

All Parliamentary Group Inquiry on RE

MAIN FINDINGS

1 Supply of primary RE teachers

- a) In over half of the 300 primary schools participating in this inquiry, some or all pupils were taught RE by someone other than their class teacher. In a quarter of these schools RE was taught by teaching assistants. This is unacceptable and in many cases this has a detrimental impact on the quality of RE (2.2-2.5).
- b) About a half of primary teachers and trainee teachers lack confidence in teaching RE (2.6-2.10).
- c) About a half of subject leaders in primary schools lack the expertise or experience to undertake their role effectively (2.11-2.13).
- d) There is a wide variation in the extent of initial teacher training in RE and too many trainee teachers have little effective preparation for teaching the subject (2.14-2.16).

2 Supply of secondary teachers

- a) Over 50% of teachers of RE in secondary schools have no qualification or appropriate expertise in the subject. This is unacceptable (3.1-3.6).
- b) The inclusion of non specialists in the total number of RE teachers given by the DfE gives the false impression that we have enough RE teachers and skews the statistics regarding the need to train more RE specialists (4.1-4.4).
- c) Secondary RE trainees on school based routes are not guaranteed places in schools where the RE staff have sufficient expertise to provide training (5.3-5.4).
- d) Applications for secondary RE teacher training courses are currently 143 down on the same time last year. The loss of bursaries for RE is among the reasons for this reduction in applicant numbers for 2013/14 (5.4-5.5).

3 Support for teachers of RE

- a) In nearly 40% of schools RE teachers have inadequate access to continuing professional development (6.1-6.3).
- b) RE teachers, particularly non specialists, in schools without a religious character have particularly limited access to CPD (6.13-6.21).
- c) The ability of SACREs to provide support for teachers of RE at a local level has been dramatically reduced by local authority funding decisions and the impact of the academisation programme (6.31-6.36).
- d) Teachers' access to CPD is a postcode lottery; it depends on the resources of their local SACRE or diocese, proximity to training and the priority given to RE in schools.

4 Contributory factors

- a) A range of government policies, notably those relating to the EBacc and GCSE short courses, are contributing to the lowering of the status of RE in some schools leading to a reduction in the demand for specialist teachers (4.5-4.11).
- b) Recent reductions and changes in teacher training have resulted in the closure of some outstanding university providers with a loss of opportunities for RE CPD (5.1-5.3).
- c) The combined effect of inadequate supply and inadequate access to support is that whatever their level of commitment, many teachers struggle to reach the levels of subject competence expected in the DfE's own teaching standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The DfE should:

- revise the methods by which it gathers information about the number of RE teachers in secondary schools and present full time equivalent totals, and use these as the basis of the department's calculation of teacher training targets
- introduce a system which requires all secondary teachers to receive some training in any subject they teach
- restore bursaries for RE trainees
- restore the inclusion of results for the GCSE short course for RE to school league table points
- require academies to use the local agreed syllabus
- publish the outcomes of SACREs' monitoring of teacher supply and CPD
- ensure that SACREs have the resources to carry out their statutory responsibilities

All schools should:

- ensure that all teachers of RE meet the Teaching Standards in respect of the subject and develop their confidence and expertise in teaching RE
- make proper provision for continuing professional development for subject leaders, specialist teachers and others with responsibility for teaching RE in order to improve its quality

Primary schools should:

- review, where relevant, the widespread practice of using staff other than the classroom teacher to teach RE
- provide regular opportunities for RE subject leaders to train their colleagues in subject knowledge and planning and assessing RE

Secondary schools should:

- review as a priority, where relevant, the practice of using non specialist teachers to teach RE
- where non specialists are teaching RE;
 - ensure that the same few teachers teach the subject every year rather than fill timetable gaps with any teacher who is free at the time
 - ensure that all non specialists receive high quality subject-specific training

ITE training providers should:

- improve the quality of RE training for primary trainees to enable them to teach RE knowledgeably and confidently
- monitor carefully all secondary trainee RE placements to ensure that they provide high quality experiences

Local authorities should ensure sufficient resources are made available to enable SACREs to:

- provide high quality RE support for their schools
- monitor the quality of the provision and staffing of RE in schools
- develop networks to share good practice in RE in all schools in their local area.

Those involved in providing CPD for RE teachers should:

- consider providing an on-line subject knowledge booster course for primary RE subject leaders
- encourage teachers and school leaders to become better informed about the range of RE CPD opportunities available

Ofsted should:

- require inspectors to report on non-compliance with statutory requirements regarding RE
- continue to monitor the quality of RE provision, including teaching and professional development, through subject inspections

The Teaching Agency should:

- review the capacity of training schools to provide subject specific training for RE in schools without the necessary subject expertise.