

nasacre



National Association of
Standing Advisory Councils
on Religious Education

- **supporting**
- **strengthening**
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SACREs and religious education

This training presentation examines:

- The importance of RE: What is RE?
- SACRE's responsibility towards RE: How is RE provided for?

Part 1:

The importance of RE

- What is religious education?
- What is its purpose?
- What does quality RE look like?
- What might its outcomes be?

What is religious education?

Religious education provides pupils with the opportunity to explore the major responses, religious and otherwise, to life's big questions. It:

- encourages pupils to explore their own beliefs, values and lifestyle through the exploration and critical analysis of the beliefs and practices of others, religious or otherwise;
- provokes challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of belief, issues of right and wrong, concepts of the self and what it means to be human;

What is religious education?

- enables pupils to build their own sense of identity and belonging whilst developing knowledge and understanding of identity as experienced in religious and non-religious traditions;
- teaches pupils to develop respect for others whilst being increasingly able to apply critical thought and questioning to challenge in an appropriate way their own and others' beliefs, practices and presuppositions;
- prompts pupils to consider their responsibilities and sense of 'being in the world'.

What is religious education?

Religious education in school is different from the nurturing of religious faith, which is properly the responsibility and privilege of the family and faith community.

In school, effective RE brings pupils into contact with the world of religion, but it should not take them over the threshold into encouraging or discouraging the practice of faith, e.g. by inviting them to participate or imitate what religious people do.

Only certain schools with a religious character have the prerogative to grow children in their faith.

The purpose of RE is to support whole-person development in its broadest sense.

The purpose of RE

The purpose of religious education is to give pupils opportunities to:

- learn **about** religion, developing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of:
 - beliefs, teachings and sources;
 - practices and ways of life;
 - forms of expression.
- learn **from** religion, encouraging pupils' personal responses and reflection on:
 - identity and belonging;
 - meaning, purpose and truth;
 - values and commitments.

Learning from religion occurs through learning about religions: they are held in a mutual dynamic.

Good RE:

- provides knowledge and understanding of the major religions and world-views that people will encounter in Britain and around the world;
- is broad and balanced;
- is engaging, exciting and challenging;
- develops an enquiring approach to learning, promoting a disposition to and skills in questioning, enquiry and reflective response;
- raises spiritual and moral questions;
- nurtures the imagination;

Good RE:

- develops respect for self and sensitivity to others;
- helps pupils to understand worth and value;
- encourages pupils to appreciate what it means to hold a religious faith or personal belief, especially through encounter with others;
- challenges pupils to consider the impact of faith and belief on individuals, communities and societies;
- offers opportunities for personal reflection and gives pupils a language for communicating their deepest thoughts;
- develops discernment and challenges prejudice.

RE's contribution to the whole person

RE can make a significant contribution to the development of the whole person.

- RE develops self-concept and self-esteem, explores moral and social frameworks and encourages people to reflect on experiences and emotions. It explores emotional health and well-being in both specific issues and in the broader sense of the spiritual dimension of life.
- RE promotes creativity and thinking at a deeper level and links these to universal and personal human experiences so that learning becomes engaging, reflective and enjoyable. Personal development and academic achievement are woven together so that pupils are able to reflect meaningfully on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural values.

RE's contribution to the whole person

- In RE pupils explore what it means to be a person and consider how they and others should be treated; they develop understanding of and respect for diverse beliefs and cultures, thus RE contributes to promoting anti-racism and anti-bullying attitudes.
- Pupils' own experiences, beliefs and perceptions lie at the heart of RE. This pupil-centric approach to learning through an exploration of faith and belief, ensures that they are able to contribute to their own and others' learning.

For discussion

1. What would you want a religiously educated school leaver to:

- know
- understand
- be able to do

2. What characteristics would you want her or him to display?

You will want to refer to your local authority's agreed syllabus to check out your shared expectations.

Part 2:

SACRE's responsibility towards RE

- How is RE provided for?
- What is the agreed syllabus?
- What are a SACRE's responsibilities towards RE?
- What is an Agreed Syllabus Conference?

The legal position

- All schools must provide religious education for all registered pupils: ie RE is statutory
- RE is part of the 'Basic Curriculum', not part of the National Curriculum
- In maintained schools and C of E Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, RE must be taught according to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. This is known as 'local determination'.

The legal position

- In Academies and Free Schools, RE is written into the school's Funding Agreement and must be taught to all pupils in the school in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses
- Voluntary Aided (VA) schools and schools with a religious foundation will teach RE in accordance with their Trust Deed
- The governing bodies of Academies and VA schools may choose to follow the locally agreed syllabus
- Parents have the right to withdraw their child from RE in school. 6th form students over the age 18 have the right to withdraw themselves from RE. Teachers have the right to withdraw from any involvement in RE.

RE: A Local Business

Religious education is:

- locally determined and monitored by a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and
- taught according to a local document (an agreed syllabus) developed by a local Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)*

**See separate presentation on Agreed Syllabus Conference*

The Agreed Syllabus:

- is the statutory document for RE in the local authority.
- is produced by an agreed syllabus conference.*
- The agreed syllabus must be reviewed every five years. If, at some other time, Groups A, B and C of the SACRE asks the LA in writing to reconsider its agreed syllabus, the LA must convene a conference for that purpose.
- The LA group does not have a vote when decisions about calling an ASC are taken

**See separate presentation on Agreed Syllabus Conference*

Agreed Syllabus RE

- Must be non-denominational and non-confessional;
- Does not seek to nurture religious faith but provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human.
- Is focused on making worthwhile contributions to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The Agreed Syllabus

Every agreed syllabus must:

- *‘reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’.*
- This applies also to any RE syllabus developed by Academies or Free Schools

What are a SACRE's responsibilities towards RE?

In relation to RE, a SACRE **must**:

- advise the local authority (LA) on religious education given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters to do with RE as the SACRE sees fit or in response to those issues that might be referred to the SACRE by the LA.

Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010 DCSF

What are a SACRE's responsibilities towards RE?

In relation to RE, a SACRE **should**:

- monitor the provision and quality of agreed syllabus RE and the effectiveness of the syllabus itself;
- provide advice and support on teaching agreed syllabus RE;
- consider whether changes need to be made to the agreed syllabus;
- offer advice to the LA, and through the LA to its schools, concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum.

Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010 DCSF

What are a SACRE's responsibilities towards RE?

In relation to RE, a SACRE **may**:

- advise the LA on matters to do with the work of the SACRE;
- co-opt individuals who are not members of any of the groups, to provide educational expertise, the views of young people, or religious and non-religious views to ensure RE reflects a diverse multi-cultural society.

Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010 DCSF

Giving advice on resources for RE

- The SACRE might offer advice on the most appropriate materials to use in delivering the aims, objectives and content of the agreed syllabus.
- Sometimes SACRE members review materials or investigate websites that could be useful for schools to use for RE, publishing their findings to schools.
- Faith community representatives may review the suitability of materials being traded nationally on their own faith or belief
- Some SACREs produce and circulate a newsletter every term.

Monitoring RE in schools

SACREs should:

- monitor good practice in the delivery of the agreed syllabus in a range of ways and take note of any difficulties;
- maintain regular contact with teachers by, e.g. inviting them to report to SACRE meetings and attend in-service training;
- disseminate good practice in the teaching of RE;
- review provision for in-service training and development;
- scrutinise examination results and congratulate schools that have been successful and offer support to those that have experienced difficulty ;
- receive and discuss relevant sections of school inspection reports.

Training teachers of RE

If a new agreed syllabus is to be properly implemented, there training needs to be provided for all teachers in primary and special schools and all those teaching RE in secondary schools to support its implementation.

SACREs should ensure that local authorities are aware of this need for training.

SACREs also have a responsibility to be aware of the arrangements for preparing teachers in initial training to teach RE.

Part 3:

National Developments in RE

- The National Framework for RE 2004
- RE Non-statutory Guidance 2010
- REC review of religious education in England 2013
- 2013 Ofsted report 'RE: Realising the potential'
- Some areas of controversy

The National Framework for RE 2004

- offers support to local SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences.
- is designed to be helpful to SACREs (and Agreed Syllabus Conferences) in thinking about what quality RE might look like;
- was developed as a resource for agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs) to use when evaluating and reviewing their agreed syllabuses. Many ASCs have either adopted or adapted it when developing a new agreed syllabus. It was intended as guidance and is non-statutory.

Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010

- was developed to replace the guidance provided in Circular 1/94 on religious education
- was to be used by all those involved in RE according to their specific roles within local determination
- was designed to ‘support the provision of high quality RE in maintained schools in England’
- also updated the National Framework for RE 2004
- was, again, non-statutory

A review of religious education in England 2013

- a non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE to complement the new national curriculum programmes of study
- an analysis of the wider context of RE

The report also contained nine recommendations for the future development of RE.

Ofsted 'RE: realising the potential' 2013

This identified critical weaknesses in RE provision in schools:

- low standards
- weak teaching
- problems in developing a curriculum for RE
- confusion about the purpose of RE
- weak leadership and management
- weaknesses in examination provision at Key Stage 4
- gaps in training
- the impact of recent changes in education policy

This will be helpful to SACREs in developing their support to schools.

Some areas of controversy

The growing malaise regarding the quality of RE and its 'special' place in the school curriculum has prompted some serious questioning and divergent views within the RE world.

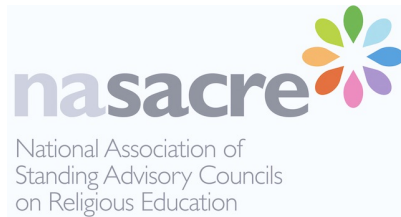
- Whose RE is it, anyway? There are many interest groups in RE, yet it is an educational issue, not one of faith, nurture or government policy
- Should RE continue to be locally determined? There is a real rise in passionate advocacy for a national curriculum RE, especially from some classroom practitioners. This would involve a change in the law.
- Why do we teach RE? There is a rich diversity of views on the purpose(s) of RE and many people believe this confuses teachers, leaders and pupils, leading to less good RE.

Some areas of controversy

As things stand, RE remains both statutory and locally determined through SACREs, the ASC and the local agreed syllabus.

However, there is serious debate taking place and SACREs need to be aware of and respond to these issues, with consideration and a focus on pupil learning and experience.

Some helpful bodies that support RE



NASACRE

the National Association of SACREs



REC

the RE Council of England and Wales



NATRE

the National Association of Teachers of RE



AREIAC

the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants