



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

RE Newsletter

Spring 2011

Religious Education under Threat; the national and local context

Education is in yet another period of great change and also great uncertainty. Schools are under pressure to second guess future Government policy (currently only outlined in white paper(s) and there is a danger that decisions made in haste today may be regretted tomorrow. The local authority also has the same challenge and dilemmas.

Derby has a reputation for good community relations and excellent opportunities and initiatives for children and young people to engage with issues around faith, culture and active Citizenship both within schools and more broadly across the city at events such as The Annual Young Citizens' Award ceremony and the events on and around Holocaust Memorial Day. It is important that such initiatives continue but essentially it is the curriculum that presents the best and most structured opportunity for children and young people to learn about themselves, other people and social, cultural and moral issues in society and the world.

Developments around the English Baccalaureate have had an adverse impact on RE provision at Key Stage 4 in some secondary schools around the country and I am anxious that this is not the case here in Derby. The majority of our secondary schools have successful and well established provision for RE at Key Stage 4, not only in terms of meeting the statutory requirements (which the Government have confirmed will not change) but also in terms of GCSE provision. The subject is clearly as academic and rigorous as history and geography and nationally, as well as locally, is extremely popular, with the number of students studying it to GCSE level climbing from 113,000 to 460,000 over the last 15 years. The multi-disciplinary nature of the subject, involving textual study, philosophical thinking, ethics, social understanding and the skills of analysis and reasoning, develops critical thinkers and prepares students well for academic rigour and success post Key Stage 4.

Recently, Baroness Warsi, Conservative Chair, warned of a dangerous hardening of British attitudes to Islam - a casual legitimisation of prejudice. Education can be an inoculation against that kind of threat. A secular society is impoverished if it marginalises the faiths from which it has emerged.

For more information contact:

Graham Falgate
*Education Officer – PSHE/
Citizenship and RE*
01332 256327
graham.falgate@derby.gov.uk

Heather Handley
Administrative Assistant
01332 256756
heather.handley@derby.gov.uk

Web address:
www.derby.gov.uk/edu_re



Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, an Oxford historian and BBC presenter, said the decision not to include RE in the English Baccalaureate and to minimise its place in the school curriculum at any stage of the educational system was short-sighted. "Religion matters to most human beings in the world today," he added. "To leave religion to the religious extremists, outside a good education system, is to distort it. RE is a real tool for creating that kind of cohesive community and society that we're looking for... we neglect it at our peril".

The local Context: a new (proposed) structure for the Children and Young People Directorate and significant budget cuts

You will, I am sure, be aware of the budget pressures faced by our local authority as it struggles to come to terms with the reduction in funding imposed by central government. This will inevitably lead to significant reductions in services to schools during the course of the next financial year 2011/12 and on into the future. The impact of these budget pressures is compounded by the restructuring of our Children and Young People Directorate that had begun before the full impact of central government cuts were known and has been further complicated by a lack of continuity of strategic leadership within the Children and Young People Directorate.

Last week I was informed that my post and the team I manage (RE, PSHE, Citizenship and Healthy Schools) are to be made redundant at some point between March and the end of June.

There is now a short period of consultation with regard to any changes to the proposed new structure. If you are concerned about the impact for your school and our city in losing the support that we now have for RE, SACRE and The Open Centre then we encourage you

to make your views felt in the coming weeks.

Without a specialist adviser/officer to support RE in Derby the following support and services will disappear this academic year:

- Support for classroom teachers of RE.
- Monitoring of standards for RE in line with the Agreed Syllabus.
- Leadership of RE network meetings for Primary and Secondary RE Co-ordinators.
- Publication of RE newsletters and Annual SACRE reports.
- Support for classroom teachers of RE or consultancy for Headteachers/RE subject co-ordinators from an adviser.
- The loaning of or advising on classroom resources.
- The annual Spirited Arts Awards.
- The Annual Young Citizens' Award Ceremony, a major civic event.
- Support and advice to SACRE including revising, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Locally Agreed RE Syllabus, advice on applications for 'determinations' regarding Collective Worship.
- Leadership to SACRE and the LA around a significant number of issues relating to Community Cohesion.
- Leadership from Children and Young People for the Holocaust Memorial Day/week events.

If you are concerned about the impact for your school and our city in losing specialist support for Religious Education then we encourage you to make your views felt in the coming weeks to the Interim Strategic Director of Children and Young People, The Director of Learning and Inclusion and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (see the next page).

Contact Details for Consultation and Feedback

Heather Tomlinson
Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People
Children and Young People Directorate
Derby City Council
4th Floor Saxon House
Heritage Gate
Friary Street
Derby
DE1 1AN

E-mail: heather.tomlinson@derby.gov.uk

Lynda Poole
Service Director for Learning and Inclusion
Children and Young People Directorate
Derby City Council
Middleton House
27 St Mary's Gate
Derby
DE1 3NU

E-mail@ lynda.poole@derby.gov.uk

Councillor Evonne Williams
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Derby City Council
c/o Saxon House
Heritage Gate
Friary Street
Derby
DE1 1AN

E-mail: evonne.williams@derby.gov.uk

The National Context: recent developments within Parliament regarding Religious Education

Currently the Education secretary Michael Gove is reviewing and "taking on board constructive comments about the qualifications that count towards the English Baccalaureate". There is also an early day motion to be debated shortly.

Early Day Motion

That this House notes the recent publication of league tables of school performance measuring the proportion of pupils obtaining the English Baccalaureate; further notes that the English Baccalaureate is awarded to pupils who gain GCSEs at Grade C or above in English, mathematics, science, a foreign language and a humanities subject; further notes with concern that this list of approved subjects does not include religious education; recognises that religious education is an academically rigorous subject with increasing popularity among pupils; further recognises that the rise of religious extremism around the world and in the UK means that a good understanding of all religions is vital to a well-rounded education; further notes that with the increasing emphasis on the English Baccalaureate as the primary qualification for 16-year-olds, schools are more likely to focus on the core subjects which make it up; and therefore calls on the Government to recognise the importance and relevance of religious education by including it as a core subject in the English Baccalaureate.

The position of RE was also raised in Parliament by MPs when questions were asked of the Minister for Schools recently:

Religious Education – 3 February 2011

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the requirement for religious education to be a compulsory subject in all maintained schools. [33977]

Mr Gibb: Religious education holds a unique position as a statutory subject in the basic curriculum for all pupils in maintained schools in England. It is not a part of the National Curriculum, which means that there are no statutory national programmes of study, attainment targets or assessment arrangements. The nature of RE is such that local authorities and schools, who know their communities, are best positioned to design a syllabus which reflects local traditions and needs. The locally agreed syllabus, which is designed by Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education, SACRE, and adopted by the local authority, is statutory, and that means that local authorities must provide such a syllabus and that maintained schools must follow it. Schools with a religious character can either follow the locally agreed syllabus, or use a syllabus which has been agreed by their governing body. It is the responsibility of the head teacher, governors and local authorities (LAs) to make the necessary provisions for RE in all maintained schools. We are firmly committed to maintaining the strong position of RE in the basic school curriculum and we do not intend to change the current statutory arrangements.

Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department's review of the national curriculum will include the status of religious education. [34862]

Mr Gibb: Religious education (RE) is a statutory part of the basic curriculum of maintained schools in England, but not a part of the national curriculum. There are a number of important components of a broad and balanced school curriculum for which, as is currently the case, it would

be inappropriate to prescribe national programmes of study. RE falls into this category, and therefore, falls outside the scope of a review of the national curriculum.

The nature of RE is such that local authorities and schools, who know their communities, are best positioned to design a syllabus which reflects local traditions and needs. The locally agreed syllabus, which is designed by Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and adopted by the local authority, is statutory, and that means that local authorities must provide such a syllabus and that maintained schools must follow it. The Government do not intend to make any changes to the statutory basis for RE.

Caroline Nokes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for what reasons he has excluded religious studies from the humanities list of the English Baccalaureate. [36031]

Mr Gibb: For the purposes of the 2010 performance tables the humanities element of the English Baccalaureate measure was either history or geography. We have not included religious education (RE) as fulfilling the humanity requirement of the English Baccalaureate because it is already a compulsory subject. One of the intentions of the English Baccalaureate is to encourage wider take up of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory RE.

However we recognise, as many schools do, the benefits that religious education can bring to pupils. This is why the teaching of RE remains compulsory throughout a pupil's schooling. Success in all subjects studied at GCSE will also continue to be recognised by other performance table measures, as it has in the past. We are open to arguments about how we can further improve the measures in the performance tables and will review the precise definition of the English Baccalaureate for the 2011 tables.

The Government have been surprised by the weight and force of the arguments sent to them from across the country with regard to the place of RE in the school curriculum. Below is one such letter sent in by Dr Paul Hopkins.

Letter to the Department for Education

Dear Michael Gove,

As a University Academic and Teacher Educator I am writing to you in order to explore some of the issues raised by the recent White Paper (The Importance of Teaching).

The belief that through education we can achieve a fairer society is one that we share and we would concur with many of the aspirations laid out in the programme of changes, for example the need to raise standards, promote subject knowledge, narrow the attainment gap, create a world class curriculum.

There are, however, a number of pressing issues that are brought to the fore in regard to the proposed changes.

The White Paper makes no overt reference to the need for young people to understand the complex inter-relationships of religion and belief in contemporary society. At a time when communities are becoming ever more diverse, there has never been a greater need for good Religious Education to help create a more religiously literate and cohesive society.

Neither is there any apparent recognition of the role schools need to play in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils, which is one of the central duties as set out in the National Curriculum (2000). I am concerned that the White Paper's 'silence' may be seen as meaning that RE is not important, which I am sure you do not think.

I am also dismayed at the omission of Religious Studies from the list of 'Humanities' subjects in the proposed

English Baccalaureate. The multi-disciplinary nature of this subject, involving textual study, philosophical thinking, ethics, social understanding and the skills of analysis and reasoning make it a valued qualification and we want to seek assurances that it will be added to the list.

I would also like to raise the issue of the RE at GCSE, which, over the past 10 years, has been a remarkable success story, seeing entries increasing hugely to over 465,000 in 2010. The 'non-statutory National Framework for RE' (2004) states that all students aged 14-16 should follow "at least one course in religious education or religious studies leading to a qualification approved under Section 96". The GCSE short course and full course examinations have provided a valuable bench mark, allowing students to achieve a recognisable qualification through the development of detailed knowledge and understanding, skills of interpretation and analysis etc. It would be a retrograde step to remove this qualification.

Yours sincerely

Dr Paul Hopkins

Reply from the DfE

Dear Mr Hopkins,

Thank you for your recent email. We have introduced the English Baccalaureate because we are concerned that the number of pupils who currently receive a broad education in core academic subjects is far too small. This is particularly the case for pupils in disadvantaged areas. The English Baccalaureate is designed to recognise the success of those students who attain GCSEs or iGCSEs at grade A-C across a core of academic subjects. We want to encourage more pupils to study these core subjects and to open up opportunities for all students to have the chance to study them regardless of the school they attend. We will give special*

recognition in the performance tables to those schools which are helping their pupils attain this breadth and we will mark individual pupils' achievements through a certificate.

Whilst the English Baccalaureate will give pupils the opportunity to study a core of academic subjects, it does not mean that we wish to restrict their choices or opportunities for wider study which is why the number of core subjects is small enough to allow for that. Study in other subjects will be just as valuable to pupils and we will encourage all pupils to study non-English Baccalaureate subjects alongside the core English Baccalaureate in order to benefit from a well rounded education.

We recognise, as many schools do, the benefits that religious education can bring to pupils. This is why the teaching of RE remains compulsory throughout a pupil's schooling. Success in all subjects studied at GCSE will also continue to be recognised by other performance table measures, as it has in the past.

We have not included RE as fulfilling the humanity requirement of the English Baccalaureate because it is already a compulsory subject. One of the intentions of the English Baccalaureate is to encourage wider take up of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory religious education.

P/P Secretary of State for Education

RE and Academies

The National Association for Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) has discovered that the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) might be of help to RE Teachers in Academies who are worried about the subject being marginalised, for example by the introduction of the EBacc. NATRE's survey of almost 800 teachers in January 2011 found that around 30% of subject

leaders reported a negative impact on timetable time and/or staffing.

NATRE contacted the Department for Education for advice and their guidance is reproduced (verbatim) below:

'Academies must provide religious education in accordance with their Funding Agreements. The policy intention is for the model Funding Agreements to broadly reflect the provisions that apply to local authorities and schools in the maintained sector. The Funding Agreement requires that Academies with a religious designation provide religious education in accordance with the tenets of their faith and Academies that do not have a religious designation must arrange for religious education to be given to all pupils in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses. In other words, a curriculum which reflects 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.

'For foundation or voluntary controlled schools with a religious designation that convert to Academies, the intention is that they will arrange for religious education in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses, as set out above, unless any parents request that their children receive religious education in accordance with any provisions of the school's trust deed or in accordance with the tenets of the school's faith. If any parents do request this, the Academy must make arrangements for those children to receive such religious education unless, because of special circumstances, it would be unreasonable to do so. The Funding Agreement sets this out.'

Other News and Developments!

Young People Give Thumbs Up to RE

New research among young people, including school leavers and those in full time education, indicates that Religious Education (RE) is a valued subject that leaves a lasting impression on those who study it. This timely research comes as the government sets out its Schools White Paper, calling for a return to traditional humanities-based subjects.

The study was commissioned by the RE Council of England and Wales (REC), and involved 1,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 years. It found that 80 per cent of respondents thought studying RE could promote better understanding of different religions and beliefs. This figure rose to 83 per cent amongst those who had studied RE at GCSE and was consistently higher for young women (85 per cent amongst the 19-21 year olds). There was notable support for this sentiment from all religions and beliefs, including 77 per cent of those who said they were atheists.

Professor John Howson, former government advisor and managing director of Education Data Surveys said: "This is an authoritative survey that clearly demonstrates the key place of Religious Education in the school curriculum. In our increasingly diverse world, it is important that young people have the opportunity to understand the nature of faith and belief in society. It is very encouraging that 83 per cent of those who took a GCSE felt that studying Religious Education in schools can help to promote a better understanding of different religions and beliefs up to eight years after taking the course".

RE lessons are part of every school's core curriculum and a majority of students go on to choose to take a GCSE in RE as

one of their humanities subjects. Respondents were asked if they had been positively influenced by studying RE at school and those who had taken a GCSE were more likely to have been positively influenced.

Dr Brian Gates, Emeritus Professor of Religious and Moral Education at the University of Cumbria and chair of the REC added:

"Our research has shown RE has a measurable impact on those who study it; RE in schools shouldn't be viewed as controversial or a minefield but an essential part of the humanities mix. RE is a rigorous academically based subject that will equip and inform future generations about the origins and meanings of the different beliefs, ethics and opinions found in Britain and around the world".

Recollection of RE in schools between 2002 - 2010

Today RE lessons explore different religions and beliefs as well as allowing children and young people the opportunity to discuss and question accompanying moral and social responses. The study asked young people what they remembered about their RE lessons at school. The most popular memory was learning about several different religions, the second was debates on right and wrong.

The memories of RE were consistent across the group, with 57 per cent of the younger 16-18 year old age group remembering debates on right and wrong, compared with 42 per cent of the 19-24 group, perhaps reflecting an increased focus on moral and ethical issues.

The sample was a representative cross-section of all religions and beliefs. Among them, only 32 per cent disagreed with a statement that there should be

more effective teaching about Christianity so they can better understand English history, culture and society.

Gates concludes: *"This current and topical study shows RE is relevant to young people today and has a lasting impact on them. The REC is calling for the subject remain a statutory part of the school curriculum, alongside other humanities such as History and Geography"*.

Notes to Editors

1. The research took place in October 2010 across a representative sample of 1,000 16-24 year olds. The study was conducted through an online omnibus poll by youth research specialist, Dubit Research, in strict accordance with Market Research Society guidelines.
2. Established in 1973 the REC brings together some fifty national organisations in its membership. These comprise academic and professional associations specialising in religions and religious education, as well as the individual religion and belief organisations inclusive of the range of faith communities found nationally. The REC's shared priority is to strengthen the quality of provision for the subject throughout the educational system.
3. Education Data Surveys is an independent research company. EDS provides research and information about the education sector and is the leading provider of management information on the job market for classroom teachers and leaders in the education community.

Guidance on Parental Concerns to Visits to Places of Worship

SACRE has responded to the perception expressed by some schools and The Open Centre that an increasing number of parents are raising concerns about letting their children go on out of school visits to Places of Worship.

The issue of requests from parents to withdraw their children from visits to places of worship is a serious matter about which many of us in the world of education, and specifically in religious education, are deeply concerned. It is difficult to know if the incidence of this is increasing but we think it is important to raise it and share some examples of good practice in the hope that we might be able to avert further problems.

SACRE will hopefully be approving next month guidance that has been prepared in recent weeks by members of SACRE and myself for Headteachers and teachers when handling objections to visiting inner city Derby and places of worship. This guidance will be sent out to all schools in the coming months.

Spirited Arts Competition 2010/11

The closing date for this Years Spirited Arts Competition is Friday 1 April. Although there is uncertainty about the RE Advisers post and this year's Annual Young Citizens' Award Ceremony I would encourage you to still submit your entries as every effort will be made to honour the competition this year.

Survival Island - An RE Experience

For those of you who were 'washed ashore' on the Secondary Schools Common Closure Day, a big thank you for your co-operation and enthusiasm. For those who never made the Island, I thought you might be interested to hear of the survival of your colleagues!

What follows is a brief outline of what took place in the RE workshop that day: Teachers worked in groups and imagined that they had been shipwrecked on an Island. They had to construct their own habitat and overcome practical difficulties, such as the pollution of the rivers, diseases... There were many ingenious plays to avert disaster.

Next, the groups had to devise their own laws and decide how to punish those who broke the rules. These varied from corporal to capital punishment, with only one group showing compassion! Competition between the groups was fierce – especially amongst the St Benedict contingent! The next instalment involved more people arriving on the island and everyone had to assess whether they would treat the newcomers any differently. It was surprising how many of the original group had come to consider the island 'their own' – the power of role play!

It was interesting to observe that the decisions and reactions of the groups were not dissimilar to those of students who take part in this activity. The lesson is part of our Year 7 curriculum and is one that students really enjoy and constantly refer back to. It can act as a springboard to introducing other topics such as moral codes, festivals, rites of passage and founders. Anyone who is interested in trying out Survival Island or has experimented with it, I would be pleased to hear from you. I can be contacted at: christinesmith@chellaston.derby.sch.uk

Christine Smith



A reminder (see Autumn Terms RE newsletter) that March is nationally the Celebration month to showcase RE at its best, ideas for pupils of all ages and abilities with downloadable materials in English and Welsh are available from the excellent website www.celebratingre.org.

Please use this national initiative to showcase RE in **your** school with displays, newsletters to parents and governors, special events, such as one off assemblies, RE 'street theatre' in and around school', information and good practice posted on the school website/ blogs etc, invite in outside speakers, trips out etc.... go for it!!

Keeping in Touch

I hope that this newsletter made its way efficiently to the right person in your school. It is helpful for us to keep our database of RE Co-ordinators up to date.

Please could you let us know of any changes of role or personnel in your school as it impacts on RE, by filling in the attached slip and returning to Heather Handley by Monday 28 March 2011 at the latest.



RE Co-ordinator

Please return to Heather Handley, Middleton House, 27 St Mary's Gate, Derby, DE1 3NN by Monday 28 March 2011.

PLEASE PRINT

School Name: _____

RE Co-ordinator(s): _____

Head of RE: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please include an e-mail address at which you are happy to be contacted with regard to new and developments concerning RE provision in Derby City (optional)

E-mail address: _____