% | 52.2% | 1,767 | 8% | 56% |
| Highest Group Average | | 87% | 45% | 55% | 27% | 80% | 52.00 | 4.6 | 47% | 36% | 2,483 | 16.5% | 65% |
| National Average | | 83% | 63% | 37% | 20% | 78% | 50.00 | 4.40 | 40% | 30% | 3,772 | 17.3% | 39% |

Table 1

What do we know about the 20 local authorities that recorded the lowest levels of entry for RS GCSE?

The average:

1. number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds in these local authorities is **16 percentage points below** the national average,
2. number of children in the authority being educated in a school with a religious character is **8 percentage points below** the national average,
3. entry of pupils in schools in these local authorities for GCSE RS is **20% below** than the national average,
4. attainment of grades 9-4 in RS is **0.1 percentage points below** the national average,
5. attainment 8 score is **1.2 points below** the national average,
6. point score (APS) for EBacc subjects is **0.19 points below** the national average,
7. number of pupils entered for the EBacc in these local authorities is **6 percentage points below** than the national average,
8. number of pupils that attained grades 9-4 for the English Baccalaureate is **4 percentage points below** the national average,
9. number of pupils entitled to claim free school meals is **0.2 percentage points below** the national average,

Also -

10. 0 of the Local Authorities in the bottom 20 were London Boroughs.

Local authority entry rates for GCSE Religious Studies as a proportion of the Year 11 cohort in 2020 – lowest 20

| Rank | Number of secondary schools | % pupils in non-selective schools | % White British | % BAME | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character | % achieving 9-4 Full course RS (of those entered) | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils | Average EBacc APS score per pupil | Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate | % of pupils achieving 9-4 in English Baccalaureate | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals | % entering Full course Religious Studies |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | 14 | 93% | 80% | 20% | 21% | 79% | 51.3 | 4.49 | 42% | 32.5% | 2,808 | 15% | 23% |
| 2 | 13 | 77% | 75% | 25% | 6% | 75% | 49.9 | 4.36 | 37% | 28.7% | 2,051 | 16% | 22% |
| 3 | 43 | 86% | 91% | 10% | 10% | 78% | 50.2 | 4.37 | 36% | 25.9% | 6,895 | 12% | 21% |
| 4 | 14 | 86% | 48% | 52% | 12% | 82% | 46.3 | 3.95 | 30% | 21.1% | 2,549 | 16% | 20% |
| 5 | 45 | 93% | 83% | 17% | 15% | 77% | 50.5 | 4.42 | 38% | 29.0% | 8,094 | 14% | 20% |
| 6 | 32 | 84% | 94% | 6% | 8% | 81% | 48.8 | 4.10 | 32% | 25.7% | 5,017 | 20% | 20% |
| 7 | 32 | 91% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 72% | 48.8 | 4.11 | 25% | 18.6% | 5,233 | 14% | 19% |
| 8 | 42 | 93% | 71% | 30% | 13% | 77% | 48.5 | 4.20 | 36% | 26.9% | 7,773 | 11% | 19% |
| 9 | 11 | 73% | 94% | 6% | 15% | 71% | 48.0 | 4.10 | 29% | 25.3% | 1,600 | 21% | 19% |
| 10 | 16 | 69% | 90% | 10% | 12% | 74% | 49.2 | 4.25 | 33% | 24.5% | 1,945 | 16% | 19% |
| 11 | 20 | 90% | 41% | 59% | 18% | 80% | 46.1 | 3.83 | 28% | 18.9% | 3,773 | 24% | 18% |
| 12 | 28 | 50% | 80% | 20% | 16% | 73% | 48.3 | 4.16 | 31% | 21.3% | 2,732 | 9% | 18% |
| 13 | 48 | 90% | 81% | 19% | 9% | 84% | 48.4 | 4.18 | 33% | 23.5% | 7,413 | 13% | 18% |
| 14 | 29 | 59% | 91% | 9% | 20% | 77% | 49.7 | 4.34 | 43% | 29.1% | 3,559 | 15% | 18% |
| 15 | 11 | 82% | 73% | 27% | 18% | 86% | 45.7 | 3.95 | 38% | 24.3% | 1,839 | 22% | 18% |
| 16 | 47 | 81% | 80% | 20% | 15% | 80% | 50.1 | 4.38 | 38% | 28.1% | 7,413 | 10% | 18% |
| 17 | 28 | 82% | 58% | 42% | 7% | 77% | 48.6 | 4.25 | 38% | 27.0% | 4,963 | 23% | 17% |
| 18 | 20 | 80% | 83% | 17% | 16% | 77% | 48.8 | 4.18 | 33% | 24.0% | 3,715 | 16% | 17% |
| 19 | 4 | 75% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 84% | 55.3 | 4.89 | 41% | 35.0% | 497 | 7% | 15% |
| 20 | 10 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 76% | 43.2 | 3.74 | 30% | 22.3% | 1,742 | 20% | 11% |
| Group Average | | 81.6% | 79.1% | 20.9% | 11.5% | 78.0% | 48.79 | 4.21 | 34.6% | 25.6% | 4080.55 | 15.7% | 18.5% |
| National Average | | 82.9% | 63.5% | 36.5% | 19.5% | 78.1% | 50.0 | 4.4 | 40.2% | 30.0% | 3771.65 | 17.3% | 38.9% |

Table 2

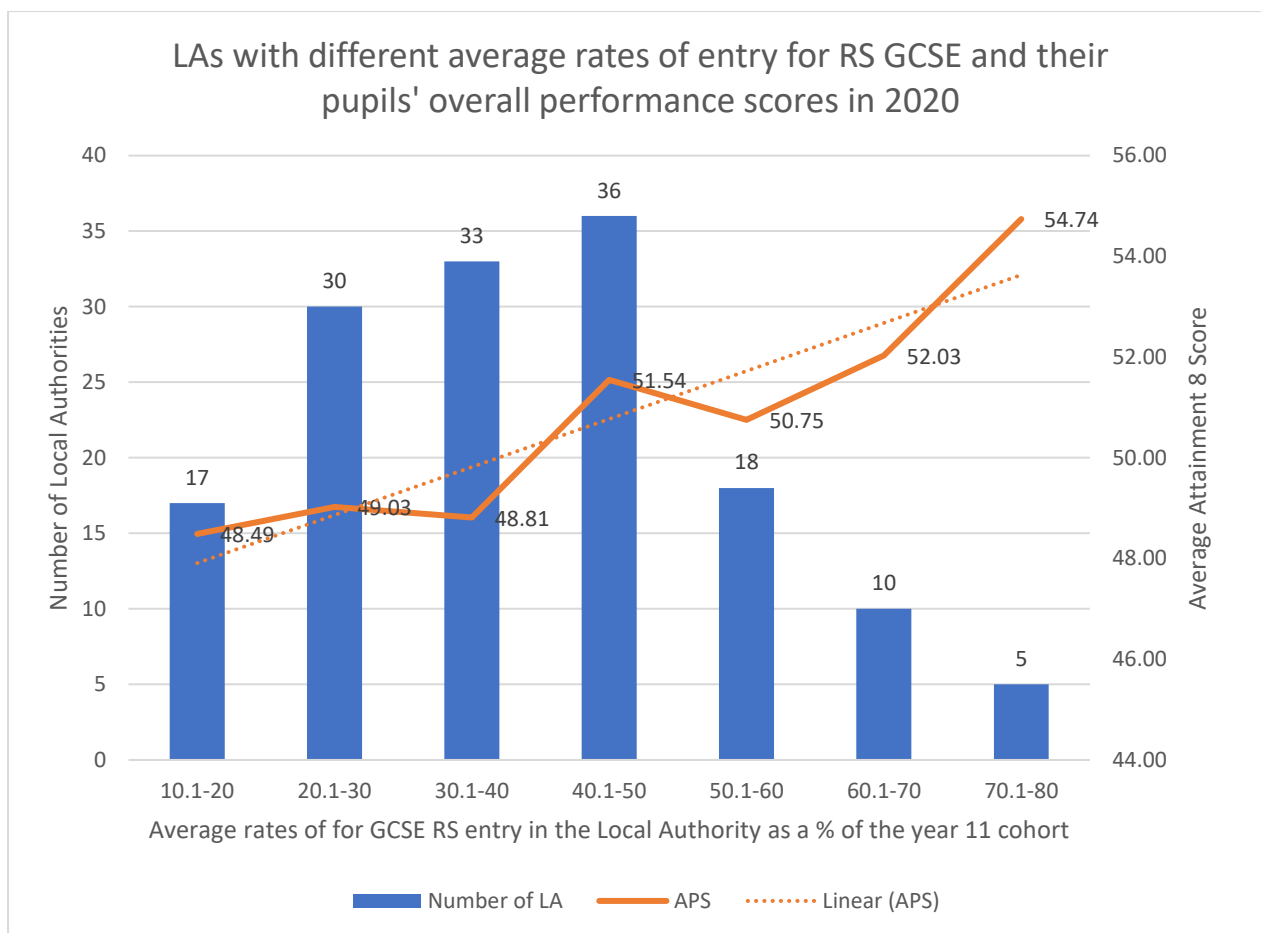


Figure 1

| Rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies 2020 | Number of pupils at end of Key Stage 4 | Number of LAs |
|--|--|---------------|
| 10.1-20% | 69,857 | 17 |
| 20.1-30% | 132,260 | 30 |
| 30.1-40% | 133,977 | 33 |
| 40.1-50% | 125,890 | 36 |
| 50.1-60% | 68,697 | 18 |
| 60.1-70% | 20,970 | 10 |
| 70.1-80% | 10,325 | 5 |

The trend line in figure 1 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, the average points score for all pupils is just over 6 points higher than in those LAs with the lowest rates of entry. 6 points is the equivalent of one and a half standard pass grades across 8 subjects with English and Mathematics double weighted.

Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications including mathematics (double weighted) and English (double weighted), 3 further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and 3 further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list. Each individual grade a pupil achieves is assigned a point score, which is then used to calculate a pupil's Attainment 8 score.

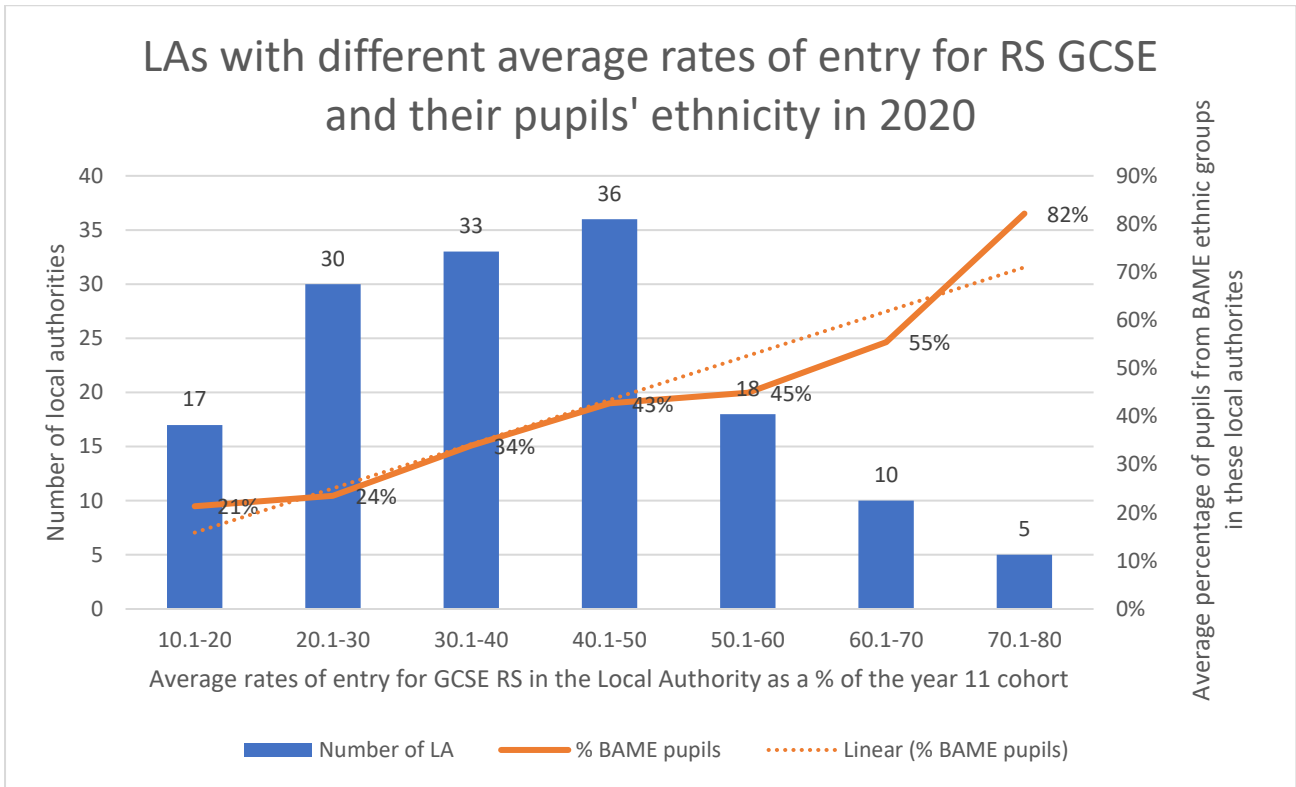
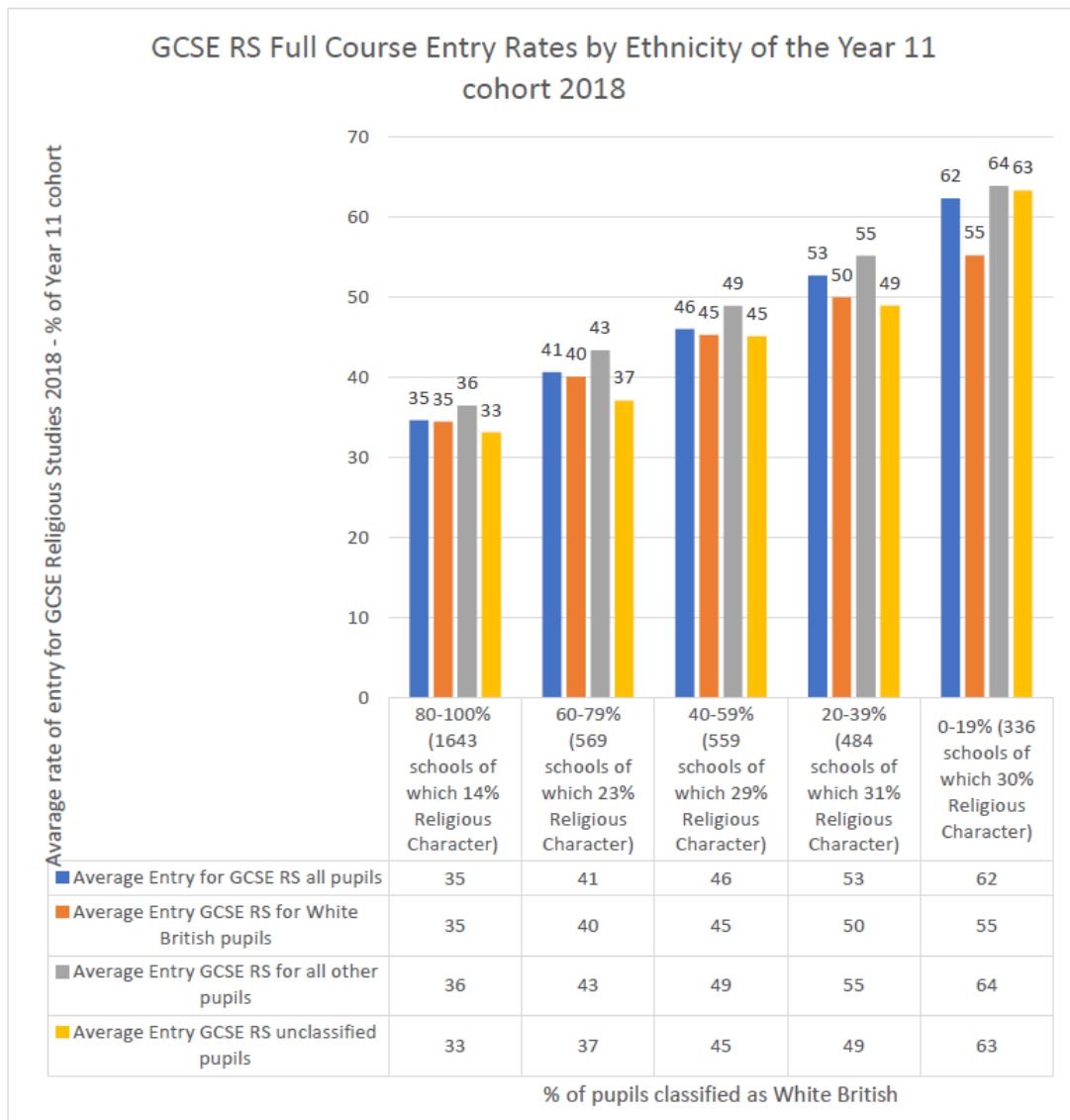


Figure 2

The trend line in figure 2 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, serve populations with a greater proportion of pupils from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.



This data shows that pupils in schools where the majority come from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, are twice as likely to be entered for GCSE RS. The table below that these pupils perform on average, about 9 percentage points higher at GCSE RS than their White British Peers. The cumulative finding from these data sets is that where children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are in a school where they are a minority, they are twice as likely not to be entered for GCSE RS and yet, this subject is one that they are more likely to perform well.

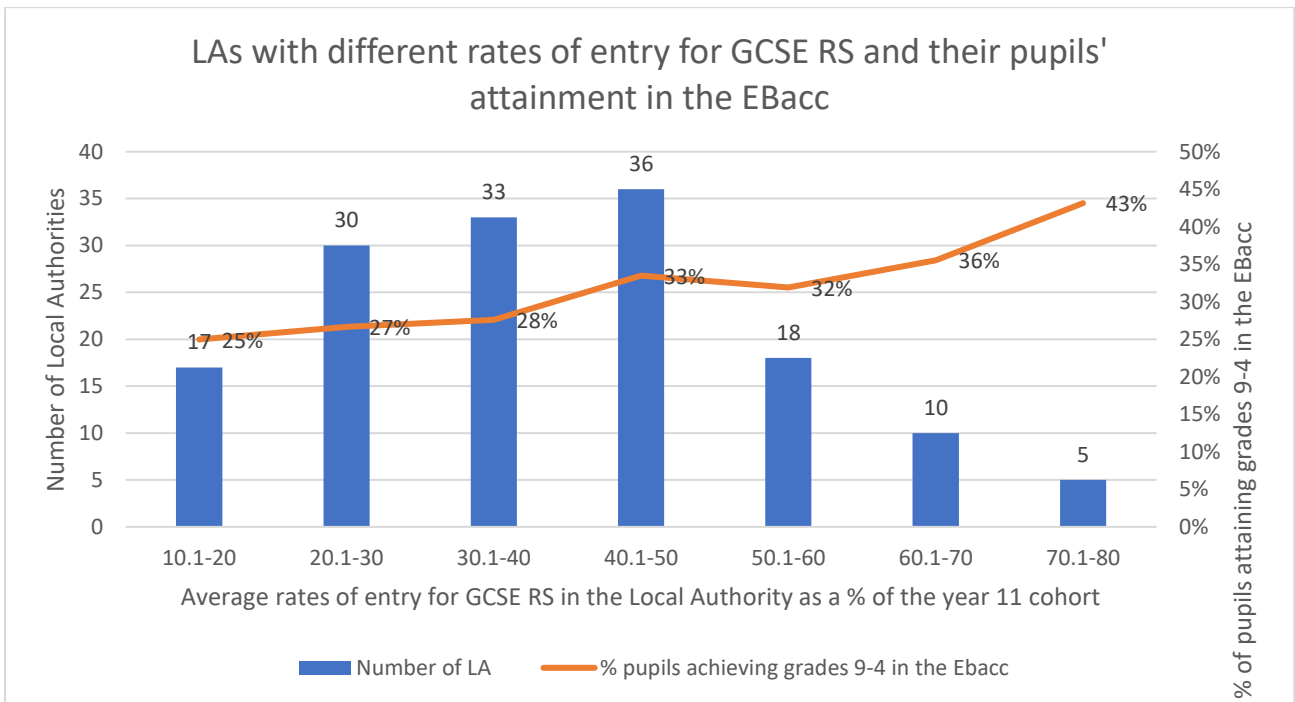
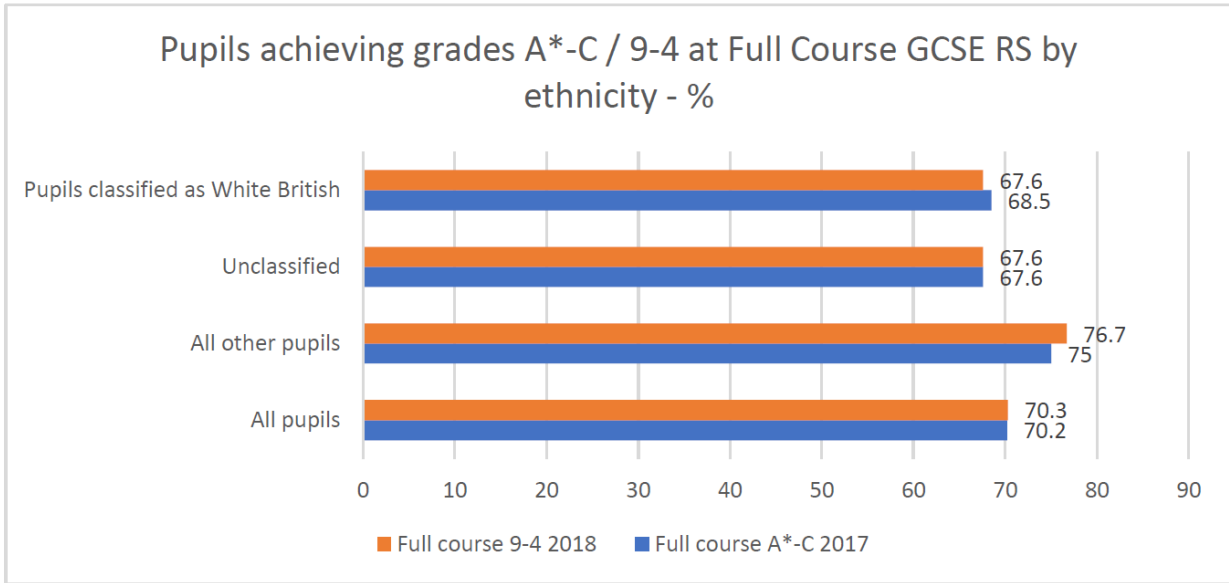


Figure 3

The trend line in figure 3 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, the number of pupils attaining grades 9-4 in the EBacc is 18 percentage points higher than in those LAs with the lowest rates of entry.

How does the data in Thurrock compare to the national trends?

Thurrock appears in position 49 out of 150 local authorities when ranked according to entries for GCSE RS. The highest ranked authority enters 77% and the lowest 11%. The entry rate in Thurrock is 25% compared to an average in England of 39%. The average point score for all subjects in Thurrock Schools is around 2 points (half a GCSE grade) lower than average. This is consistent with the national trend for this data in that in LAs entering higher proportions of candidates for GCSE RS pupils tend to perform better overall than in lower entering local authorities. The difference between the top and the bottom ranked LAs in relation to entries

for GCSE RS is 6 APS scores i.e. One and a half GCSE grades. Of course this is a correlation and would need more research to prove causation, but it is worth considering how the knowledge, understanding and skills in RS might be complementary for performance in other subjects e.g. English literature, English language, History, Art and Music.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|----------|-----------------------------|----|-------|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|--------|-------|---|-----|--|-------|--|------|-----------------------------------|------|--|-----|---|-------|--|-------|--|-----|------------------------|-----|
| LA ranking | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 49 | Thurrock | Number of secondary schools | 11 | 0.12% | % pupils in non-selective schools | 82% | % White British | 57% | % BAME | 43% | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character | 6% | % achieving 9-4 Full course (of those entered) | 74% | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils | 48.6 | Average EBacc APS score per pupil | 4.19 | Percentage number of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate | 39% | Percentage number of pupils achieving 9-4 the English Baccalaureate | 28.9% | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 | 1,864 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals | 15% | % entering Full course | 25% |
| | England | | | | 83% | 63% | 37% | 20% | 78% | 50.10 | 4.4 | 40% | 30% | 3,772 | 17% | 39% | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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|--|---------------------------------|
| 16 June 2021 | ITEM: 8 |
| Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | |
| Ofsted Research Review on Religious Education 2021 | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Non-Key |
| Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills | |
| Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services | |
| This report is Public | |

Executive Summary

1. A revised Ofsted framework and handbook was published in 2019, that placed far more emphasis on curriculum design.
2. In May 2021, Ofsted published a research review on RE as part of a series on different subjects. Religious Education was the second report to be published.

1. Recommendation(s):

- 1.1 **That SACRE members agree to share information about the key findings of this review with Headteachers, Governors and multi-academy trusts and some excerpts to stimulate discussion.**

2. Introduction and Background:

The new education inspection framework from Ofsted was published 14th May 2019 along with the inspection handbook. This report highlights Ofsted’s findings from a research review into what constitutes high quality RE in the context of that framework.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Headteachers and Governing Bodies/Boards are responsible for the educational standards and provision in their schools. The work forms a key part of the judgement of leadership and management in Ofsted reports. This report recommends that SACRE share the report and discussion resources of

Ofsted's research review to ensure those in leadership roles are informed of the findings.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Ofsted are paying more careful attention to the curriculum and this has already led to many schools undertaking a review of the curriculum. This presents an opportunity for SACRE to encourage schools, especially those where RE has not previously been a priority to reconsider their position

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;
- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
 - Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
 - Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the second element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance, Corporate Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the activities recommended in this report will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

This report asks that SACRE accepts a recommendation for action that comes within the remit of its monitoring function.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

The aim of this exercise is to help school leaders and governors become better informed about the provision for RE in their schools. If governors hold senior leaders to account for the level and standards of provision in RE, it is likely to help raise standards. Higher standards in the teaching of RE will help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs. Furthermore, several comments on RE in the research review are linked to the duty of all schools to promote the fundamental British Values including mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. Appendices to the Report

- Appendix 1 - A summary of the Ofsted research review on religious education published by the DfE on May 21st 2021
- Appendix 2 - Extracts from the report for discussion with teachers and school leaders

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

A summary of the Ofsted research review on religious education published by the DfE on May 21st 2021

Ofsted has published the second in a series of reviews into different subjects across the curriculum. This review looks at religious education (RE).

The latest review draws on our education inspection framework (EIF) and other religious education (RE) literature to identify what contributes to high-quality RE curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and systems in schools where we inspect RE.

The review recognises that there is no single way of constructing and teaching a high-quality RE curriculum. However, it does identify some common features:

- The curriculum should cover substantive content and concepts collectively (or ‘collectively enough’), rather than covering excessive amounts of content superficially. Content is sufficient for pupils to grasp a bigger picture about the place of religion and non-religion in the world.
- What is taught and learned in RE is grounded in what is known about religion or non-religion from academic study. This helps prevent pupils from developing misconceptions about religion and non-religion.
- Pupils study certain areas of the RE curriculum in depth and acquire a range of detailed knowledge of different concepts and ideas, which they remember long term. Drawing on this prior knowledge enables them to consider more complex ideas about religion. Leaders and teachers select this ‘depth of study’ from contrasting religious and/or non-religious traditions so that pupils avoid developing misrepresentations.
- The curriculum is well sequenced to ensure that pupils learn the knowledge they need for later topics.
- There is a consideration of when pupils should relate the content to their own personal knowledge (for example, their own prior assumptions).
- How the curriculum is taught and assessed focuses pupils’ attention squarely on the knowledge they need to learn.
- Adequate curriculum time is given to RE, so that leaders can deliver an ambitious curriculum.
- There is sufficient training and professional development so that teachers have appropriate subject professional knowledge.

The review refers to 3 different types of subject-specific knowledge that pupils learn in RE. Each of these is powerful and should not be confused with ‘mere facts’. The first is ‘substantive’ knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions.

The second type is 'ways of knowing', where pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion. The third type is 'personal knowledge', where pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about what they study. The review suggests that improvement in RE at both primary and secondary level includes knowing more of these 'pillars of progression'. This prepares pupils to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular world.

In the spring term of 2022, we will be publishing a report on the quality of RE curriculums taught in schools. We will gather the evidence for this through subject 'deep dives' during inspections under the EIF.

Extracts from the report for discussion with teachers and school leaders

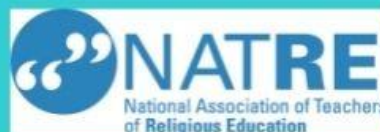
PRIORITISING RE IN THE CURRICULUM

The review includes a comprehensive appendix setting out the legal context of RE and inspection arrangements and reminds readers that all schools are required to teach RE to all pupils at all key stages (including sixth form), except for those withdrawn.

The review notes, “The way in which school leaders structure and plan ways to fulfil these obligations in school is one indication of the quality of education in RE.”

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



THE IMPORTANCE OF CPD AND SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Examples of the advice offered in this area:

1. "School leaders and subject leaders need to consider carefully the appropriate type of professional development to ensure that RE teachers have improved subject knowledge and are well placed to teach a high-quality RE curriculum."

2. "At primary and secondary level, pupils should be taught by teachers who have secure subject and curriculum knowledge"

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



SCHOOL DECISIONS THAT LIMIT HIGH QUALITY RE

....there are significant challenges that limit high quality in RE, including: insufficient time to teach an ambitious RE curriculum school decisions that are not taken in the best interests of all pupils, such as decisions concerning the statutory teaching of RE, the opportunity to take a qualification in religious studies, or early examination entry a lack of consideration about what it means to ‘be scholarly’ in objective, critical and pluralistic RE

What are the implications of this statement
in your context?

What questions do you have?



WEAK FRAMING

How the RE curriculum is classified may be another indication of the extent to which a school prioritises RE. ... Problems can emerge when RE is too weakly classified. Sometimes this can lead to its erosion in the curriculum. Some examples of RE being too weakly classified might be: at primary, a key stage 2 topic approach that provides pupils with a rich historical and geographical knowledge, but has relatively little RE content. At secondary, delivering RE through tutor times, assemblies or in conjunction with PSHE education, or in rotation with other subjects where the format of delivering RE limits the curriculum that pupils can learn.

What are the implications of this statement
in your context?

What questions do you have?



BALANCE

To consider the overall concept of religion and non-religion that pupils build through the curriculum is perhaps more useful than thinking about the quantity and weighting of traditions to include.

Equally, simply covering a greater number of religious and non-religious traditions (as inclusive as that sounds) is no guarantee of a high-quality RE curriculum. This overloads the curriculum and might lead to superficial caricatures of religious and non-religious traditions

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



COLLECTIVELY ENOUGH

In subject terms, this requires that the RE curriculum comprises ‘collectively enough’ of the knowledge and skills that would amount to a high standard of subject education at primary and secondary level.

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



THREE TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Although educators make different claims about the purpose of RE, it is nonetheless vital for subject leaders, curriculum designers and teachers to be aware of different types of knowledge in RE

First, ‘substantive’ knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions

Second, ‘ways of knowing’: pupils learn ‘how to know’ about religion and non-religion

Third, ‘personal knowledge’: pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study

What are the implications of this statement
in your context?

What questions do you have?



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