

## Education Durham: Report to Durham SACRE 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022

In May 2021 Ofsted published '**Research review series: religious education**'. Its purpose was to identify factors that contribute to high-quality school RE curriculums, teaching, assessment and systems. It has been used as a basis by officers in the local authority to support reflection on R.E. teaching and to ensure the immediate relevance of network and in-school support. Durham local authority acknowledges that while all state-funded schools are legally required to provide R.E. as part of the curriculum, in all key stages, there are many varying ways that this can be done.

It should be considered that the Ofsted publication previous to '**Research review series: religious education**' in 2021 was '**Religious education: realising the potential**' (2013) which was broadly critical of local determination of the R.E. curriculum saying it had neither kept pace with changes in the wider educational world and made assessment of what constitutes a quality curriculum difficult to reach in any standardised, national sense. The 2021 document attempts to draw upon research published since 2013 to provide insights into the concept of high quality R.E. It is for this reason that the document has been used as a starting point for ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of R.E. in Durham schools.

The main reports drawn upon in '**Research review series: religious education**' are:

- 'A new settlement: religion and belief in schools'
- 'R.E. for Real'
- 'Living with difference'
- 'The state of the nation' report on secondary R.E.
- 'A new settlement revised: religion and belief in schools'
- 'Religion and worldviews: the way forward' – a national plan for R.E.

What these reports all emphasise, among other things, is the importance of children and young people building accurate knowledge of the complexity and diversity of global religion and non-religion. But also central is the identification of chronic problems with school-level provision of high quality R.E.

### **Key factors:**

#### **Reception/Primary**

Most locally agreed syllabuses recommend spending approx. 60 mins per week on R.E. at KS1 and 75 mins per week at KS2. The National Association of Teachers of Religion (NATRE) surveyed primary schools in 2020 and concluded that approximately a quarter of these spend less than 45 minutes per week teaching R.E. However, half the schools surveyed said that curriculum time spent on R.E. had increased, and most had directly linked this with Ofsted's focus on the curriculum.

### **ACTION:**

Durham L.A. will be undertaking a MS survey of Durham primary schools in early December to determine the amount of designated curriculum time per week currently given to R.E.,

establishing if this has increased or decreased since the changed Ofsted Framework in 2019. The survey will also gather information on planned educational visits related to R.E. and how accessible these are to all children. Also the level of training and preparedness experienced by those teaching R.E.

## **Secondary**

Most local agreed syllabuses assume the curriculum time spent on R.E. is at or above 5%. National workforce data from 2017 indicated that more than a third of secondary schools (including 44% academies) did not meet this threshold. 34% academies at that time reported no timetabled R.E.

Focussing specifically on KS4, 55% of schools did not meet the 5% threshold. The number of students taking full-course GCSE has been decreasing steadily from a high point in 2016. Numbers had dramatically increased between 2009 and 2016 but, according to many sources including teachers, the failure to make R.E. part of the English Baccalaureate qualifications in 2010 contributed to its current decline as a preferred examination.

The number of A-level entries in R.E. has likewise declined, inevitably linked to the drop-off in GCSE studies meaning that students embarking on A-level do not have the subject as a foundation.

### **ACTION:**

Durham L.A. has commissioned the DCC Data and Performance team to provide an analysis of how Durham schools performed in GCSE R.E., comparing outcomes in 2022 to those of previous years and setting these against national outcomes for R.E. The national statistical release of GCSE results only took place on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022, which means the details of the analysis will not be available for the November SACRE meeting. However, it will be reported in full at the subsequent meeting.

Included in the focus will be an attempt to determine whether wider research findings apply in County Durham schools. For example:

- research suggests that pupils attending schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils are less likely to have the opportunity to take GCSE religious studies.
- pupils are frequently entered for GCSE early but then gain results statistically well below those pupils who are not entered early. Nationally, in 2019, 17,309 pupils were entered early for religious studies (the second-highest subject after English literature). This accounted for over 7.5% of the 2019 entries for GCSE religious studies. Those pupils with lower prior attainment who were early entrants, performed considerably worse than their peers with low prior attainment who were not early entrants.

The analysis described above, therefore will – in addition to determining outcomes and trends – attempt to establish patterns of early entry in County Durham schools, if any, and report on these.

## Ofsted deep dives

Ofsted does not publish any data on the number of 'deep dives' undertaken in primary school inspections. In July 2022 it issued a statement saying it did not hold this information and that inspections will always involve a 'deep dive' into reading and one or more foundation subjects.

NATRE continues to collect information that relates to R.E. deep dives from published Ofsted reports, including the following extracts. Although there is no NATRE information that relates to schools in County Durham, the extracts may prove useful in establishing the quality of teaching and curriculum provision likely to result in the following judgements:

**Good (R.E. deep dive - primary):** Teachers make lessons interesting. Pupils enjoy learning about other cultures, for example when handling Sikh artefacts. They debate arguments, for example 'for and against' having rules, with enthusiasm. Pupils find out about different cultures when listening to visiting speakers such as a rabbi.

**Good (R.E. deep dive - primary):** Pupils learn well because, linked to the school's agreed policy, teachers plan interesting and creative topics. They develop positive attitudes to learning. Following a visit to the church, for example, Year 2 pupils considered why it is a special place for Christians. They were articulate when asking questions and giving their views. They explained why the artefacts they saw are special to some people, including other pupils in their class, but not to others.

**Outstanding (R.E. deep dive - primary):** Leaders have thought carefully about what pupils should learn in each subject during their time at school. They have sequenced knowledge and skills well so that pupils build on what they already know. This is important because it helps pupils to have a secure understanding of their learning.

**Inadequate (R.E. deep dive - primary):** Leaders' ambition for pupils is not high enough, so pupils do not learn enough. Pupils study the full range of subjects, but teachers do not consider deeply what pupils need to learn and when. This means pupils do not gain as much knowledge as they should. This includes learning about, and appreciating, different religions and other cultures.

**Requires improvement (secondary):** Most teachers are now teaching pupils the subject content that matters the most, apart from religious education, which is limited. Currently, some pupils in key stage 3 do not cover subject content sufficiently well to be able to draw upon their learning in the future. This is because subjects such as religious education lack prominence in the curriculum.

**Good (secondary):** Most leaders ensure that subjects are planned in a logical sequence. For example, in Year 7 religious studies, pupils learn about how communities develop, through a well-sequenced series of learning activities.

However, in some subjects, such as geography and design technology, learning is not yet sequenced as well.

There have been no deep dives as part of Ofsted inspections undertaken in County Durham schools so far. There has also been no mention of R.E. curriculum or teaching made in published Ofsted reports of Durham schools during at least the last year. There have been two published reports including reference to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education:

- “In key stage 4, pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not a high priority. Leaders do not provide enough opportunities for these pupils to talk in depth about issues, rights and responsibilities. Pupils in key stage 4 do not receive the support and guidance they need at a crucial time in their development.” (Durham Community Business College)
- “Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well.” (Durham Gilesgate primary)

### **ACTION**

A complete round up of Ofsted comments on R.E. (including SMSC) from reports published on Durham schools will be compiled and presented to Durham SACRE at each termly meeting.

As part of Ofsted inspections, schools should have an expectation that inspectors will seek evidence that the statutory compliance of teaching R.E. is being met which, as stated above, appears to be a major challenge especially in some secondary schools. The national HMI R.E. team is conducting work alongside Ofsted, gathering evidence about R.E. which, although not published in the main reports, will inform future Department for Education reviews. We have been advised that a R.E. subject review will be published in the new year.

### **Support and resources for schools:**

Networks and training have been arranged for R.E. teachers as follows:

Autumn – Network: Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (Secondary & Special) – virtual

Network: Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (Primary & Special) - virtual

Spring – Course: Judaism explored in the primary classroom. Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> February (Primary & Special) – all day face-to-face

Network: Fri 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (Primary & Special) – face-to-face and virtual

Network: Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 (Secondary & Special) – face-to-face

Summer – Network: Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 (Primary & Special) – face-to-face and virtual

Network: Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023 (Secondary & Special) – face-to-face

Network focus includes developing and articulating a well sequenced curriculum and supporting and developing non-specialist teaching. The MS Teams network site will continue to signpost low-cost/no-cost R.E. training and resources.

Current attendance for the Primary networks stands at autumn (x68), spring (x73), summer (x74). For the Secondary networks this is – Autumn (6), spring (9), summer (10). Except for the Secondary autumn network, which has already taken place, all these numbers are likely to increase as the closing dates get nearer.

### **Bespoke in school support for Religious Education – Sept 2022 to current.**

For delivery this term there have been 6 individual R.E. support contracts generated through the Education Durham School Support Service Level Agreement - primary (5) and special schools (1). This amounts to 16 hours of support requested and is mainly for new and existing leaders of R.E., reviewing provision and curriculum planning.

### **NASACRE virtual training events later this term are:**

17 November 2022, 7-8pm: **SACREs – a way forward...?** Chaired by Linda Rudge and Paul Smalley Special guest: Charles Clarke - £20 for a subscribed SACRE and £30 for a non-subscribed SACRE

6 December 2022, 7-8pm: **How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE** Hosted by Sukaina Manji and Claire Clinton - £20 for a subscribed SACRE and £30 for a non-subscribed SACRE

To book a place on this, or any, session please email [admin@nasacre.org.uk](mailto:admin@nasacre.org.uk).

### **End note**

Colleagues may find the link below useful - **Religious Education Policy Unit Virtual Parliamentary Roundtable Report** (March 2022)

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/NATRE%20News/REPU%20March%20Roundtable%20Report.pdf>

**Phil Hodgson**

Strategic Manager 'Education Durham'