

RE MATTERS

The RE Adviser Report

Summer Term 2016

RE Networks

RE networks have continued this term with the **secondary RE Talking Network** on 19th April. This is an informal after-school network which gives any RE teacher the chance to meet others and talk all things RE. The **primary RE Talking Network** will be held at DLC on 12th July, 4.00–5.30pm.

The more formal **primary RE Network** was held on 10th May at DLC from 1.00– 4.00pm. Delegates explored a range of teaching and learning activities that support good learning in RE. These included a literacy strategy to help pupils produce extended writing on the story of Divali, map from memory, annotating passages from scriptures in order to understand beliefs, use of artefacts and pictures. 35 delegates attended this network. The **secondary RE Network** will take place on 27th June, 1.30–4.30pm.

Primary and secondary networks will continue next term:

Primary (1.00-4.00 at DLC)

- 13 October 2015
- 15 March 2017
- 14 June 2017

Secondary (1.15-4.00 at DLC)

- 24 November 2016
- 13 February 2017
- 26 June 2017

GCSE Conference

Durham EDS held a conference on 18th March for leaders and teachers of RE as they prepare for the introduction of the new GCSEs this September (see below). 25 delegates attended including some RE leaders from neighbouring local authorities. There were presentations from:

- Exam Boards – AQA, Edexcel, WJEC
- Sharon Lupton, Head of RE at Sedgefield School
- Islamic Diversity Centre, Newcastle
- Kate Christopher from RE Today Services

NEW GCSEs in RS (Religious Studies)

First teaching of the new RS GCSEs will begin this September, with first examination June 2018. The new GCSE is much more focussed on the study of religion and religions, although schools still have the option to study some ethical issues. The qualification is more rigorous and students will have to demonstrate quite detailed knowledge of the beliefs and practices of religions. Students must now study 2 religions from the following list: Buddhism, Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism. Schools cannot choose both Christianity and Catholic Christianity.

Reference can be made to non-religious beliefs e.g. humanism in the course (this has not been without controversy).

There has been quite a significant delay in the publication of draft specifications for GCSE RS, which has obviously caused some difficulties for RE leaders in schools. Some schools who begin to teach RS GCSE from Year 9 have also been teaching the new GCSE before specifications have been validated.

Contribution of RE to British Values

All schools are required to actively promote British values with their pupils. RE has a particular role to play in the promotion of mutual respect and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs, particularly in how it helps pupils engage with people from a whole variety of faiths and non-religious beliefs.

Primary schools are doing this in a variety of ways including visits to faith communities in the area e.g. the local gurdwara, mandir, mosque, church and Durham Cathedral. Faith visitors are also invited to school to make a contribution to RE and Collective Worship. Some primary schools are engaging in an enquiry unit: *What can we find out about our local religious communities?*

Some secondary schools have worked together to develop enquiry learning around religious diversity in the region using question such as:

- Is anybody religious anymore in the North East?
- Is religion dead?
- Do we live in a religious diverse society?

This has involved the study of religious diversity and changing landscape of religions and religious belief through the analysis of census data as well as

meeting, questioning and discussing a range of issues with a variety of faith and non-faith believers (e.g. through an RE Faiths Conference, visits to faith communities, email and skype contact).

It is hoped that schools across the region can form their own hubs (e.g. across County Durham, in Hartlepool, Sunderland, South Tyneside) to extend and develop this work in RE. This will enable students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of what is meant by religious diversity, as well as actively encourage respect and tolerance for all.



Local Partnerships

On behalf of SACRE and Durham EDS I continue to meet with our local RE partners and discuss ways to support RE.

- Karenza Passmore (NERLRC) regularly attends RE conferences, courses and networks in order to support colleagues and share her invaluable ideas and resources.
- Elizabeth Baker is a local storyteller with particular expertise in supporting RE e.g. through work on northern saints, Christmas, Easter. She regularly makes presentations at the primary RE networks. She is currently developing work around the Spirit in Stone project, which helps schools to make the most of local church visits.
- I have met with members of the Education Service at Durham Cathedral in order to discuss ways in which pupils at all key stages can visit

the Cathedral to support their RE learning. I will attend a school session in early June at the cathedral.

RE Hub

You may recall that a bid was made for national hub money to enable teachers to develop support networks across the area. Karenza Passmore at NERLRC administers the finances. The hubs have had some success, with a small group of teachers meeting at Cuthbert House to develop some planning around the new GCSEs. However, success has generally been limited with the primary group not becoming established. Attendance is a real issue for busy teachers. It is anticipated that the existing teacher group will continue with the addition of:

- a teacher group around South Shields to develop work for engagement with local faith communities
- a small group of primary Co-ordinators trialling RE training materials.

Withdrawal from RE and Collective Worship

There has been an increased number of queries from schools and parents about parental rights to withdraw their children from RE and/or Collective Worship. The RE Adviser has produced some guidance for use by local SACREs and schools to help address some of the concerns and issues which arise. This guidance is available from SACRE or the RE Adviser. If you wish to discuss any individual queries or questions, please contact Isobel Short.

RE, Academies, Free Schools, White Paper and all that

As always there has been a great deal of noise and activity in the wider RE world as professionals react to the latest

educational initiatives and the implications they have for RE in schools.

Although RE and SACREs are not mentioned in the recent White Paper, the emphasis on all schools becoming Academies has consequences for RE, SACREs and the production and use of locally Agreed Syllabuses. Various RE Advisers and Lecturers have been writing to MPs and the Secretary of State for Education in order to gain some clarity of the current position and thinking of the government. Below are some of the responses received so far.

COMPULSORY RE

In response to a question in the House on 14th April 2016, Nick Gibb, Schools Minister, stated:

“Religious Education remains compulsory for all state funded schools, including academies and free schools, at all key stages. The Government firmly believes in the importance of RE. High quality RE can develop children’s knowledge of values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and foster understanding among different faiths and cultures.”

This was reiterated in a letter sent to Dr. Robert Bowie, Canterbury Christ Church University, on behalf of Secretary of State for Education:

“I can assure you that RE continues to be a relevant and important subject in the curriculum. There is no specific reference to RE in the Schools White Paper: Educational Excellence Everywhere. The government still firmly believes, however, in the importance of RE to develop children’s knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and to foster understanding among different faiths and cultures. This is why RE remains compulsory for all state funded schools, including academies and free schools, at all key stages and why all schools have a duty to teach a broad and balanced curriculum.”

This affirms the government’s position on the position of RE in the school curriculum.

AGREED SYLLABUS AND ACADEMIES

The letter also clarifies the type of RE curriculum which Academies and free Schools should offer.

“Academies are required to have a curriculum for RE which meets the same requirements for locally agreed syllabuses, although they may choose whether to adopt a locally agreed syllabus or develop their own RE provision.”

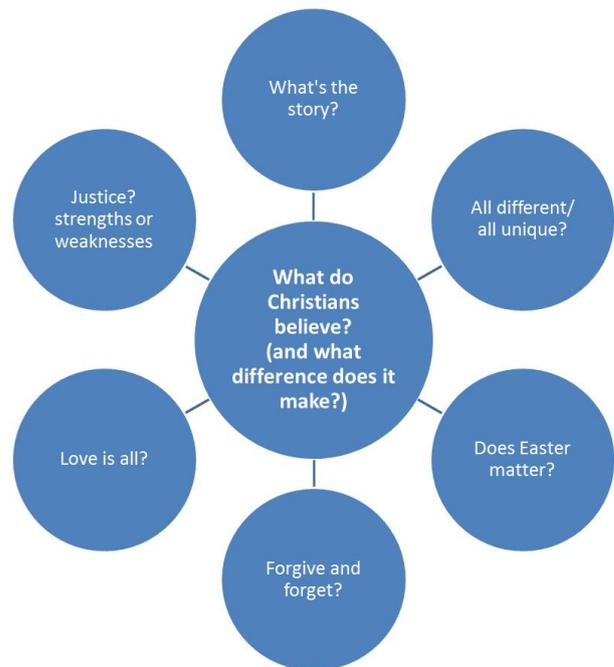
In other words, whilst Academies and free schools need not follow the locally Agreed Syllabus, they must use an RE Syllabus which is based on the same statutory requirements i.e. that RE “must reflect the fact that religious traditions in great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”.

SACREs

If all schools become Academies and local authorities no longer have any role in school improvement, it would appear that SACREs no longer have a function. The letter addresses this issue:

“You asked about the government’s expectation of local authorities in respect of RE. The Government does not currently have any plans to remove local authority duty to establish a SACRE. SACREs continue to play an important role in supporting schools to teach high quality RE and we recognise the contribution that SACRE members bring to the quality of RE. Local authorities continue to have a statutory duty to support the activities of SACRE and we know that many academies and SACREs work together to provide high quality RE for the young people in their local area.”

KS3 Unit – What Do Christians Believe?



We are developing a unit of work for KS3 students on fundamental Christian beliefs to include the concepts of: *love, forgiveness, salvation, sacrifice, resurrection, eternal life, uniqueness of all humans, compassion, justice and reconciliation*. Students will study what is meant by these concepts and the impact these have today for individuals and communities.

The secondary network is beginning to share ideas and resources to help students grapple with the big concepts. This includes film and documentary clips, music, stories, visual aids.

If you have any ideas or resources which could be shared, please send them to Isobel.