

The Current Context for RE – October 2017

An overview of the key reports

1. In 2013 OFSTED produced a report on the state of RE, called Realising the Potential. This report gave evidence of the poor state of RE teaching across all types of schools, focusing particularly on the poor teaching of Christianity. Assessment came in for particular criticism; the collection of spurious data was the main issue.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential>
2. On the back of that report, a Church of England report, called Making a Difference found evidence of a similar situation across Church of England schools, identifying poor teaching, lack of CPD and insufficient rigour.
<https://tinyurl.com/yaq7qntm>
3. In early 2015, the Religious Education Council published the findings of the review of RE, which set out the basis for the guidance document later the same year. This moved away from the two attainment targets to a three-strand approach: Enquiry into the nature or religion and belief; knowledge and understanding of Christianity and knowledge and understanding of a range of other religions and world views. This recommended that in addition to Christianity, it should be a minimum of one additional faith per Key stage. The guidance document, that accompanied it, seemed to suggest one additional faith/belief per phase. The thinking seemed to be that depth was to be preferred over breadth. It was also at this point that the enquiry method was made prominent in the thinking of RE. It also began to set out a system of progression, that recognised that it needed to be built into the curriculum. The guidance document set out some end of phase outcomes for each of the three strands. At the time that assessment was moving away from levels, this was the first step towards an alternative.
<http://reonlineorg.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Religious-Education-in-the-New-Curriculum-2015.pdf>
4. These documents were followed later in 2015 by the Living with Difference report into religious literacy across the nation. This report identified the lack of religious knowledge in the media and business, as well as in education. It recommended that the profile of religion needed to be raised across the nation and taken seriously.
<https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>
5. At a similar time, the RE for Real report was published; this called for a greater teaching of religion as it is lived and experienced by people today. Evidence from pupils called for the opportunity to encounter real faith; they wanted more RE and better RE that equipped them better for life in modern Britain.
<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-units/faiths-and-civil-society/REforREal-web-b.pdf>

6. September 2017 saw the publication by NATRE of the State of the Nation report into RE provision in secondary schools. This report concluded that RE is not being given its statutory provision in about 26% of schools; academies are the most likely to be failing in their duty in terms of time allocation, curriculum and trained staff, but maintained schools and schools with a religious character were also not always fulfilling their statutory duty. The report calls on OFSTED to look at the provision of RE and comment on curricula that do not include RE, as not meeting the requirement for a broad and balance curriculum. Additional training and support for non-specialist teachers has also been called for.
<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/SOTN%202017%20Report%20web%20version%20FINAL.pdf>

7. The most recent publication has been the interim report form the Commission on RE, which catalogues the current failings of RE and make some broad and courageous recommendations, which if implemented would signal a change in the provision of RE. They are calling for a national statement of entitlement, which would apply to ALL schools. This statement talks about the nature and content of RE, using the word “worldviews” as the default. It is also calling for an expanded role for SACRES and much greater training in RE for student teachers. Like the NATRE report it calls on OFSTED to comment on whether RE is offered in accordance with statutory requirements. As this is the interim report the findings are still open for discussion.
Find the full report here: <http://www.commissiononre.org.uk/religious-education-for-all-commission-interim-report/>
And the consultation survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CoREConsult1>.

Our current syllabus review needs to be set against the background of these reports, so any time you can spend looking at these reports will help us to produce a syllabus fit for the next 5 years.