

How are Ofsted reports referring to Religious Education?



There has been a marked increase in the number of references to Religious Education in both secondary and secondary Ofsted reports. RE was mentioned in approximately 15% of long reports in 2015/16 and 16% in 2016/17. There are wide variations between regions however, with RE mentioned least frequently in London and most frequently in the North West, the North East and the West Midlands. There were almost 650 comments in total of which 80% were positive and 20% negative.

Ofsted has not inspected subjects for many years, so it is not possible to draw many conclusions about the health or otherwise of the subject from these reports.

The increase in the number of references to RE in Section 5 reports probably tells us as much about changes in the focus of Ofsted inspection as it does about RE itself. Ofsted is now paying much more attention to the wider curriculum and inspectors are drawing their evidence from a wider range of subjects when making their overall judgements. Recent comments from the Amanda Spielman (HM Chief Inspector of Education) [here](#) would suggest that this trend will continue into the new framework for inspection due to be launched in 2019.

From a RE perspective this probably has two key messages:

1. Ofsted is looking more seriously at whether schools are offering a broad and balanced curriculum – senior leaders need to ensure they are making good provision for RE alongside other subjects.
2. Where there is good quality provision for RE, there is now a greater chance that it will contribute positively to the evidence Ofsted are using to make their overall judgements about a school.
3. Similarly, where there is limited or poor-quality provision, it is possible that RE will be used as an example to illustrate a broader concern or where there is a contrast between practice in some subject areas and others.

For ease of reference, the comments that follow are grouped under five main headings. 1. Curriculum 2. Preparation for life in modern Britain 3. Teaching, learning and progress 4. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development 5 Leadership.

Several themes emerge in these reports. Schools might usefully consider if there is evidence that these might be strengths or areas for development in their provision for RE:

- A. An emphasis on quality of curriculum provision including:
 - The use of accredited courses where appropriate,
 - Ensuring that the timing of entry for public examinations maximises the opportunity for progress
 - Inclusion of RE in the curriculum of each year group in the school
 - Breath of study including religions and non-religious worldviews such as Humanism
- B. The importance on the knowledge and skill of the teacher including their:
 - secure subject knowledge including of diversity within and between religions;
 - confidence in anticipating, and responding to misconceptions
 - high expectations demonstrated through appropriate levels of challenge;
 - coherent planning for progress over time;
 - rigorous and targeted questioning;
 - design of well-crafted and differentiated tasks;
 - effective use of assessment and evidence of progress;
 - ability to draw on pupils' own knowledge and experience
- C. The value placed on visits and visitors to support authentic learning about religions and beliefs;
- D. The contribution of RE to pupils' literacy, especially in relation to extended writing;
- E. The importance through not over-dependence of RE for the teaching of fundamental British values;
- F. The importance of middle and senior leaders in:
 - valuing RE;
 - evaluating provision;
 - having enthusiasm for their subject

The following questions might be a useful starter for a discussion about RE in a faculty or departmental meeting:

- What are your strengths in RE? What would you hope an inspector would notice?
- What are your areas for improvement? What do you need to improve for our pupils?
- Are you devoting sufficient time to teaching and learning in RE?

To explore the issues **referenced by OFSTED inspectors** in their recent reports in more depth, you might also ask:

- Are you clear about:
 - which religions and beliefs you are teaching this year to ensure your planning contains sufficient breadth?
 - which knowledge, understanding and skills you need to cover?
 - How the planned learning represents progression from previous work in RE?
 - The appropriate level of challenge for children in your year group?
 - Your rationale for when pupils sit public examinations and if opportunities for progress are maximised?
- Do you know and have access to:
 - The Agreed Syllabus, Diocesan Guidelines, Academy Trust syllabus that your school has adopted?
 - Assessment guidelines for RE?
 - Materials to extend your subject knowledge on the content you need to teach?
 - Visits and visitors to provide compelling learning experiences in RE?
- Are you confident about:
 - Your subject knowledge?
 - How to frame questions about religion and belief that would extend children's learning but not be offensive to believers?
 - Using RE materials as the stimulus for literacy especially extended writing or writing in different genres?
 - Your ability to justify the way that provision for RE is timetabled in relation to student progress in RE, e.g. as a discrete subject, drop-down day, merged with another subject?
- Could you produce evidence that:
 - you know how well the children in your class are performing in RE?
 - the subject leader regularly evaluates provision and shares the findings with staff?
 - all those delivering RE understand the school policy and put it into practice?
 - the curriculum for RE is published on the school website for each year group

The RE subject leader may choose to use this document as preparatory reading for a task for a faculty or departmental meeting. Resources to support such a task can be found here: [inset hyperlink].

1. Curriculum – secondary

OFSTED comment	Area of concern	Type of school	Overall judgement
 - The curriculum is inadequate. It does not include some essential elements, such as Religious Education. The teaching of fundamental British values is weak.	RE not included in the curriculum	Academy	Inadequate
 - The school's previous policy of entering pupils for some GCSE examinations in Year 10 rather than in Year 11 continues to have a negative impact on their progress. This is the case across a range of subjects including art and design, media studies, Religious Education and product design.	Early entry in Year 10 reducing the capacity for students to progress	Sponsor led academy	Good
 - The school's curriculum is too narrow and some subjects , such as design technology and music, are not offered. Key subject areas, for example Religious Education , are delivered mainly through 'drop-down' days which happen about five times a year.	Narrow curriculum RE delivered via 5 drop down days	Sponsor led academy	Inadequate
OFSTED comment	Good practice	Type of school	Overall judgement
 They learn about different faiths through Religious Studies lessons, with all pupils in the secondary phase sitting the Religious Studies GCSE.	All pupils sitting RS GCSE	Voluntary Aided	Good
 - Work in Religious Studies lessons covers the main religious traditions represented in Britain and concepts such as morals, love and atheism . As a result, pupils have a clear understanding of British values and develop their personal skills very effectively.	Good range of religions and beliefs taught as well as key concepts	Free School	Outstanding
 - Leaders continue to place a high value on sport for all, Religious Education and personal, social, health and careers education. These contribute well to the breadth and depth of pupils' experience and to pupils' preparedness for life in modern Britain.	Subject valued by school leaders	Foundation	Good

2. Preparation for life in modern Britain – secondary

OFSTED comment	Area of concern	Type of school	Overall judgement
 -Furthermore, the development of fundamental British values (FBV) has not been planned carefully across the curriculum and is overly dependent on teaching within Religious Education.	The delivery of FBV is overly dependent on RE	Academy converter	Inadequate
 - Place greater emphasis on preparing pupils for life in modern Britain, by: - improving the current Religious Education (RE) programme and the school's provision for pupils' spiritual development - making explicit to pupils the links between British values and the school's own values.	RE programme requires improvement	Academy converter	Good
 The teaching of fundamental British values is weak. The curriculum does not include RE. Leaders have recently recognised that the way the school day is timetabled is compounding poor learning.	Teaching of FBV weak compounded by lack of RE provision	Sponsor led academy	Inadequate
Good practice			
 - Religious Education plays a central role in the 'Prevent' agenda , which educates pupils about the dangers of extremism.	Contribution to the 'Prevent' agenda	Community School	Good
 -Pupils are taught about the meaning of terms such as extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, the consequences of such actions and why they do not promote tolerance and mutual respect. Similarities and differences are explored through Religious Education (RE) and assemblies.	Learning about terms such as extremism and terrorism and the consequence of these things	Community	Good
 - Leaders have ensured that British values are taught in all year groups, and pupils can confidently explain their meaning in modern British life. The combination of these values being taught alongside compulsory Religious Education for all pupils ensures that pupils develop an understanding of how respect for other faiths helps people live together peacefully.	Links between learning in RE and the FBV of respect and tolerance for people from different religions and beliefs	Voluntary aided	Good

3. Teaching, learning and progress - secondary

OFSTED comment	Area of concern	Type of school	Overall judgement
 -Pupils' achievement in modern foreign languages, in Religious Education, in science and in mathematics is also in need of significant improvement .	Pupils' achievement requires significant improvement	Sponsor-led academy	Inadequate
 -Teachers do not use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and clarify misconceptions . For example, in science and in Religious Studies gaps in pupils' knowledge are not recognised by teachers and subsequently misunderstandings persist.	Ineffective questioning Misconceptions not clarified Gaps in subject knowledge unrecognised	Voluntary Aided	Requires improvement
 -In Religious Education pupils are given work that does not develop sufficient depth of understanding .	Set tasks do not lead to depth of understanding	Middle deemed secondary	Inadequate
 - The school was well below the national floor standard for pupil progress in GCSE for 2016. The attainment of pupils in Religious Education, history, drama, science and computer science was significantly lower than pupils nationally .	Attainment significantly below than pupils nationally	Foundation	Inadequate
OFSTED comment	Good practice	Type of school	Overall judgement
 Stronger teaching leads to better progress in subjects such as mathematics, Religious Education and graphics.	Better progress Stronger teaching	Community	Inadequate
 - At the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment is exceptional . In many subjects, for example mathematics, history, geography, computer science, dance, DT textiles, information and communication technology (ICT), music and Religious Studies, most pupils achieved grades A* to A.	Exception attainment - most pupils achieved A*-A	Academy converter	Outstanding
 - Pupils cover a wide range of topics in Religious Education such as humanism, different faiths and moral issues such as animal rights.	Planning for breadth	Academy converter	Requires improvement
 In Religious Education (RE) , strong questioning helped pupils to understand how people of different religious faiths see topical ethical issues.	Strong questioning Appreciation of diversity	Sponsor led academy	Requires Improvement

4. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSCD) -secondary

	OFSTED comment	Area of concern	Type of school	Overall judgement
-	Aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are present within the Religious Education curriculum, for example. These are not, however, key strengths of the school. Pupils discussed aspects of fundamental British values but their use of terminology was not strong.	SMSC present in RE but not a strength	Academy Converter	Inadequate
-	Pupils' cultural development, however, is less well developed. Pupils say that they enjoyed their 'diversity day' and learning about the lives of their Sikh, Muslim and Christian visitors. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to further extend their knowledge and experience of other countries and cultures	Limited opportunities for encounters with people from different religions and beliefs	Community	Inadequate
-	- Teachers promote pupils' cultural development with varying degrees of success. Pupils are taught about a range of religions in Religious Education , including Hinduism and Sikhism. However, their knowledge and understanding of different faiths are quite limited.	Knowledge of different faiths is quite limited	Community	Requires improvement
	OFSTED comment	Good practice	Type of school	Overall judgement
+	- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Study of Religious Education (RE) in Years 7 to 11 is 'interesting and relevant' to pupils and it is helping to raise their awareness of moral and ethical issues.	RE is interesting and relevant Raised awareness of moral and ethical issues	Community	Good
+	- Consistently high performing subjects at GCSE are mathematics, Religious Studies and citizenship. The latter two subjects help to reinforce pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of fundamental British values.	High levels of performance contributing to SMSC and FBVs	Voluntary Aided	Good
+	- Pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of social, moral, cultural and spiritual matters. The curriculum reinforces this understanding well in tutor time, Religious Education lessons, assemblies and the range of trips available	Sound understanding reinforced in RE And trips and visits	Sponsor led	Inadequate

5. Leadership

OFSTED comment	Area of concern	Type of school	Overall judgement
 - Pupils' progress in Religious Education and citizenship is particularly slow . Although leaders are aware of the poor outcomes in these subjects, further analysis is needed to understand why pupils are not achieving as well as they should.	Slow progress and poor outcomes Lack of understanding about the reasons for this	Sponsor-led academy	Requires improvement
 - Improve the quality of leadership and management by:... ensuring compliance with the statutory requirements for the teaching of Religious Education	Non-compliance with statutory requirements for RE	Community	Inadequate
 -leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to the teaching of religious education , careers, British values and personal, social, health and economic education	Pupils do not receive their entitlement to RE	Community	Inadequate
- Despite their best efforts, leaders are unable to recruit enough teachers in science, English, mathematics and Religious Education. Consequently, some pupils are regularly taught by supply teachers. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress.	Insufficient RE teachers Regular teaching by supply teachers Negative impact on progress	Academy converter	Requires Improvement
OFSTED comment	Good practice	Type of school	Overall judgement
 - Improved leadership and teaching has resulted in improved GCSE outcomes in nearly all subjects, especially in English, history, Religious Studies, biology, physics, chemistry, construction, and health and social care.	Improved leadership Improved teaching	Sponsor-led academy	Good
 - New leadership in English, science, Religious Education, humanities, French, design technology, business and information technology is invigorating the teaching and learning , and good practice is shared with teachers . These departments are now growing in strength.	Strong middle-leaders Sharing good practice Invigorated teaching and learning	Voluntary Aided	Good
 - The school has received support from a national leader in education, the Principal from [name of academy], to strengthen leadership in the school. It has also used support from [name of schools] to check and improve pupils' progress in mathematics, science, history, geography and Religious Education .	Working with neighbouring schools	Foundation	Good