

# Press release: More than half of schools found to be failing pupils on religious education

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Schools and the government have failed to focus effectively on religious education, Ofsted said today.

The schools inspectorate said, in *Religious education: realising the potential*, that religious education makes an important contribution to pupils' development, both personal and academic. It does so by promoting respect and empathy, which are increasingly important in an ever more globalised and multicultural 21st century. While inspectors identified examples of good practice they found that six out of ten schools examined in this report failed to realise the subject's full potential.

The report finds low standards; weak teaching; a confused sense of purpose of what religious education is about; training gaps; and weaknesses in the way religious education is examined.

To turn this around Ofsted recommends:

- the government should consider whether the current arrangements for supporting the subject are proving effective, and that provision for religious education in schools should be monitored more closely
- schools should make sure that the provision for religious education deepens pupils' understanding of the nature, diversity and impact of religion and belief in the world today
- councils and local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education should work more closely with schools and academies to build networks and share good practice
- GCSE examinations for religious education should be improved to ensure they focus more strongly on developing pupils' understanding of religions and beliefs
- improvements should be made to the supply and training of religious education teachers
- schools should make sure that the overall curriculum for religious education is challenging, and has greater coherence and continuity.

Ofsted says there is an urgent need for the government to help teachers by clarifying the purpose and aims of religious education, and to promote these through lucid guidance.

Michael Cladingbowl, Ofsted's Director of Schools, said:

'Religious education in schools matters. It develops children's understanding of belief and the world in which we live.

'At its best, it encourages children and young people to extend their natural curiosity and prepares them for life in modern society. We saw some great examples of this during the survey, but too often we found religious education lessons being squeezed out by other subjects and children and young people leaving school with little knowledge or understanding of different religions.

'This just isn't good enough when religion and belief are playing such a profound part in today's world. Pupils deserve much better.'

John Keast, Chair of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, said:

'The Religious Education Council is disappointed but not surprised by these findings. We have been warning the Department for Education for some time about the poor state of religious education in many schools.

'The report of the Religious Education Council's own review of religious education is being launched on 23 October in Westminster. It offers a new curriculum for religious education as a benchmark for local authorities, academies and faith schools, and proposes various ways to improve religious education in our schools.

'It is now vital that the Department for Education and the Religious Education Council work together in a new way to help put things right. We can do better than this.'