

Ofsted Research Review - Religious Education

- ▶ On 12th June 2021, Ofsted published a research review with the aim of identifying the factors which contribute to creating a high-quality RE curriculum. The review draws on literature relating to RE and uses this as a basis for examining how RE is taught in primary and secondary schools in England.
- ▶ Ofsted's education inspection framework (EIF) looks at RE in all schools without a religious character, as well as voluntary controlled schools with a religious character. Schools which are inspected by a different body may also use this research review to help inform their provision.
- ▶ This summary brings together the key points of the research review, using the same headings as in the original document. The document is not designed to be a checklist that all schools should follow; there are many ways in which schools can provide a high-quality RE curriculum.
- ▶ For the full document, see here: [Ofsted - research review series: Religious Education](#).

'RE is vital in preparing pupils to engage in a diverse and complex multi-religious and multi-secular society.'

▶ The three types of RE knowledge

The review refers to three different types of knowledge used in RE, which are pillars of progression.

Substantive knowledge:

Pupils learn subject content about various religious and non-religious traditions.

Ways of knowing:

Pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion.

Personal knowledge:

Pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study.

▶ Curriculum progression and types of knowledge

- There is careful consideration of the knowledge that pupils build through the RE curriculum.
- Teaching and learning is well-grounded in up-to-date academic study about religion/non-religion. This avoids pupil misconceptions.
- Curriculum content is carefully selected and sequenced.
- 'Ways of knowing' are appropriately taught alongside the substantive content, not isolated from it.
- There is consideration of when pupils should relate the content to their own personal knowledge (for example, prior assumptions).

► Substantive content and concepts

- The content and concepts taught are 'collectively enough' to enable pupils to grasp the complexity of a multi-religious, multi-secular world.
- There is an awareness that all curriculum content about religious and non-religious traditions is a representation of reality. Care should be taken to ensure that these representations are as accurate as possible and do not lead to misconceptions.
- There is enough depth of study in certain areas of the RE curriculum. This will give enough detailed content to allow meaningful discussions about religion and non-religion.
- There is enough detailed knowledge of specific religious and non-religious traditions, such as their stories, narratives, texts and testimonies, in the RE curriculum, to enable pupils to make useful connections between content.
- A well-sequenced RE curriculum prepares pupils with the prior knowledge (including content, concepts and vocabulary) they need for subsequent topics. This is particularly important for controversial and sensitive topics.

► Ways of knowing

- Pupils build knowledge of 'ways of knowing' throughout the curriculum, learning about accuracy and reliability of knowledge about religions. Pupils think in critical and scholarly ways about the representations of religion and non-religion that they encounter.
- There is a clearly sequenced RE curriculum that includes the teaching of scholarly methods and tools.
- Subject leaders and teachers make good decisions about which 'ways of knowing' pupils need to learn and match the 'ways of knowing' to the substantive content.
- Pupils recognise which 'ways of knowing' they are using.

► Personal knowledge

- The RE curriculum does not induct pupils into any religious tradition (in settings where the EIF applies to RE).
- The curriculum helps pupils to become aware of their own assumptions and values.
- The curriculum is designed to include content that helps pupils to reflect upon and develop their own beliefs and values.

► Interplay, end goals and competencies

- The curriculum focuses on ambitious end-goals rather than covering a huge amount of content superficially.
- Pupils build up accurate knowledge about the complexity and diversity of religion and non-religion worldwide.
- There are clear links between substantive knowledge and concepts, 'ways of knowing' and 'personal knowledge'.
- Subject leaders are aware of the risk of distortion of the RE curriculum and take precautions to avoid it.

► Teaching the curriculum

- Classroom activities are selected to support long-term memory of the RE curriculum.
- Pedagogy is based on cognitive science and RE subject knowledge.
- Deep learning is prioritised over activities that are superficially engaging.
- For every classroom activity, the curriculum objective is clear.
- Teachers adapt teaching to suit prior RE knowledge.
- Learning in RE is revisited and links are made to previously taught aspects of the curriculum.

▶ Assessment

- Formative assessments help identify misconceptions or gaps. Teachers can then review or adapt the curriculum.
- The format and timing of summative assessments suits their purpose.
- RE assessment needs to relate to the curriculum, which sets out what it means to 'get better' at RE.
- RE assessments are designed to be fit for purpose: they assess exactly what the curriculum sets out to achieve.
- Subject leaders ensure that assessment is not too onerous for teachers.
- Care is taken to ensure that questions or tasks represent a broad perspective of what RE learning includes.

▶ Systems, culture and policies

- Sufficient time is given to RE in the timetable.
- Pupils are taught by subject-specialist RE teachers, where appropriate.
- High-quality training is given for leaders and teachers of RE to develop their professional subject knowledge.
- Subject leaders find high-quality training to further their knowledge. This includes policy, subject content, subject pedagogy and RE research.

▶ Common challenges that limit high-quality teaching in RE

- Insufficient time is given to teach RE well.
- Decisions are made that are not in the best interests of all pupils, e.g. entering all pupils for early examination.
- There is a lack of understanding of what it means to be 'scholarly' in RE.
- Misconceptions are taught because of a lack of clarity about reliability of knowledge about religion/non-religion.
- Teaching does not embed into pupils' long-term memory of curriculum content.
- Assessment does not fit with the RE curriculum.
- There is not enough CPD for teachers to develop their RE subject knowledge.