

Barnet SACRE Newsletter for Schools

Spring Term 2016

Details of the Next Primary RE Coordinators Training Session:

- *Date* - Tuesday 1 March 2016
- *Time* - 9am to 12noon
- *Venue* - The BEST Training Hub Lanacre Road Colindale London NW9 5FN
- Updates
- How RE contributes to the teaching of British Values
- Visiting a place of worship: a synagogue

Important Publications

There have been a number of important publications that have implications for RE:

Commission on Religion and Belief in Public life recognizes the “vital” role of religious education

Living with Difference, the report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life, makes an important contribution to the growing debate over the future of religious education. The report celebrates the role that religious education plays in preparing pupils for life in Modern Britain. The report calls for religious education to be accorded the same status as other humanities subjects, and for consideration for it to be included within the English Baccalaureate: these would be important steps for RE.

It is important that the report is so clear in emphasizing the essential nature of religious education as the “best and earliest chance of breaking down ignorance and developing individuals who will be receptive of the other, and ask difficult questions without fear of offending”. The report recognises that good religious education is “vital ... for a fairer, more cohesive society”. The Commission has also made recommendations relating to the recruitment, training and continuing professional development of teachers of RE, with a “massive recruitment and retraining programme for teachers of education about religion and belief”, and that a similar attention to religious education in primary initial teacher training as is given to reading and mathematics. REC has called on the Government to take note of these recommendations and hope to work with them to implement them.

Chief Executive of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC), Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, says:

‘For too long religious education has been treated as a Cinderella subject. Too often it is under-resourced and squeezed in the timetable. As the report highlights, RE plays a vital role in preparing children for life in modern Britain and the subject should be accorded the status it deserves alongside other humanities subjects.

‘The Government must act to secure high quality, academically rigorous, and personally inspiring religious education for all pupils; and the RE Council will offer all possible support to achieve that end.’

Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), Daniel Hugill, says:

'I am delighted that yet another report has highlighted that the need for high quality education in religion and belief has never been greater. A knowledge-rich and critical Religious Education helps to secure the crucial religious literacy of pupils that is surely vital for life in modern Britain not to say the world.'

'I join this report in calling for the type of robust initial teacher training provision that ensures teachers from infant to secondary school are prepared to teach this very important subject to the young people of our country.'

'NATRE members would like to see Government ministers' warm supportive statements backed with action to ensure Religious Education in secondary schools is subject to the same robust accountability measures as those subjects privileged by their inclusion in the EBacc.'

REforREaI

In November the Faiths & Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London release a major new report on RE in secondary schools. The report highlights broad support for Religious Education from students, parents, and employers.

The students in the study stated that 'learning about religion and belief is becoming more and more relevant' and almost all of them stated that RE allowed to them to 'engage positively with diversity'. The young people in our schools can clearly see the value of RE. This reflects other recent research in RE, such as that of the REDCo project, which found similar findings amongst students across Europe.

The parents and employers in the study were clear that RE should be compulsory throughout secondary school. They were also united in their agreement that RE provides an important opportunity to learn about the effect of religion and belief in the lives of individuals and on contemporary society.

We particularly welcome the recommendations for continued investment in Initial Teacher Training for subject-specialist teachers and increased investment in continuing professional development.

Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), Daniel Hugill, says:

'This report confirms what RE teachers know already – that the students in their classrooms value the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the phenomena of religion and belief. I am delighted to see that parents and employers can also see the value of RE to young people and wider society.'

'In order for every young person to experience high quality Religious Education we need the Department for Education and school leaders to value and make further investment in teacher training and ongoing professional development. It is only when teachers are well trained, confident, and knowledgeable that they can equip students with knowledge of lived contemporary religion and belief.'

Chief Executive of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC), Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, says:

'This is an important contribution to the growing debate on the critical role of RE in preparing children for life in modern Britain. It is clear that pupils, parents, teachers and employers all recognise the value of good RE as a core part of education, but the report makes clear that there is a need for further in-depth work on the nature, purpose and arrangements for the subject. The Government should take note of this and work with the RE Council to ensure good quality RE for all pupils in all schools, academies and colleges'.

There was also the ruling by Mr Justice Warby on RE & the need to include non-religious beliefs systems. The High Court today gave a ruling on the case brought by three families against the Secretary of State for Education regarding the exclusion of non-religious worldviews from the GCSE RS exam criteria. The families were supported by the British Humanist Association.

I included the report by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead *published 'A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools'* in the last newsletter & the NASACRE briefing paper has been distributed to all SACRE members & the full document can be accessed on the NASACRE website.

The NASACRE newsletter had a useful comparison:

	SACREs	ASCs	RE	Collective worship
A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in schools	SACREs would remain to support RE locally	Abolished	Nationally determined	To remove the requirement for collective worship but to have inclusive assemblies
LIVING WITH DIFFERENCE community, diversity and the common good	No comment is made on SACREs	Not mentioned in the report but to be abolished in light of national determination	Nationally determined	To remove the requirement for collective worship but to have inclusive assemblies
REforREal	The need to review their purpose and remit	Abolished in light of the recommendation for a national curriculum framework for RE	Nationally determined	Mentioned in relation to learning in RE
Mr Justice Warby	Not a concern for this report	Religious education is different from religious studies and should include non-religious belief systems	Not a concern for this report	Not a concern for this report

There will be an opportunity to discuss all these documents at the next SACRE meeting in March.

Some of the issues that NASACRE have suggested that SACRES look at in the light of these publications are as follows:

Nationally Determined RE

- Clarke-Woodhead writes about a National Syllabus for RE, Butler-Sloss appears to indicate a National Curriculum Order (aligned with Humanities subjects) and Dinham-Shaw, a National Framework (aligned with Citizenship and SMSC). What is not clear is whether they are talking about the same thing or not. It is not clear where RE would be in relation to the National Curriculum. Dinham-Shaw however, does consider learning about religion and belief outside of RE and its contribution to pupils' religious education.
- All agree that RE does not currently cover the diversity that it should, or that it reflects the nature of religion and belief as it exists in current British society. What is not clear is what this means in practice. There seems to be little attention given to the amount of time that RE has within the curriculum, the need for depth as well as breadth or to how teachers might make sense of the diversity on the ground whilst teaching about traditions as a whole. There has been much support for these proposals from across a wide variety of groups but it is not clear which groups, beliefs and practices would or would not be included. The reality is there is not enough time within the curriculum for every group to have 'its fair share of attention'. None of reports actually have any clear indication of how these proposals would be worked out in practice.
- All three reports focus on the need for more high quality training. This is both at initial teacher training and as part of teachers' continuing professional development. Given the government's current policy on ITE and CPD, these proposals would seem difficult to achieve. SACRES may wish to look seriously at the training that is being provided by ITE providers and those providing CPD to the schools and academies in their local authority's area. The key question would have to be about the quality of training. How would an ITE or CPD provider, or school/academy know whether the training provided was of quality? What would the impact of effective training be in contrast to mediocre or poor training?

Withdrawal from RE

- Clarke-Woodhead takes this challenge up in a way that Butler-Sloss and Dinham-Shaw do not. Clarke-Woodhead proposes that parents would lose the right to withdraw from RE if the school/academy adopted the National Syllabus for RE, but would retain the right in schools/academies that didn't. If the Butler-Sloss proposals went forward and there was a National Curriculum Order for RE then the right to withdraw would be taken away in schools that had to follow it, but not Academies and Free Schools as they do not have to follow the National Curriculum at all – although they do currently have to provide religious education.

Collective Worship

- Clarke-Woodhead proposes national guidance on assemblies but leaves the detail up to the governors of the school in question. Butler-Sloss proposes national guidance but does not indicate who would make decisions about what this would mean in specific schools. It would appear that Butler-Sloss would like to see a

national settlement for this and Clarke-Woodhead a local settlement. The report Collective Worship and Religious Observance in Schools: An Evaluation of Law and Policy in the UK (2015) by Cumper and Mawhinney calls on the government to undertake a thorough review of the current legislation and guidance for England produced by the DfE. What Cumper-Mawhinney does not allude to is the guidance on collective worship given by local SACREs, this is also true for Clarke-Woodhead and Butler-Sloss. Indeed, all of the debates appear to neglect the local in terms of collective worship.

A Level Results

The key outcomes of the 2015 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Education are as follows:

- 23,372 RS A level entries were recorded, an increase of 6.5% on 2014 and more than double the number in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003)
- The number of entries for RS A level has increased by 110% since 2003, more than for any arts, humanity or social science subject (the nearest subject is Political Studies with an increase of 62%). Among all subjects, only Further Maths has seen more rapid growth than RS
- 23.9% of entries for RS A level were awarded an A or an A*
- There were 37,365 entries for RS at AS level, an increase of 3.5% on 2014 and more than double the number in 2003 (15,482 entries were recorded in 2003)

The contextual evidence shows the growing status of RS as a subject for Higher Education entry:

- The Russell Group of top universities has made it clear that RS A level provides 'suitable preparation for University generally'
- Both Oxford and Cambridge University include Religious Studies in the top level list of 'generally suitable Arts A levels'
- Applicants with Religious Studies A level were more likely to gain admission to study History at Oxford University in 2012 than those with A levels in many 'facilitating' subjects
- 20% of students admitted to Oxford University to study mathematics in 2012 had an RS A level (more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A levels)
- Research from the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University on the comparative difficulty of different subjects at A level showed that RS was 'in the middle difficulty range, similar to Geography and more demanding than English'.

New GCSE proposals

In the last few months the new GCSE proposals have been discussed it has been a complex undertaking. These are still taking place & the timescale for implementation is getting very tight as the new syllabi will need to be taught from September 2016 for the first examination to be sat in 2018.

Farmington Scholarships for Teachers of Religious Education and Head teachers Academic Year 2016/2017

Offer wonderful opportunities for RE teachers & head teachers to study more information can be obtain from their wesite: <http://www.farmington.ac.uk/>

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All good wishes

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