

1 November 2023		ITEM: 7
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education		
The REC's National Content Standard for RE (2023)		
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

A National Content Standard (NCS) for RE was published by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales in October 2023.

The NCS is a non-statutory document that aims to provide a benchmark for high-quality RE in the style of a National Curriculum Programme of Study

1 Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

1.1 Agree to contact the CEOs of Academy Trusts with schools in Thurrock to ask them if they would consider recommending the National Content Standard to all their academies.

2 Introduction And Background:

- 2.1 The data SACRE has discussed over many years shows the level and quality of provision for RE is inconsistent. One of the key reasons for this is that most schools in Thurrock are academies and are not required to follow the local Agreed Syllabus. In the past, this syllabus was the means by which SACRE could encourage schools who were providing high quality provision and hold to account, those who were not.
- 2.2 The survey of schools, SACRE discussed in the last academic year showed that of the 27 schools that responded to last year's survey, 12 reported they

had adopted the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus fully, 2 did not answer, 6 mostly, 6 partly and 1 not at all.

- 2.3 Of the 9 secondary schools that responded, NONE said they had adopted the Agreed Syllabus fully. The greatest variations in the level of provision reported was at key stage 4 (14-16 year olds).
- 2.4 The RE Council's National Content Standard aims to provide a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work. It is specifically for use in England. It is not a curriculum, and it does not determine precisely what content schools should teach. Rather it is a standard by which different RE curricula, content, pedagogy, and provision can be benchmarked. The plan is to encourage Academy Trusts to adopt the NCS, in their drive to raise standards across the curriculum. The REC has already secured endorsement from several academy trusts, from major faith groups and from the Oak National Academy.

3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Academy Trusts are currently under no obligation to adopt the NCS, but the ambition is to build support in such a way that, the standard becomes the accepted benchmark for high quality RE
- 3.2 Thurrock has data to demonstrate that whilst some pupils in Thurrock experience a thorough and comprehensive religious education, others do not and are therefore ill-equipped to take their place in a multi-religious and multi-secular world.
- 3.3 This means SACRE has the option to continue to report on these inequalities, or can take action that has a good chance of challenging the status quo.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 SACRE is funded through the Central Schools Services Block of school funding to support RE in all schools, including Academies. They therefore have a responsibility to challenge the inequalities they find.

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**
Head of Finance Children Services and
Dedicated Schools Grant

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: **Daniel Longe**
Principal Solicitor

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: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and
Equalities

The aim of this report is to encourage more equality in the level of provision for RE in Thurrock. If Academies adopt the NCS, 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 religious and non-religious worldviews

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

- Not applicable

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. Appendices to the report

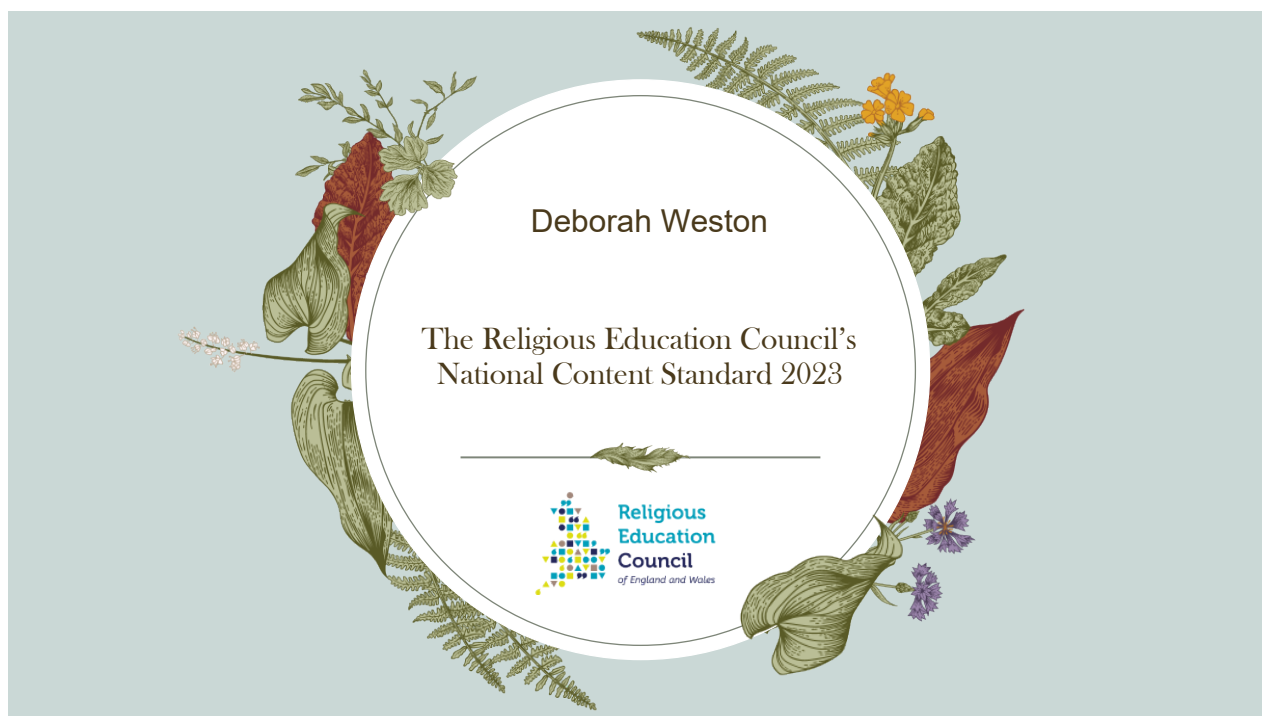
- Appendix 1 – A presentation on the National Content Standard for RE

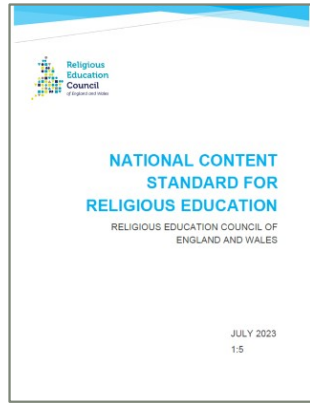
Report Author:

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Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix 1





The National Content Standard for Religious Education

- exists within the context of **National Plan for Religious Education**
- aims to **embed the standard** into the planning and delivery of the subject in England
- draws on the REC's **Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom** project
- links to other **relevant national publications** from the last 5 years.
- is set out in the style of the **National Curriculum document**
- outlines how a National Content Standard for the subject might apply in **different types of school**
- Includes appendices that summarise **relevant sources and evidence** that have been considered



What is a National Plan for Religious Education?

- **builds on the principles set out in the Commission on RE (2018)**
- **reflects changes that have impacted the education sector since that time, including to**
- **initial teacher training and early career development,**
- **the expansion of the academy schools programme and**
- **a further decline in the level and quality of provision for RE, evidenced for example, in DfE school workforce data and the Ofsted Research Review (2021).**



FINAL REPORT
**RELIGION AND
 WORLDVIEWS:
 THE WAY FORWARD**
 A national plan for RE
 SEPTEMBER 2018



Where does the NCS fit within a National Plan for RE?

It is proposed that:

- a **National Content Standard** for RE/an education in religion and worldviews be established to set a benchmark for what constitutes high quality in this subject (see page 4)
- Where Academies are free to determine their own curriculum, the **Funding Agreement should be amended** to specify the nature of the provision required to secure the expected quality of RE/education in religion and worldviews, with the effect that the published syllabus for the subject in these contexts must demonstrate due regard to the National Content Standard.
- systems are established, including through the inspection process, **to hold more effectively to account**, those schools that are failing to have due regard to a National Content Standard.



Stephen Morgan MP Shadow Minister for Education
Westminster Hall Debate

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Why do we need a National Content Standard for RE?



- At the heart of the National Plan for Religious Education is the need to establish a benchmark for what constitutes high quality in the subject – a National Content Standard.
- Such a benchmark could be used in clarification of regulations about the nature of provision required in Academy schools and may helpfully provide non-statutory guidance for the arms-length curriculum body, Oak National Academy
- Likewise, the National Plan and National Content Standard may support Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and others with responsibility for RE to play their part in raising standards for all children.

An adapted National Curriculum style



- The National Content Standard draws upon a range of sources and presented in the style of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study.
- This approach recognises that, whilst the sources set out in the appendices establish that all state funded schools must teach RE, neither primary legislation nor supplementary documents such as academy funding agreements, provide a benchmark for the breadth, depth and level of ambition of the curriculum.
- Without a National Content Standard therefore, Religious Education lacks parity with the subjects of the National Curriculum despite its statutory place at the core of the basic curriculum

A National Content Standard

Religious Education programmes of study

In the style of the National curriculum in England

NOTE: Whenever the term 'worldviews' is used in this document, it means religious and non-religious worldviews.

Purpose of study¹

An education in religion and worldviews should:

- introduce pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion, locally and globally, as a key part of understanding how the world works and what it means to be human
- stimulate pupils' curiosity about, and interest in, this diversity of worldviews, both religious and non-religious
- expand upon how worldviews work, and how different worldviews, religious and non-religious, influence individuals, communities and society
- develop pupils' awareness that learning about worldviews involves interpreting the significance and meaning of information they study
- develop pupils' appreciation of the complexity of worldviews, and sensitivity to the problems of religious language and experience
- induct pupils into the processes and scholarly methods by which we can study religion, religious and non-religious worldviews
- enable pupils, by the end of their studies, to identify positions and presuppositions of different academic disciplines and their implications for understanding
- give pupils opportunities to explore the relationship between religious worldviews and literature, culture and the arts
- include pupils in the enterprise of interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews and how they may benefit from exploring the rich and complex heritage of humanity
- provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on the relationship between their personal worldviews and the content studied, equipping them to develop their own informed responses in the light of their learning.

Selecting content

1. Legal Framework
2. Intention
3. Inclusive Principle
4. Contextual Factors
5. Collectively enough principle
6. Coherency

Selecting content

It is vital that syllabus writers and curriculum developers make wise decisions on the selection of knowledge for a curriculum. Time for RE is limited, and the religion and worldviews approach is intended to avoid a proliferation of content, not least because of the impossibility of comprehensive coverage of the diversity of religious and non-religious traditions. The criteria for deciding content include the following:

1. **Legal Framework:** The relevant legal requirement operates (see page 11), which for most schools and academies without a religious character is that RE 'shall 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). For most schools and academies with a religious character RE is determined by the governors and in their trust deed or equivalent. This primary legislation along with case law, set an expectation that pupils will develop knowledge and understanding of the matters of central importance for the religious and non-religious worldviews studied.
2. **Intention:** The National Content Standard must frame the intent behind the content selection. The treatment of that content then contributes to the progression of understanding of the elements in the National Content Standard, and the links between them.
3. **Inclusive Principle:** Best practice in RE, as well as European and domestic legislation, has established the principle that RE in schools without a religious character should be inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews. Schools should ensure that the content and delivery of the RE curriculum are inclusive in this respect (noting that this does not imply equal time between religious and non-religious worldviews). All religious and non-religious worldviews studied must have fair and accurate representation.
4. **Contextual Factors:** Local context is important, including school character, local community character, pupil knowledge and experience, teacher knowledge and experience. Local context also includes the history of local areas, allowing opportunities for local studies that connect teaching and learning with the geographical and historical background.
5. **Collectively Enough Principle:** Pupils need to gain 'collectively enough' or 'cumulatively sufficient' knowledge (OFSTED 2021), not total coverage. In this context, 'collectively enough' needs to relate to the National Content Standard, with its three broad strands of content, engagement and position.
6. **Coherency:** Schools should be able to give a clear account of their curriculum choices and carefully consider how they will enable the construction of a coherent curriculum for pupils.

Presentation title

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Subject content - exemplar



- should be read **within the context of the legal framework** including the primary legislation cited above for different types of school, and case law which together set an expectation that pupils will develop knowledge and understanding of the matters of central importance for the religious and non-religious worldviews studied.
- The material below is **indicative of the breadth, depth and ambition** of the curriculum content about religious and non-religious worldviews, that is required in a curriculum that would meet this National Content Standard.
- However, schools are **not required by law to teach this exemplar content**.
- The standard builds on the legal framework in its assumption that the content of a curriculum in this subject will be **age appropriate and focus on religious and non-religious worldviews rather than on content which is the focus of a different curriculum subject**.
- Likewise, for all pupils to have equal access to high quality education in religion and worldviews, the subject **must be given adequate time** and resources commensurate with its place as a core component of the basic curriculum.

Presentation title

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EXEMPLAR OF CONTENT THAT WOULD MEET THIS STANDARD

In relation to religion and belief, pupils must be taught:

Content

- Nature/formation/expression: What is meant by worldview and how people's worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences
- Organised/individual: How people's individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews
- Contexts: How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, are highly diverse, and feature continuity and change
- Meaning and purpose: How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience
- Values, commitments and morality: How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life
- Influence and power: How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies

Engagement

- Ways of knowing: The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.
- Lived experience: The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people.
- Dialogue/interpretation: The field of study of worldviews is to be shown as a dynamic area of debate

Position

- Personal worldviews reflexivity: Pupils will reflect on and potentially develop their personal worldviews and make school judgements in the light of their study of religious and non-religious worldviews.
- Personal worldviews impact: Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning

Presentation title

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Making good progress – an exemplar

The National Content Standard is intended to set a standard and a benchmark for an education in religion and worldviews, although there is no single correct way to deliver it. Religious education is part of the statutory basic curriculum and not the National Curriculum. This means that, unlike the core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum, there is no single descriptor of the subject content which must be followed for schools to which the National Curriculum applies. Furthermore, the legal framework for RE in different types of school, means that responsibility for setting the curriculum content, rests with different authorities.

For all these reasons, the national content standard does not recommend one model for making good progress. Instead, one possible example is offered here which demonstrates the breadth, depth and ambition of subject content around which progression needs to build. Two further examples may be found in the Draft Resource pages 42-45.

Standards for EYFS

4-5 year olds might use photographs to observe home lives of some people from a religious tradition, from at least two different contexts. They notice some things that are the same in the homes and some that are different. They notice that some things in their own homes are the same and some are different, and that not everyone is the same. (a, c, g, h, j)*

Standards for Key stage 1

5-7 year olds might look at some religious artwork from a diverse range of contexts (such as pictures of Jesus from around the world) and connect them with some stories or texts that help to interpret the artwork (e.g. gospel accounts pictured). They notice how the different ways of expressing the stories in art are more or less familiar and think about why (e.g. according to their own contexts). They are introduced to a selection of voices to help them find out that such stories may be important in some people's lives as part of organised worldviews, and find out why (e.g. they may include important people, and ideas about how to live). They find out that all kinds of different people may see the stories as important, but not everyone, and that sometimes this is to do with belief in God. (a, b, c, g, j)

Standards for Upper Key stage 2

9-11 year olds might ask a question about the difference that context makes to one's worldview. For example, after thinking about their own context, they might use and interrogate data, interviews and visual images to examine the differences it makes to be a Muslim in a Muslim majority country (e.g. Indonesia) and a Muslim minority country (e.g. UK), including opportunities and challenges, and how these shape their lived experience – not just intellectual ideas. They might reflect on whether it is similar if someone is non-religious (e.g. Humanist) in a secular society or a religious society. They might reflect on their own context again and consider how it influences their own worldviews. (a, c, e, g, h, j, k)

Standards for Lower Key stage 3

11-12 year olds might ask a question such as 'what is religion?' They might examine a range of common features of religion and carry out some research into their importance in the lives of members of the school and local community, and reflect on the role any of these features play in their own lives. By analysing these, they get an insight into the flexible role of religion in people's lives and worldviews, including their own responses. Having looked at the diversity of expression of religion in people's lives, they can then analyse and evaluate a range of contested academic definitions of religion, reflecting on the impact of a person's worldview on their understanding of 'religion'. (a, b, c, g, h, i, j, k)

Standards for Upper Key stage 3

12-14 year olds might ask questions about how religions change over time. They might explore how significant concepts developed through the ages (e.g. using theological methods to understand Trinity as expressed in art, or theories of atonement in Christian traditions; or the miraculous nature of the Qur'an in Islamic traditions) and how practices develop in place (e.g. RS methods to explore how the Buddha's teaching was adapted as it spread to, for example, Sri Lanka, China, Tibet and the West, exploring how the importance of the story of the life of the Buddha varies across these contexts). They might use these studies to inform their understanding of how such ideas shape cultures and worldviews and enable them to examine questions of power and influence. They might reflect on which methods were most effective in getting to the heart of the matter, and examining why they think so, reflecting on the impact of their personal worldviews on their choices and responses. (a, c, f, g, j, k)

Presentation title

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How the National Content Standard would be applied in different types of school.

Content Standard sets a benchmark for the minimum standard of Religious education that all parents can expect following an education in a state funded school. Schools with the freedom to plan their own syllabus for Religious education would be expected to ensure that their syllabus was similar in breadth, depth and ambition to the national content standard. The following table shows how this Standard would be applied in different types of school.

Type of school	Curriculum Legislation as it relates to Religious Education	Standards set out by their governors and in their trust deed or equivalent.	Standard	
			Church of England Statement of Entitlement on Religious Education, Religious Education Directory (CES) Other entitlement statements for schools with a religious character	National content standard for RE
(a) Community, foundation and VA or VC schools without a religious character that follow an Agreed Syllabus	Statutory	Not applicable	Not applicable	Recommended to the Agreed Syllabus Conference as a benchmark for high quality RE
(b) Academies and Free Schools <i>without</i> a religious character	Statutory	Not applicable	Not applicable	Comparable in breadth, depth and ambition to the NCS
(c) Academies which are former VC or Foundation schools with a religious character that followed an Agreed Syllabus	Statutory	Not applicable	Expected	Comparable in breadth, depth and ambition to the NCS
(d) Academies with a religious character, current and former VA schools with a religious character	Statutory	Statutory	Expected	Comparable in breadth, depth and ambition to the NCS
(e) Foundation and Voluntary Controlled Schools with a religious character that follow an Agreed Syllabus	Statutory	Statutory	Expected	Recommended to the Agreed Syllabus Conference as a benchmark for high quality RE

[End of the National Content Standard]

Presentation title

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Appendix B – A survey of schools about their use of the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus

Name of school	Has your academy chosen to adopt the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus? (This refers to the syllabus and not the units of work)
1. Woodside primary Academy	No answer
2. Horndon-on-the-Hill	No answer
3. Stifford Clays	Yes - fully
4. Aveley Primary	Yes - fully
5. Corringham Primary School	Yes - fully
6. Quarry Hill Academy	Yes - fully
7. Somers Heath Primary School	Yes - fully
8. Tudor Court Primary School	Yes - fully
9. Arthur Bugler Primary school	Yes - fully
10. Gateway Primary Free School	Yes - fully
11. Orsett Heath Academy	Yes - fully
12. Belmont Castle Academy	Yes - fully
13. Deneholm	Yes - fully
14. Warren Primary School	Yes - fully
15. Dilkes Academy	Yes - mostly
16. Aveley Primary school	Yes - mostly

17. Kenningtons Primary Academy	Yes - mostly
18. Stanford-le-Hope Primary School	Yes - mostly
1. The Hathaway Academy	Yes - mostly
2 Harris Ockendon	Yes - mostly
3 Harris Academy Riverside	Yes - partly
4 William Edwards	Yes - partly
5 St Clere's School	Yes - partly
6 Harris academy Chafford Hundred	Yes - partly
7 Gateway Academy	Yes - partly
8 Gable Hall	No
9 Ortu Hassenbrook Academy	Yes - partly

Of 27 schools that responded to last year's survey, 12 reported they had adopted the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus fully, 2 did not answer, 6 mostly, 6 partly and 1 not at all.

Of the 9 secondary schools that responded, none said they had adopted the Agreed Syllabus fully.