

NEWS RELEASE

All schools should publish their commitment to religious education, Commission on RE proposes

Interim report finds rules governing RE are not fit for purpose

All state-funded schools in England should publish details of their approach to religious education and how they meet the requirements of a new National Entitlement for RE, under proposals set out in an interim report by the Commission on Religious Education published today (September 21, 2017).

The recommendation is one of a series of proposals set out for consultation in the Commission's report, "Religious Education for All", which reviews the law and policies behind RE, as well as the way it is delivered in schools. The Commission's aim is to improve the quality and rigour of the subject and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

The report criticises the current inconsistency in the quality and provision of RE. It cites increasing numbers of schools that are failing to meet their basic legal requirements, meaning pupils experience a lottery in access to high quality RE and miss out on vital preparation for life in a multicultural society and globalised world.

Among the proposals by the Commission on RE, an independent body with members from a variety of backgrounds and expertise, including teaching, the law, and academia, are:

- A new National Entitlement for Religious Education. This would clearly set out for the first time the aims and purposes of RE and what students should experience in the course of their study. For example, the Commission proposes that RE should enable pupils to understand the relationship between people's worldview and their thinking and actions in political, public, social and cultural life, and how worldviews are 'inextricably woven into, influence and are influenced by, all dimensions of human experience'. The Commission also believes that RE plays a role in preparing pupils for life in modern Britain by enabling them to engage respectfully with people with worldviews different from their own.
- Schools should be held to account for the provision and quality of RE they provide. All schools, including free schools, academies, and schools of a religious character, should publish details of how they meet the new National Entitlement, and inspectors and other approved bodies would have the power to monitor RE to ensure a minimum standard.
- A National Plan for improving the teaching and learning of RE - along the lines the National Plan for Music Education - which brings together the Commission's recommendations for improving teacher subject knowledge. The nine draft proposals for the plan include a minimum of 12 hours devoted to RE in all primary initial teacher training courses; the opportunity for all primary trainees to observe RE teaching in a

leading school for RE; and the requirement that teachers 'demonstrate a good understanding of and take responsibility for the sensitive handling of controversial issues, including thoughtful discussion of religious and non-religious worldviews'. The Commission also recommends that bursaries for trainee RE teachers are brought in line with other subjects where there is a shortage of recruits.

Chair of the Commission, The Very Rev Dr John Hall, said:

"All students need a thorough understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews, regardless of their own personal views, as a vital preparation for life and employment in modern Britain. A rich understanding of Britain's diverse communities and a broad perception of different worldviews will enable students to build a more cohesive and peaceful world for the future.

"However, the evidence is that too many state schools are failing to meet their legal obligations to provide religious education for all students. This is unfair. So we are recommending a National Entitlement for RE and that all schools should be required to give an account of how they make the provision.

"At the same time, we wish to see a review of the quality of RE teaching and of teacher education in RE. We need to ensure that students' learning addresses how religious and non-religious worldviews affect people's decisions and behaviour in almost every aspect of life.

The Commission on RE's interim report will now be subject to an extensive consultation between October and December 2017, before it makes its final recommendation, which will be published in September 2018.

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Notes to Editors:

The Commission on Religious Education (CoRE)
www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/commission-on-re

The Commission on Religious Education was established in 2016 to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for religious education (RE). This review is a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

The Commission was established by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), which provides the secretariat for the Commission. The Commission is however, independent of the REC and is entirely responsible for the content of its reports and recommendations.

The remit of the CoRE is to consider RE in all schools and colleges in England that educate pupils of any age up to 19, irrespective of whether they are mainstream, special or alternative

provision, independent or maintained, and of a religious character or not.

The following areas are being considered by the Commission:

- The quality of teaching and learning in RE
- The legal and structural arrangements
- The public and professional profile of the subject
- Teacher recruitment, Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development
- The range of school settings in which RE should be required
- The age range for which RE should be required
- The right to withdraw (parents or carers, pupils and teachers)
- Whether or not there should be a common entitlement in RE, and if so what the entitlement should be

Members of the Commission on Religious Education:

- The Very Rev Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster. Former Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, Chair of the Commission.
- Samira Ahmed, journalist and broadcaster of a range of culture and religious programme and documentaries across television and radio.
- Alan Brine, Ofsted National Advisor for RE from 2007 to 2014.
- Professor Denise Cush, former Head of Study of Religions at Bath Spa University.
- Esther Deans MBE, Humanities KS4 Lead at Malmesbury School. Chair, Stand Against Racism & Inequality, and Chair, Bristol Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE).
- Professor Sir Malcolm Evans KCMG OBE, Professor of Public International Law, University of Bristol. Member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion & Belief from 2003 to 2014
- Dame Helen Hyde, Head of Watford Grammar School for Girls between 1987 and 2016, Commissioner on the National Holocaust Commission and chair of its education work.
- Emma Knights, Chief Executive Officer, National Governors' Association.
- Juliet Lyal, teacher at Cunningham Hill Infant School, St Albans.
- Dr Joyce Miller, Associate Fellow in the Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick (WRERU), formerly Head of Diversity and Cohesion at Education Bradford and Senior Lecturer in religious studies at the University of Wolverhampton
- Professor Eleanor Nesbitt, Emeritus Professor in Religions and Education at the University of Warwick.
- Dr Vanessa Ogden, CEO of the Mulberry Schools Trust, Tower Hamlets.
- Dr Farid Panjwani, Director, Centre for Research and Evaluation in Muslim Education, UCL Institute of Education.
- Dr Anthony Towey, Director of the Aquinas Centre for Theological Literacy at St Mary's University, Twickenham.