

WHAT DOES THE OFSTED REPORT MEAN FOR SACRE?

Part 1:

A very brief summary

The Ofsted report into the teaching of RE (12 May 2021) sets out some of the expectations and principles behind what makes good RE. It tackles some of the questions that SACREs have been asking for a while, about the numbers of schools that are not complying fully with the law, either in terms of time or quality of provision. There is evidence that early entry GCSE disadvantages all pupils, but in particular the already disadvantaged. It also raises issues about teacher training and subject knowledge, acknowledging that in some contexts there are insufficient subject specialists and that good RE teaching is complex and needs proper CPD and support.

The central part of the document focuses on the CURRICULUM as it is following Ofsted's focus on the curriculum as being the main driver in delivering a quality education. It addresses different types of knowledge, identifying three.

They are:

- first, 'substantive' knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions.
- second, 'ways of knowing': pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion and
- third, 'personal knowledge': pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study.

The expectation is that the curriculum will enable pupils to progress (know more and be able to do more) in these three domains. Progression in the first two domains would provide the bedrock of knowledge for assessment. Thus the early stages of the RE curriculum need to prepare pupils for learning at the later stages. This requires coherent, carefully sequenced RE, that has clear end goals. It needs to avoid oversimplifying and ensure that what is presented is accurate, diverse, and scholarly. The review recognises that the possible choices of curriculum content are far wider than could ever be taught, but that the selection of material needs to consider how it prepares pupils for life in a multi-religious and multi-secular world, taking in the local and the global context. Clearly accurate does not have to equal complex, and while it may be necessary to generalise, qualifying statements with some, many, most and adding a suggestion of locality and place (e.g. most western Christians) points to the big picture of religion and non-religion. RE should not avoid the "morally displeasing" elements of religion but must sequence carefully to ensure that pupils are ready for the new knowledge. Equally, particular faiths should not only be taught in relation to negative ideas such as persecution or terrorism.

The key phrases are that the curriculum must be "collectively enough" and offer a "cumulative sufficiency". Ambitious end goals should direct the learning, enabling teachers to choose suitable content and methodology appropriate to that content. The curriculum should be viewed as the progression model, in terms of structure and substance – this has implications for teachers, ensuring that they know what has been taught previously and continue to assess that prior knowledge.

Many of the curriculum and assessment messages are really about what good teaching and learning look like, no matter what subject is being addressed, while recognising that in RE the selection of content matter, and knowledge about the ways of learning need to be made specific.

Part 2:

What does this mean for SACREs?

There are two clear areas where this report impacts on the work of SACRE.

1. Design of the Locally Agreed Syllabus
2. Provision of CPD for teachers

It may also have an impact on our monitoring and evaluation of RE, and the advice offered to schools in terms of their curriculum provision.

1. Design of the Locally Agreed Syllabus

SACREs would be wise to consider carefully the guidance that this review offers as to what a well planned RE curriculum should contain. The review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus should ensure that a framework is provided for teachers that enables them to create curriculum for their schools that reflect the recommendations.

SACRE will need to consider:

- a) How far it specifies content and how that will be sequenced so that the curriculum is the progression model.
- b) The balance between breadth and depth to create that “cumulative sufficiency”, ensuring that over time pupils cover Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions in depth.
- c) How the “ways of knowing” of knowing will be defined and which tools will be recommended.
- d) The links that will be drawn out to create the coherence.
- e) The assessment model recommended (if at all).
- f) The “ambitious end goals” rather than age-related expectations.
- g) How to avoid both the oversimplification of the thematic and the silo effect of separate religions.
- h) How to create a balance between the local and global aspects of lived religion.
- i) How to create precise questions that do not lead to over simplified generalisations.

2. Provision of CPD for teachers

This review makes it clear that it is what happens in the classroom that matters, and that without sufficient subject knowledge and subject specific teaching skills a good syllabus may not be turned into good learning for pupils.

SACRE will need to consider:

- a) How far current CPD provision is adequate.
- b) What specific training will be required on the introduction of a new syllabus.
- c) Whether there is sufficient funding and time allocated to RE CPD in the LA.
- d) Whether to identify current good practitioners and encourage them to work with other schools.
- e) Whether there are cost effective ways of offering teacher CPD.
- f) How to encourage practitioners and schools to participate in CPD.

Monitoring and evaluation of RE in schools will need to have an eye to this review, particularly in regard to the time allocation for RE and the quality of curriculum. Schools where Ofsted could do a deep dive (i.e. VC, academies and maintained schools) will need to be our focus.