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Understanding Religious Education

An information leaflet for school managers and governors
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
East Riding of Yorkshire Council

From *Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance*,
[DCSF]

Introduction

From time to time schools are approached by parents and carers of children, expressing their concerns about the teaching of religious education (RE). Sometimes this has to do with the content of the RE but more often than not it has to do with the mistaken view that the RE taught in schools today has something to do with the 'Scripture' or 'Religious Instruction' lessons that they may have experienced when they were at school. Nothing could be further from the truth. Other than in schools with a religious foundation, RE is required to be taught in an objective manner and not as indoctrination. The principle purpose of RE is to help pupils to understand themselves and the world around them, including people who may have very different cultures and beliefs from their own. Key focuses of RE are based around learning respect for themselves, respect for others and respect for the place in which they live, as well as an awareness that, for many of those around them, this will also include respect for God. Good RE teaching promotes the wellbeing of each child and also supports community cohesion.

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The context of RE today

The rapid pace of development in scientific and medical technologies and the environmental debate continue to present new issues which raise religious, moral and social questions. The data on religious affiliation reveals the diversity of religion and belief across England and Wales in our twenty-first century society. It also confirms that religion plays a role in the identities of many British people, whilst there are also many others who identify themselves as being of no religious faith. This is the context in which children and young people are growing up.

It is important that pupils learn about the ideas of religion and belief and the part these play in the lives of people in a diverse society. Learning about and from religions and beliefs in RE, plays an essential role in achieving these aims. Religion and belief have an impact on people's values, attitudes, words and actions in their personal, family, work and social life in local, national and international contexts.

The legal status of RE

The law requires that the curriculum of every maintained school in England must comprise a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum) and include provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or by students withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 and over). Separate regulations covering maintained special schools require them to ensure that, so far as is practicable, a pupil receives RE. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from collective worship and sixth-form pupils are able to withdraw themselves. The right of withdrawal from RE and collective worship is set out in section 71 of the **School Standards and Framework Act 1998**.



The role of the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

SACRE members, whose membership reflects the religious and faith communities of the local area, are charged with ensuring the quality of provision for RE (and also of collective worship) in the schools in their local area and the effectiveness of support for its teaching. They are also able to respond to parental/carer concerns about the provision of RE in a local school. The East Riding SACRE regularly reviews the provision for, and standards of, RE in local schools. A report on the quality of RE is produced at the end of each year and will be published on www.qcda.gov.uk .

The guidance on the RE provided in each local authority (LA) is contained in a 'Locally Agreed Syllabus' (LAS) that is agreed by SACRE, whose membership reflects the religious and faith communities of the local area. In all maintained schools RE must be taught according to either the LAS, or in accordance with the school's designated denomination or faith. The headteacher shares responsibility with the East Riding Council and the governing body for making sure that RE requirements are met. Voluntary Aided and Trust schools are not required to follow the LAS but, in practice, many of them choose to reflect it in their curriculum.

Because RE is seen as an important subject in the school curriculum, the Government is keen to ensure that it is of a high quality for all pupils. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) recently issued updated non-statutory guidance to support all those who teach RE:

Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance, 2010

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The purposes of RE

RE provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human:

- Develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views, including secular perspectives, that offer answers to questions such as these
- Offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development
- Enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression, as well as of the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures
- Encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning
- Challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses
- Encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging
- Enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a diverse society and global community
- Has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning
- Enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own
- Promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education, p.7
[QCA] 2004

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RE supports spiritual development

RE makes a distinctive and essential contribution to young people's **spiritual** development through:

- promoting discussion and reflection on key questions of meaning and truth, such as the origins of the universe, life after death, good and evil, and beliefs about God
- considering how religious and other beliefs and concepts may be expressed through the creative and expressive arts and related to the human and natural sciences, thereby contributing to personal and communal identity
- looking at how religions and other world views perceive the value of human beings, and their relationships with one another, with the natural world, and with God
- enabling pupils to develop a sense of belonging and consider their own views and ideas on religious and spiritual issues.

RE supports moral development

RE provides opportunities for **moral** development through:

- engaging in such issues as truth, justice and trust
- exploring the influence of family, friends and media on moral choices and how society is influenced by beliefs, teachings, guidance from religious leaders and sacred texts
- encouraging young people to consider what is of ultimate value through studying the key beliefs and teachings from religion about a range of ethical issues and so to develop a sense of conscience.

RE supports social development

RE contributes to **social** development through:

- considering how religious and other beliefs lead to particular actions and concerns
- investigating social issues from religious perspectives
- providing opportunities for pupils to express their own and others' ideas on a range of contemporary social issues.

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RE supports cultural development

RE provides opportunities to promote **cultural** development through:

- enabling pupils to engage with people, literature, arts and resources from differing cultures
- considering the relationship between religion and cultures and how religions and beliefs contribute to and are influenced by cultural identity and practices
- promoting harmony between people of different religions and beliefs, and respect for all, by combating prejudice and discrimination
- contributing positively to community cohesion
- promoting awareness of how co-operation between people of different religions and beliefs can support the common good.

RE supports personal development and wellbeing

RE contributes significantly to schools' duty to promote pupils' **wellbeing** through:

- engaging the whole person, and is particularly relevant to wellbeing in the relational, emotional, social, moral, intellectual, economic and spiritual aspects of life
- giving young people the knowledge, skills and disposition to search for personal meaning and deepen their awareness of themselves and others
- Helping pupils realise that religions and beliefs can be life-affirming or damaging, enabling them to make positive and healthy choices
- Enabling pupils to be listened to and learn to listen carefully to others developing stronger self-awareness and self-esteem, as well as an understanding of the needs of others.



RE supports the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*

RE contributes to the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* by:

- offering information and insights on the impact of beliefs, practices and values
- allowing pupils to explore the consequences of attitudes to authority, property and relationships, and to develop empathy for others
- challenging pupils in ways that stimulate them and give them a sense of achievement
- fostering a sense of self-awareness and identity that encourages positive participation in school and community life
- raising issues of immediate and future relevance such as attitudes to wealth and poverty, skills for living and working in a diverse society and sustaining the planet.

RE supports community cohesion

RE provides a key context for children and young people to develop their understanding and appreciation of diversity through the study of religion and belief. It helps to promote shared values, respect for all, and to challenge racism and discrimination.

Effective RE promotes community cohesion within:

- the school community – RE provides a positive context within which the diversity of cultures, beliefs and values within the school community can be celebrated and explored
- the local community – RE provides opportunities to investigate the patterns of diversity of religion and belief within the local area
- the UK community – a major focus of RE is the study of the diversity of religion and belief which exists with the UK and how this diversity influences national life
- the global community – RE involves the study of matters of global significance recognising the diversity of religion and belief and its impact on world issues.



Further information

The latest national guidance on RE:

www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/8222-DCSF-Religious_Ed_in_Eng-consultation-FINAL.pdf

Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education
Qualifications & Curriculum Authority [QCA] 2004

Local guidance on RE:

www.reweb.org.uk

Anglican Diocese of York - syllabus and guidelines for CE (VA) schools:

www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/education

Catholic Education Service for RC (VA) schools:

<http://www.cesew.org.uk>

East Riding SACRE officers:

Mr Noel Jones, Network Adviser, School Improvement Service,
County Hall, Beverley, HU17 9BA

Mrs Sue Holmes, RE Consultant, School Improvement Service,
Council Offices, Skirlaugh, HU11 5HN

Detailed guidance on the duties of SACREs can be found in Circular 1/94.