

# Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010



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# 1 Context

## About this guidance

The purpose of this publication, produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), is to support the provision of high-quality religious education (RE) in maintained schools in England. It provides clear non-statutory guidance about RE in the curriculum and the roles of those who have a responsibility for, involvement in or interest in the subject. The guidance is intended for:

- local authorities (LAs), standing advisory councils on religious education (SACREs) and agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs)
- governors, headteachers, curriculum planners, teachers and trainee teachers of RE and others in maintained schools
- educational agencies, advisers, inspectors and consultants
- providers of initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD), trainers and mentors
- representatives of religion and belief groups locally and nationally
- RE professional bodies, national and local.

This guidance does not constitute an authoritative interpretation of the law; that is a matter for the courts.

## Scope of the guidance

This guidance replaces the elements of Circular 1/94 that relate to RE and explains that RE is a distinctive but core part of the basic curriculum for maintained schools in England.<sup>1</sup> It relates to the Secretary of State's duty in relation to the curriculum. The curriculum for a maintained school must be a balanced and broadly based one which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.'<sup>2</sup>

It also provides checklists, case studies and links to relevant websites for people involved in designing and teaching RE.

## Why updated guidance for RE?

RE is an important curriculum subject. It is important in its own right and also makes a unique contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and supports wider community cohesion. The Government is keen to ensure all pupils receive high-quality RE.

A number of important changes have taken place not just since 1994 but also since 2004 when the non-statutory national framework for RE ('the

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<sup>1</sup> Section 80(1), Education Act 2002

<sup>2</sup> Section 79 (1), School Standards and Framework Act

Framework') was published.

In particular new illustrative RE programmes of study for secondary education were published in 2007 and a new RE programme of learning for primary education in January 2010. These effectively replace pages 19-30 of the Framework and provide a basis for LAs, SACREs and their ASCs to develop statutory local syllabuses and for schools in certain cases to determine their own individual syllabuses.

There have also been changes in both educational structures and in approaches to the wider curriculum:

- The *Every Child Matters* agenda and the *Children's Plan* have placed increased emphasis on personalisation and on the development of the whole child or young person in social and emotional as well as cognitive terms.
- New types of school have come into existence, such as academies, and provision for children's early years has been extended. Each contributes to an educational vision which now routinely caters for the needs of young people up to the age of 19.
- The first minority faith schools to open in the state sector were Jewish. Since 1997, educational provision has included the establishment of the first maintained Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools as voluntary-aided schools and the establishment of new Jewish voluntary-aided maintained schools.
- The curriculum is less prescriptive as to content than it was. Schools have the flexibility to provide more coherent and integrated cross-curricular learning experiences to complement discrete subject teaching tailored to the needs of their pupils and community. In practice this means that subjects such as RE, history or citizenship might be taught discretely but also together within a humanities framework, with links to history and citizenship. Some schools might choose to focus on intensive teaching of RE in particular years. Consequently individual subjects may not feature in the curriculum under their traditional names or indeed be taught always in discrete subject areas.
- Cross-curricular dimensions such as identity, cultural diversity and community cohesion provide important unifying themes that help young people make sense of the world and give education relevance. They reflect the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society and can provide a focus for work within and between subjects and across the curriculum as a whole.
- Reflecting this flexibility the inspection of maintained schools by Ofsted focuses on school improvement, on educational outcomes for subjects, and on the curriculum as a whole, rather than on the time and detailed content devoted to individual subjects. It is also concerned with the well-being of every pupil.

However while schools are free to decide when and how subjects are taught and how much time is spent on each subject, they remain responsible for implementing the legally required syllabus (whether the locally agreed syllabus or their individual one) and for monitoring pupils' progress.

## **The wider context for RE**

The UK has a rich heritage of culture and diversity. This is continuing today in an era of globalisation and an increasingly interdependent world. Religion and belief for many people forms a crucial part of their culture and identity.

Religion and beliefs have become more visible in public life locally, nationally and internationally. The impact of religion on society and public life is constantly brought to public attention through extensive media coverage. The rapid pace of development in scientific and medical technologies and the environmental debate continue to present new issues which raise religious, moral and social questions. The internet enables learning and encourages participation in public discussion of issues in a new and revolutionary way.

## 2 The importance of RE

Religion and beliefs inform our values and are reflected in what we say and how we behave. RE is an important subject in itself, developing an individual's knowledge and understanding of the religions and beliefs which form part of contemporary society.

Religious education provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It can develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, of other principal religions, other religious traditions and worldviews that offer answers to questions such as these.

RE also contributes to pupils' personal development and well-being and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. RE can also make important contributions to other parts of the school curriculum such as citizenship, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE education), the humanities, education for sustainable development and others. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development, deepening the understanding of the significance of religion in the lives of others – individually, communally and cross-culturally.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

Section 78 (1) of the 2002 Education Act states that all pupils should follow a balanced and broadly based curriculum which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'. Learning about and from religions and beliefs, through the distinct knowledge, understanding and skills contained in RE within a broad-based curriculum, is essential to achieving these aims. Exploring the concepts of religion and belief and their roles in the spiritual, moral and cultural lives of people in a diverse society helps individuals develop moral awareness and social understanding.

### **Personal development and well-being**

RE plays an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning. It helps children and young people become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. It gives them the knowledge, skills and understanding to discern and value truth and goodness, strengthening their capacity for making moral judgements and for evaluating different types of commitment to make positive and healthy choices.

### **Community cohesion**

RE makes an important contribution to a school's duty to promote community cohesion. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination. Effective RE will promote community cohesion at

each of the four levels outlined in DCSF guidance.<sup>3</sup>

**The school community** – RE provides a positive context within which the diversity of cultures, beliefs and values can be celebrated and explored.

- **The community within which the school is located** – RE provides opportunities to investigate patterns of diversity of religion and belief and forge links with different groups in the local area.
- **The UK community** – a major focus of RE is the study of diversity of religion and belief in the UK and how this influences national life.
- **The global community** – RE involves the study of matters of global significance recognising the diversity of religion and belief and its impact on world issues.

RE subject matter gives particular opportunities to promote an ethos of respect for others, challenge stereotypes and build understanding of other cultures and beliefs. This contributes to promoting a positive and inclusive school ethos that champions democratic values and human rights.

In summary, religious education for children and young people:

- **provokes challenging questions** about the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs, the self, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, and religious traditions that examine these questions, fostering personal reflection and spiritual development
- **encourages pupils to explore their own beliefs** (whether they are religious or non-religious), in the light of what they learn, as they examine issues of religious belief and faith and how these impact on personal, institutional and social ethics; and to express their responses. This also builds resilience to anti-democratic or extremist narratives
- **enables pupils to build their sense of identity and belonging**, which helps them flourish within their communities and as citizens in a diverse society
- **teaches pupils to develop respect for others**, including people with different faiths and beliefs, and helps to challenge prejudice
- **prompts pupils to consider their responsibilities** to themselves and to others, and to explore how they might contribute to their communities and to wider society. It encourages empathy, generosity and compassion.

RE has an important part to play as part of a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum to which all pupils are entitled. High quality learning experiences in

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=11635>

RE are designed and provided by careful planning through locally agreed syllabuses and in schools, taking into account the need to offer breadth of content, depth of learning and coherence between concepts, skills and content.

## 3 The legal framework, rights and responsibilities

### The legal basis of RE in the curriculum of maintained schools

Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The key document in determining the teaching of RE is the locally agreed syllabus within the LA concerned (see 'Agreed syllabus', p.14). Schools designated as having a religious character are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses. LAs must, however, ensure that the agreed syllabus for their area is consistent with Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996, which requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

Schools are not obliged to provide RE to pupils who are under compulsory school age (section 80(2)(a) of the Education Act 2002), although there are many instances of good practice where RE is taught to these pupils. Separate legislative provision on RE is made for maintained special schools. Regulations<sup>4</sup> covering maintained special schools require them to ensure that, as far as practicable, a pupil receives RE.

### The role and responsibility of the LA

Each LA must:

- establish a permanent body called a standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE).<sup>5</sup> LAs must appoint representatives to each of four committees, representing respectively:
  - Group A: Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area
  - Group B: the Church of England
  - Group C: teacher associations
  - Group D: the LA

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<sup>4</sup> Regulation 5A, Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Consolidation) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/3455

<sup>5</sup> Section 390, Education Act 1996

- establish an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC) to review the agreed syllabus for RE adopted by the LA.<sup>6</sup> This may have common membership with the SACRE but is a separate entity and must therefore be separately convened
- institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus within five years of the last review, and subsequently every five years after the completion of each further review
- appoint members of the committees represented on the ASC<sup>7</sup>
- ensure that the composition of Group A on a SACRE and Committee A on an ASC is broadly representative of the proportionate strengths of the denominations and religions in the area. The statutory provisions recognise that there will be occasions when the interest of efficiency overrides the requirement for directly proportionate representation<sup>8</sup>
- take all reasonable steps when appointing a person to be a member of a group on a SACRE or a committee of an ASC to represent any religion, denomination or association, to ensure the person appointed is representative of the religion, denomination or associations in question.<sup>9</sup>

To ensure that people being considered for appointment to SACREs and ASCs are representative, it is normal for LAs to seek nominations from the organisations that have a right of representation on each of the groups or committees. While LAs should seek nominations separately for membership of SACREs and ASCs, as these are separate organisations with different functions, they may request that consideration be given by nominating bodies to nominating the same individuals for membership of both the SACRE and the ASC. There is nothing restricting membership of the LA group (SACRE) or committee (ASC) to elected members. LAs are free to include senior LA officers or others whom they consider can appropriately represent the authority.

An LA should fund and support a SACRE and an ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to constitute or convene each of these bodies and to enable them effectively to carry out their functions.

#### An LA may:

- decide on matters to refer to its SACRE, including in particular methods of teaching, choice of teaching material and provision of teacher training<sup>10</sup>
- give its SACRE a role in the local statutory complaints procedure under Section 409 of the Education Act 1996.

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<sup>6</sup> Schedule 31(2), Education Act 1996

<sup>7</sup> Schedule 31(4), Education Act 1996

<sup>8</sup> Section 390, Schedule 31(4), Education Act 1996

<sup>9</sup> Schedule 31(7), Education Act 1996; Section 392(2), Education Act 1996

<sup>10</sup> Section 391(1)(a), Education Act 1996

## The role and responsibility of a SACRE

### A SACRE must:

- advise the LA on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions, whether in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit<sup>11</sup>
- publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the LA, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the LA<sup>12</sup>
- send a copy of the report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)<sup>13</sup>
- meet in public unless confidential information is to be disclosed<sup>14</sup>
- make minutes of its meetings available for inspection at the LA's offices (so far as the minutes relate to the parts of meetings that were open to the public). There are also provisions about public access to the agenda and reports for meetings.<sup>15</sup>

### A SACRE should:

- monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus
- provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; provide advice to the LA and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training
- in partnership with its LA, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality teaching and learning of RE
- offer advice to the LA, and through the LA to schools, concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum.

### A SACRE may:

- require its LA to review the agreed syllabus and, if after discussion a vote is taken on this matter, the LA group on SACRE is not

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<sup>11</sup> Section 391(1)(a), Education Act 1996

<sup>12</sup> Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996

<sup>13</sup> Section 391(10), Education Act 1996

<sup>14</sup> Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994, SI 1994/1304

<sup>15</sup> Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994, SI 1994/1304

entitled to cast a vote.<sup>16</sup> A majority decision by the three other committees is sufficient

- decide to advise the LA on matters related to its functions to the LA – equally, an LA may decide to refer matters to its SACRE<sup>17</sup>
- co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups<sup>18</sup> – such co-opted members may provide educational expertise, young peoples' views or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multi-cultural society.

However, on any question to be decided by a SACRE, its constituent groups each have a single vote but co-opted members do not have a vote.<sup>19</sup>

Decisions within a group do not require unanimity. Each group must regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock. Many SACREs have chosen to adopt a constitution to regulate their proceedings and ways of working.

## The role and responsibility of an ASC

Every LA is required to establish and support an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC).

An ASC must:

- produce and recommend to the LA an agreed syllabus for RE which is educationally sound and meets legal requirements – as indicated earlier, this process should take account of the illustrative primary programme of learning and secondary programme of study but is in no way bound by them
- with any sub-committee it may appoint,<sup>20</sup> meet in public, subject to exceptions in relation to confidentiality<sup>21</sup>
- unanimously recommend a syllabus for adoption by the LA (each committee having a single vote) - there are provisions for the Secretary of State to become involved where an ASC is not unanimous<sup>22</sup>
- include on any sub-committee at least one member of each of its constituent committees.

An ASC may specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus. In recommending a syllabus the ASC may not specify the amount of curriculum time that must be allocated to RE by schools, but they may provide an estimate of how much time their syllabus would require, to help schools to plan their timetable.

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<sup>16</sup> Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

<sup>17</sup> Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

<sup>18</sup> Section 390(3), Education Act 1996

<sup>19</sup> Section 390(7) and Section 391(4), Education Act 1996

<sup>20</sup> Schedule 31(6), Education Act 1996

<sup>21</sup> Regulation 3, S1 1994/1304

<sup>22</sup> Schedule 31(10), Education Act 1996

## Membership of an ASC

- An ASC is required to be made up of four committees<sup>23</sup> (see 'LA role', p.10).
- Committee A – Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the opinion of the LA, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area;
- Committee B - the Church of England
- Committee C - teacher associations
- Committee D - the LA.

There is no legal provision for an ASC to include co-opted members, but it can seek the advice it considers appropriate from those it considers appropriate, to inform the development of effective RE provision in its area.

## The agreed syllabus

The locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus of RE prepared under Schedule 31 to the Education Act 1996 and adopted by the LA under that schedule. It must be followed in maintained schools without a designated denomination.

Once adopted by the LA, the agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught and can include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages.

Every locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.<sup>24</sup>

The law does not define what the principal religions represented in Great Britain are. ASCs can decide which are the principal religions represented in Great Britain, other than Christianity, to be included in their agreed syllabus.

Agreed syllabuses in any community school and any foundation, voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled school without a religious character cannot require RE to be provided by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular religious denomination.<sup>25</sup>

This prohibition does not extend to the study of catechisms and formularies.

## The RE curriculum in different types of schools

In all maintained schools RE must be taught according to either the locally agreed syllabus or in accordance with the school's designated religion or religious denomination, or in certain cases the trust deed relating to the school.

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<sup>23</sup> Section 390(2) Education Act 1996; Schedule 31, para 4, Education Act 1996

<sup>24</sup> Section 375, Education Act 1996

<sup>25</sup> Para 3 of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

## **Community, foundation and voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools without a religious character**

RE must be taught according to the locally agreed syllabus adopted by the LA by which the school is maintained.

## **Foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character**

RE provision in foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character is to be provided in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus. However, where the parent of any pupil at the school requests that RE is provided in accordance with provisions of the trust deed relating to the school (or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, in accordance with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character), then the governors must make arrangements for securing that RE is provided to the pupil in accordance with the relevant religion for up to two periods a week unless they are satisfied that there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so.<sup>26</sup>

## **Voluntary-aided schools with a religious character**

In these schools RE is to be determined by the governors and in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed relating to the school or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character.

However, where parents prefer their children to receive RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus, and they cannot reasonably or conveniently send their children to a school where the syllabus is in use, then the governing body must make arrangements for RE to be provided to the children within the school in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus unless they are satisfied that there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so.

If the LA is satisfied that the governing body is unwilling to make such arrangements, the LA must make them instead.<sup>27</sup>

## **Academies**

Academies are all-ability, state-funded schools managed by independent sponsors, established under Section 482 of the Education Act 1996. Some academies have a religious character.

All academies are required, through their funding agreements, to teach RE.

- For academies without a religious character, this will be the locally agreed syllabus

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<sup>26</sup> Schedule 19(3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

<sup>27</sup> Schedule 19(2), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

- For denominational academies with a religious character (Church of England or Roman Catholic – but also Muslim and most Jewish academies), this will be in line with the denominational syllabus.
- For non-denominational (such as Christian) faith academies this can be either of the above, depending on the wishes of the sponsor and what is agreed by Ministers.

## Inspection

Whereas RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus in maintained schools is inspected by Ofsted in the course of the periodic inspection of a school (under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005), it is for the governing body of foundation and voluntary schools with a religious character to ensure that they are inspected at regular intervals (Section 48 of the Education Act 2005). The person who conducts the inspection is chosen by the governing body, or by the foundation governors in the case of a voluntary-controlled school, in consultation with a person prescribed in relation to the relevant designated religion or denomination. The person carrying out the inspection must prepare a report on the quality of denominational education.

All academies are inspected on the quality of their RE by Ofsted as part of the normal inspections regime. All denominational faith academies are required to be inspected by their religious body on the quality of their RE.

## The responsibilities of governors and headteachers

Governing bodies and headteachers, like LAs, must:

- ensure that RE is provided as part of the school's basic curriculum, following the locally agreed syllabus, unless they are schools with a religious character which are free to determine their own syllabus
- provide an annual report to parents or carers giving brief particulars of progress and achievements in all subjects including RE.<sup>28</sup>

## RE provision and the workforce

Community schools and foundation and voluntary schools with no religious character

In community schools, foundation and voluntary schools without a religious character and community and foundation special schools no-one can be disqualified from employment on the grounds of their religious opinions or practices. No teacher can be discriminated against in terms of pay or promotion on the grounds of their religious opinions or practices or on the basis of whether or not they teach RE.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Regulation 6, Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, SI 2005/1437

<sup>29</sup> Sections 59(1) and (3) and 60(1) to (3), Standards and Framework Act 1998

## Foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character

Foundation or voluntary-controlled schools designated as having a religious character must have teachers who have been selected for their suitability to teach RE ('reserved teachers'), but no more than one-fifth can be selected on that basis. No-one who is not a 'reserved teacher' can be disqualified from employment on the grounds of their religious opinions or practices. No teacher who is not a reserved teacher can be discriminated against in terms of pay or promotion on the grounds of their religious opinions or practices or on the basis of whether or not they teach RE. In dealing with reserved teachers, preference may be given when appointing or promoting teachers, or deciding about their remuneration, to teachers whose religious opinions or practices are in accordance with the tenets of that religious character or who are willing to teach RE at the school in accordance with those tenets.

In appointing a headteacher for such a school (where the head is not also to be a reserved teacher), the person's ability and suitability to preserve and develop the religious character of the school may be taken into account.<sup>30</sup>

## Voluntary-aided schools with a religious character

In voluntary-aided schools designated as having a religious character preference may be given when appointing or promoting teachers, or deciding about their remuneration, to teachers whose religious opinions or practices are in accordance with the tenets of that religious character or who are willing to teach RE at the school in accordance with those tenets.<sup>31</sup>

Certain teachers cannot be required to teach RE. The category extends to teachers in community and foundation and voluntary schools without a religious character, and teachers in foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character who are not 'reserved teachers'.<sup>32</sup>

## Parents and pupils

### Parents

Parents and carers can obtain information on their child's RE from the LA or school. They should receive information from the school on how their child is progressing in the subject.

The parent of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school has the right to request that the pupil be excused from all or part of the RE provided. They do not have to provide a reason and the school must comply with their request. See 'The right of withdrawal', p.27).

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<sup>30</sup> Sections 60(1) and (4), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

<sup>31</sup> Sections 58–60, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

<sup>32</sup> Sections 59(1) and (3) and 60(1) to (3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

## **Pupils**

All pupils are entitled to receive RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum at school which promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## **Complaints**

Every school governing body and LA is required by law to have an accessible and easily understood route through which parents and others can make a complaint about school or other educational matters, including RE. A copy of the local complaints procedure should be available in each school and the school prospectus must make reference to it. LAs can seek advice from their SACREs in addressing complaints about RE.

As far as RE is concerned, the complaints procedure of an LA should fully acknowledge the rights of the governing bodies of schools where they are responsible for RE (voluntary-aided and academies). The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 includes provisions to enable, once commenced, the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate where individual issues at school level cannot be resolved. Legislation is planned to commence across a small number of LAs from April 2010, to include further LAs (around 10 to 15) in September 2010 and to roll out across all LAs from September 2011.

## 4 Guidance on providing high-quality RE

### Good practice for LAs working in partnership with their SACREs and ASCs

The partnership between LAs and their SACREs and ASCs is a key factor in the provision of effective RE for all pupils. A positive joint approach allows an LA to draw on the input of local religious groups and teachers as well as elected members. In many cases the partnership goes further than the agreed syllabus and makes an important contribution to the promotion of community cohesion.

The SACRE Self-Evaluation Tool, produced in 2005, includes a useful description of an effective partnership.<sup>33</sup>

#### Case study - LA/SACRE partnership

An LA reviewed the workings of its SACRE and identified as a problem the mutual lack of communication. It also realised that it was not making the most of the role RE could play in promoting community cohesion. It became clear that the SACRE needed more support if it were to operate effectively. The LA appointed a senior officer to attend SACRE meetings and report back to other council bodies, including its race equality service. It also prioritised the provision of expert support and appointed an adviser for RE, recognising the need for someone who could work with schools on behalf of the SACRE to inspire and challenge. The LA wanted to develop RE's contribution to community cohesion and encouraged this by supporting events for pupils such as a 'Beliefs and the environment' week, a young people's SACRE and a 'Religions and beliefs in our area' website. The LA drew on SACRE expertise by inviting some of its members to give talks to the LA's workforce on each of the faith and belief traditions represented. This included some traditions which were strong locally and others which were important from a national and global perspective. The approach encouraged the SACRE's desire for inclusive membership, while taking seriously the need to ensure representation of the local community. The LA supported a SACRE annual outreach event in the form of a lecture and refreshments, and the development of an effective SACRE website. It also provided data for the SACRE to help it carry out the task of monitoring standards in RE.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/15623.aspx>

### **Case study: Inter-faith and inter-LA collaboration**

A local authority in a diverse city decided to invite its SACRE to lead an inter-faith project. Tensions between different ethnic and religious groups were affecting life in the city and the surrounding towns and villages in neighbouring authorities. High levels of social and economic deprivation were a factor in some areas.

The SACRE helped to establish an inter-faith centre with a remit to build resources and networks focusing on the contribution of RE to inter-faith dialogue and community involvement. The centre was managed jointly and shared as a community resource by the neighbouring LAs. Membership included representatives from the Sikh, Buddhist, Chinese and African local communities. Over time the centre developed resources and opened its doors to community groups, offering facilities for consultation and education for the whole community, including schools and providers of initial teacher training. The work of the centre made a positive impact on the quality of RE in local schools, as well as facilitating faith-led enterprise initiatives to stimulate the local economy.

### **Case study: LA–SACRE consultation**

The SACRE regularly participates in its LA's strategic development. In 2008, the SACRE was consulted about:

- the Comprehensive Equalities Scheme (CES) 2008–11
- the Community Strategy (SCS) 2007–20
- the Regeneration Strategy 2007–20.

Members' views were sought on key short-, medium- and long-term issues to be addressed and they were able to respond individually or to link the council to their faith communities for wider consultation. SACRE members raised issues to be addressed, such as:

- specific health, dietary and other needs of people of different faith (for example needs of women of different faiths to access a female doctor/dentist)
- working with local hospitals on health-related issues, including how to deal with the death of a patient belonging to a particular faith
- provision of burial sites
- community safety
- the particular needs of young people from their communities.

The SACRE was involved in the development of the borough's anti-bullying strategy in 2008, particularly in articulating the needs of young people being subjected to bullying at school because of their faith. In 2009, the views and perspectives of faith members of the SACRE were sought for a borough survey on a range of issues to do with community cohesion in the area.

## SACRE membership

SACREs have many opportunities to engage all their members as stakeholders and ambassadors of RE. Increasingly, LAs and SACREs are adopting innovative good practice by co-opting representatives of pupils on their SACREs, or by having parallel young people's SACREs. However, on any question to be decided by a SACRE, its constituent groups each have a single vote but co-opted members do not have a vote.<sup>34</sup> Decisions within a group do not require unanimity. Each group must regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock. Many SACREs have chosen to adopt a constitution to regulate their proceedings and ways of working.

In a highly effective SACRE:

'members will have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, and will seek to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities. Meetings will be very purposeful and focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. There will be a very effective partnership with the LA, and SACREs will be well supported by subject specialist advice, training and funding. They will be very well informed about the quality and provision for RE...in schools, and about wider LA and national priorities and developments. The process of reviewing, revising, implementing and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus will be very robust, ensuring that schools are well supported in their work.'

(*SACREs and Self-evaluation – a guide*, Ofsted, May 2005, HMI 2467)

### Case study: SACRE membership

A SACRE had several vacancies that needed to be filled and decided to carry out a review of membership in partnership with the LA. This brought to attention the fact that there were significant religious communities in the area not currently represented on Group A, that there were no representatives of higher education on Group C, and that the voices of the young people most affected by the SACRE's work, the pupils, were entirely absent. It was decided that in the interests of inclusion the membership should be expanded to include a Bahá'í representative and through co-option to include young people as well as a Humanist representative and somebody from a nearby university. Formal votes were very rarely necessary, and the SACRE and LA agreed that since the statutory requirement was for each group, not each individual representative, to have a single vote, there was no problem about these additional new members contributing to the decision making process.

<sup>34</sup> Section 390(7) and Section 391(4), Education Act 1996

## SACREs and community cohesion

SACREs have an important role to play in promoting community cohesion, emphasised in the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) guidelines *Face to face and side by side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*: 'Effective RE can play a key part in promoting inter-faith understanding and dialogue and can address the prejudices brought about by a shallow knowledge of world religions and provides pupils with a safe forum for the discussion of controversial issues...SACREs, where properly supported by the LA, can act as powerful vehicles for building, appreciating and managing differences in beliefs and values in schools, education more widely and the local community. They are a partnership between faith communities in each local area and with the LA and schools. SACREs are predominantly focused on education but are also a statutory group that can be consulted on inter faith issues, act as sounding boards or work in partnership on broader initiatives.'

### Case study: A SACRE and the curriculum

One SACRE has supported teaching and learning in RE through a project involving a course for primary, secondary and special schools, which enables schools to provide recognition of progression for children and young people, matching the colours of the rainbow with the eight levels of the locally agreed syllabus for RE. This was a way of celebrating the achievement of children and young people that could be shared with and valued by parents and employers.

## ASCs and the agreed syllabus

To ensure high quality RE, it is recommended that the agreed syllabus, as well as meeting legal requirements (see 'Agreed syllabus', p.14), should:

- provide a clear structure which users find easy to follow and which highlights the contribution of RE to the curriculum
- provide opportunities and examples to support the cross-curricular dimensions of the curriculum
- ensure that learning in RE has both continuity and progression
- have clear statements about expected standards and assessment arrangements
- provide clear guidance about the process of learning that should underpin the planning of RE
- provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of different ages and abilities - these should be progressive and demanding but realistic

- reflect curriculum developments nationally, such as the three aims of the curriculum, the use of key concepts, essential knowledge, key skills (including personal, learning and thinking skills) and the breadth of content, as set out in the RE programmes of study and learning.

## Breadth and depth in the agreed syllabus

Breadth and depth in RE for all pupils can be achieved if the following are taken into account:

- Pupils should develop understanding of concepts and mastery of skills to make sense of religion and belief, at an appropriate level of challenge for their age.
  - RE should provide opportunities for pupils to develop positive attitudes and values and to reflect and relate their learning in RE to their own experience.
  - Building on the statutory requirements, it is recommended that there should be a wide ranging study of religion and belief across the key stages as a whole.
  - Not all religions need to be studied at the same depth or in each key stage, but all that are studied should be studied in a way that is coherent and promotes progression.
  - Pupils should have the opportunity to learn that there are those who do not hold religious beliefs and have their own philosophical perspectives, and subject matter should facilitate integration and promotion of shared values.
  - The study of religion should be based on the legal requirements and provide an appropriate balance between and within Christianity, other principal religions, and, where appropriate other religious traditions and worldviews, across the key stages as a whole, making appropriate links with other parts of the curriculum and its cross-curricular dimensions.
  - The breadth of study should take account of the four levels of community cohesion which all maintained schools are now obliged to promote. Decisions by SACREs and ASCs about the religions, other than Christianity, to be studied should take account of the balance of religion within:
    - the school community
    - the community within which the school is located
    - the UK community
    - the global community.

### Case study: How an ASC might handle breadth and balance within an integrated curriculum

- **Systematic study** that looks at one or more religion and non-religious view in detail, by exploring some of its key concepts, such as beliefs, teaching and sources, or values and commitments. For example, a major unit in Year 5 on Christianity could include a study of how Christian worship and practice reflects the life and teachings of Jesus; or in a Year 9 unit comparing Judaism and Humanism, examples could focus on the beliefs, teachings and sources that motivate them to take social action to improve the world.
- **Thematic study** that looks at a question, concept or issue and explores it in relation to one or more religions or beliefs, by enquiring into how and why the questions are answered. For example, a Year 4 unit on practices and ways of life could investigate how and why some people observe religious occasions at home, including Christian ways of marking Lent and Muslim ways of marking the month of Ramadan. A Year 8 unit on environmental campaigners could look at the religious and non-religious values and commitments that lead some people to take action against roads, runways or the treatment of animals. A Year 11 unit on fair trade, just war or ending life could explore the beliefs and commitments of Buddhists and Bahá'ís.
- **Cross-curricular study** that uses key concepts or processes from two or more subjects to engage pupils in a challenging exploration. For example, a Year 6 unit could use the investigation processes in science and RE to generate questions about the concept of truth in relation to different accounts of the origin of the universe. A Year 7 unit could address the historical concept of causation, the citizenship concept of rights and the RE concept of identity to investigate migration, with specific reference to the Jain and Zoroastrian communities and the particular culture and values they have contributed to British society.

By offering a balance of all three, RE syllabuses can promote pupils' understanding of the different impacts that religion and belief have on individuals and communities and enhance pupils' awareness of the kinds of questions raised by religion and ethics and how different religions answer them.

## Checklist for an effective partnership between an LA and its SACRE/ASC

- Do the LA and its SACRE/ASC carry out their statutory duties?
- Is SACRE/ASC properly resourced and well supported by subject specialist advice and training?
- Do members of the SACRE/ASC have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, seeking to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities?
- Are SACRE/ASC meetings purposeful and focused on the major priorities of improving the quality of RE in schools?
- Is the SACRE/ASC well informed about the quality of RE in schools and about wider LA and national priorities and developments affecting the subject?
- Has the LA adopted a high quality agreed syllabus that provides a good grounding for planning, teaching and learning in RE and enables the schools to deliver RE as part of a coherent curriculum?
- Is there an effective process of reviewing, revising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus?
- How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to help teachers and schools raise standards in RE and the quality of RE teaching?
- How far does the SACRE contribute effectively to the community cohesion agenda by supporting inclusion in schools and improving engagement within the community?

## 5 Good practice for school governors and headteachers

### All schools

As well as meeting the legal requirements (see 'Legal framework, rights and responsibilities', p.10), schools should ensure that RE is:

- of a high standard, where expectations are clear to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public
- coherent and shows progression, particularly across the transitions of the key stages and post 16
- contributing to the school's duty to promote community cohesion and high standards of achievement
- well understood by the school community, who have confidence in the school's provision and achievement.

### Every Child Matters

Schools should consider how RE contributes to the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* by:

- offering information on and insights into the impact of beliefs, practices and values, and whether they might be healthy or unhealthy
- allowing pupils to explore the value of safety in relation to attitudes to authority, property, relationships and the impact of ideas, and to develop social skills and empathy for others in considering these issues
- challenging pupils in ways that stimulate them and give them an enjoyment of learning, a sense of achievement leading to better motivation, and a belief in their capacity to respond well to people and ideas
- fostering a sense of self-awareness, belonging and identity that manifests itself in positive participation in school and community life
- raising issues of immediate and future relevance to pupils' economic well-being, for example attitudes to wealth and poverty, skills for living and working in a diverse society, the ethics of war and peace, sustaining the planet, and the use of money.

### The responsibilities of governors and headteachers

As well as fulfilling their legal obligations, the governing body and headteacher should also make sure that:

- all pupils make progress in achieving the learning objectives of the RE curriculum
- the subject is well led and effectively managed and that standards and achievement in RE and the quality of the provision are subject to regular and effective self-evaluation
- those teaching RE are suitably qualified and trained in the subject and have regular and effective opportunities for CPD
- teachers are aware of RE's contribution in developing pupils' understanding of religion and belief and its impact as part of the duty to promote community cohesion
- where appropriate, pupils have opportunities to take courses leading to an accredited qualification in the subject
- teachers explore how new pedagogies and technology can be fully utilised to support RE learning objectives and promote community cohesion
- clear information is provided for parents on the RE curriculum and the right to withdraw
- teachers are aware that they do not have to teach RE unless specifically appointed to do so
- RE is resourced, staffed and timetabled so that the school can fulfil its legal obligations on RE and pupils can make good progress
- where there are insufficient teachers in a school who are prepared to teach RE, the headteacher ensures that pupils receive their entitlement to RE. In these circumstances, headteachers might wish to seek advice from their LA or SACRE.

## **Teachers and the school workforce**

A well-trained and confident workforce is crucial in ensuring good-quality RE. In addition to RE specialists, other teachers or members of the children's workforce can contribute to the teaching of RE, regardless of their personal beliefs.

School action plans should identify the CPD needs of staff in relation to RE. Depending on their status, schools may receive advice on staff development issues from the SACRE, LA advisory staff and/or other sources. The same bodies may offer training courses for serving teachers and other opportunities for professional development, as may a range of other providers.

## **Managing the right of withdrawal**

Schools should ensure that parents who want to withdraw their children from RE are aware of the RE syllabus and that it is relevant to all pupils and respects their own personal beliefs. They should be made aware of its learning objectives and what is covered in the RE curriculum and should be given the opportunity to discuss this, if they wish. The school may also wish to

review such a request each year, in discussion with the parents.

However, the right of withdrawal does not extend to other areas of the curriculum when, as may happen on occasion, spontaneous questions on religious matters are raised by pupils or there are issues related to religion that arise in other subjects such as history or citizenship. (See 'Legal framework, rights and responsibilities', p.10, for the legal requirements.)

The use of the right to withdraw should be at the instigation of parents (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over), and it should be made clear whether it is from the whole of the subject or specific parts of it. No reasons need be given.

Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from RE without influence from the school, although a school should ensure parents or carers are informed of this right and are aware of the educational objectives and content of the RE syllabus. In this way, parents can make an informed decision. Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right must be respected, and where RE is integrated in the curriculum, the school will need to discuss the arrangements with the parents or carers to explore how the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated. If pupils are withdrawn from RE, schools have a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Pupils will usually remain on school premises.

Where a pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parent wants the pupil to receive.<sup>35</sup> This RE could be provided at the school in question, or the pupil could be sent to another school where suitable RE is provided if this is reasonably convenient. If neither approach is practicable, outside arrangements can be made to provide the pupil with the kind of RE that the parent wants, and the pupil may be withdrawn from school for a reasonable period of time to allow them to attend this external RE.

Outside arrangements for RE are allowed as long as the LA is satisfied that any interference with the pupil's attendance at school resulting from the withdrawal will affect only the start or end of a school session.

If the school is a secondary school and parents have withdrawn a pupil from RE provided at the school and asked for alternative RE to be provided in accordance with the tenets of a particular religion or denomination, then the LA must either:

- provide facilities for the alternative RE to be given at the school unless there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so
- or
- agree to outside arrangements being made as long as no financial burden falls on the LA or school as a result of these arrangements.

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<sup>35</sup> Section 71(3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998

In the case of a pupil at a maintained boarding school where a sixth former, or the parents of a pupil below the sixth form, requests that the pupil be allowed to receive RE in accordance with the tenets of a particular religion or denomination outside school hours, the governing body must make arrangements to give the pupil a reasonable opportunity to do so. This could involve making facilities available at the school, but any such arrangements cannot be funded out of the school's budget or by the LA.<sup>36</sup>

### **Case study: Managing the right of withdrawal**

In one school, parents approached the head teacher with a request to discuss whether or not to withdraw their child from RE. The head teacher met them and showed them a copy of the locally agreed syllabus, together with the school's policy and scheme of work for RE. The parents were also invited to join an RE lesson to see how the school's policy worked in practice. This provided reassurance that the approach being adopted was one of genuine open enquiry which would respect the beliefs of all children. As a result, the parents decided not to exercise their right of withdrawal.

In another school, in Year 7 RE is taught in blocked topics as part of an integrated studies programme along with English, history, geography and citizenship. The teachers discussed the programme with the parents whose child had been withdrawn from RE and agreed to vary some of the work to accommodate the parents' wishes. The pupil took a full and active part in the lessons but was provided with slightly modified resources and tasks. As a result, the benefits of the integrated approach to teaching RE and the rights of the parents were both protected.

In a primary school, a number of parents from a local Jehovah's Witness community expressed a wish to withdraw their children from RE. The headteacher met with representatives from the community, including some of its leaders, to explain the school's approach to the subject. As a result of the meeting, the school developed a relationship of trust with the community and was able to identify those aspects of the RE programme which the parents were happy for the children to join and those from which the children would be withdrawn – mainly around the celebration of Christmas.

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<sup>36</sup> Section 71, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

## Checklist for governors and headteachers

- Do all pupils make progress in achieving the learning objectives of the RE curriculum?
- Is RE well led and effectively managed?
- Are standards, achievement and quality of provision in RE regularly and effectively self-evaluated?
- Are those teaching RE suitably qualified and trained in the subject? Do they have regular and effective opportunities for CPD?
- Are teachers aware of RE's contribution to developing pupils' understanding of religion and belief and its impact as part of the duty to promote community cohesion?
- Where appropriate, do pupils have opportunities to take courses leading to an accredited qualification in the subject?
- Is clear information provided for parents on the RE curriculum and the right to withdraw?
- Are teachers aware that they do not have to teach RE?
- Is RE resourced, staffed and timetabled in a way that means the school can fulfill its legal obligations on RE and pupils can make good progress?
- Where there are insufficient teachers in a school who are prepared to teach RE, does the headteacher ensure that pupils receive their RE entitlement?

## Checklist for managing the right of withdrawal

- Is the school careful to ensure that RE is of educational value to all pupils, whatever their belief background, thus reducing the likelihood of parental/carer requests for withdrawal?
- Does the school ensure that the nature, objectives and content of RE are shared with parents?
- Are parents or carers notified about plans for RE as part of the curriculum for the coming session for their child's class?
- Does the school have a procedure in place for parents or carers who want to withdraw children from RE?
- Does the organisation of the curriculum allow parents to exercise the right of withdrawal?
- What practical implications arise from a request by parents to withdraw a child from RE and how might they be addressed?
- Are all those who teach RE aware of the school's procedures?
- Are all teachers aware of their own right not to have to teach RE?

## 6 Good practice for people who manage, plan, teach and support RE

### Provision of RE in the curriculum

The legal requirements for the provision of RE in maintained schools do not specify any particular time allocation or how the curriculum should be organised. Schools are not required to teach subjects separately or to use their given titles, though there can be advantages in doing so. One subject can also be combined with another, or it can be taught in separate lessons, or a mixture of provision used, depending on the objectives of the curriculum being followed.

Schools should weigh the advantages of regular and coherent provision, say every week, against those of more flexible provision when more time can be allocated in one week, term or year than in another - as long as the programme of study required by the agreed syllabus is covered. They need to ensure that their RE provision includes a distinct body of knowledge and enables all pupils to make effective progress in achieving the RE learning outcomes. Schools also need to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision as part of their own self-evaluation process.

Each school decides which subjects to give more time to and, within a subject, which attitudes or skills to emphasise. The priority or emphasis might apply across the key stage, to particular year groups, to groups of pupils or to individuals. As well as meeting statutory requirements a school can maximise the contribution RE makes to raising standards and achievement - for example, through qualifications undertaken by pupils contributing to performance data at GCSE and A level.

### Curriculum planning in RE

The principles of good planning apply to RE as much as to any other subject in the curriculum. Planning for RE should ensure all pupils have a high quality, coherent and progressive experience of the subject. Schools are encouraged to use models of delivery which best suit the needs of the pupils, meet the requirements of the curriculum, and contribute to the cross-curricular dimensions of the wider curriculum. The statutory syllabus should therefore not only specify the RE curriculum to be taught in schools, but also be sufficiently flexible to enable schools to match the pattern of provision to the needs of pupils and be an integral part of the wider curriculum. It is recommended that pupils have the opportunity to gain public recognition of their achievement in RE. In deciding on any particular model of curriculum delivery, it is important to make provision for the parental right of withdrawal.

When schools are planning their RE provision, they need to consider three key questions:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How will we organise the learning?
- How will we measure success?

### Creative curriculum planning

Many schools have been exploring creative and flexible ways of providing RE. For example, at one school, primary pupils study stories and myths that introduce them to concepts of good and evil, fear, courage, conflict and justice, in ways that are safe, enjoyable and yet exciting. All religions and beliefs provide such stories. Listening to these and other tales, exploring their meanings and responding to the questions they raise can contribute to young children's mental and emotional well-being. One six-year-old, for instance, said:

'I like the story of Rama and Sita, and painting hands. I like the part when the monster goes away.'<sup>37</sup>

To help pupils lead safer, healthier and more fulfilled and productive lives, the study of issues such as crime and punishment, sex and relationships, addiction and dependency, diet and body image can give secondary pupils a stronger understanding of the reasons for criminal or harmful behaviour and its impact on individuals and society. One 16-year-old said:

'RE is one of my favourite subjects and the reason for that is that most of the time in lessons we discuss issues that make me look inside myself and think very deeply about the world, behaviour, my personality and my beliefs. I have learnt not only the facts about different religions but I have learnt a lot about myself.'

Good-practice examples include schools providing opportunities for:

- exploring controversial religious issues in the modern world – including media misrepresentations of religion
- representatives of 'seldom heard' religious communities to work with the school and develop confidence that their traditions are respected
- pupils with strong commitments to share their experience in a safe context and see that their religion or belief is valued and respected
- learning outside the classroom and inviting visitors to it, giving pupils the chance to interact with different religions and non-religious groups locally
- theme days or assemblies related to, for example, Holocaust Memorial Day – often working in partnership with other subjects, most notably citizenship.

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<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the quotations from pupils in this section are reproduced courtesy of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE).

Examples of particularly effective practice include:

- One headteacher saw RE as a context for analysing patterns of religious diversity in the area, forging links with local mosques and between mosques and local churches, and using these links to develop extended school and family learning opportunities.
- A school with a mainly white mono-cultural intake twinned with a school with a high percentage of pupils from the Muslim tradition to extend the curriculum enrichment opportunities for RE.
- Some schools use focused RE theme days to extend opportunities for pupils to explore cultural diversity in more depth, inviting in visitors, such as Indian dancers.
- A school with a mainly white ethnic intake investigated the range of parents with 'global' experience and invited them to contribute to RE and beyond. Another built links through a local inter-faith network project.

Schools should encourage pupils to play a full part in their own learning in RE, for example:

- **as learners**, by deploying skills, asking questions and exploring answers
- **as individuals**, using their own experience and background to reflect on questions of truth and morality and deeper meanings of life and death
- **as citizens**, promoting debate and dialogue, celebrating diversity, taking appropriate action, putting principles into action, for example as members of young person's SACREs.

### Case study: RE curriculum planning

One primary school decided to experiment with an alternative model of delivery for RE. Previously they had taught six half-term units of RE in 45-minute lessons every week throughout the year. They moved to a model of fewer but more concentrated units in which RE was taught for up to six hours per week in two- or three-week blocks. This provided more sustained challenging learning and enabled the teachers to make much stronger links between RE and other areas of the curriculum, especially literacy. The quality of learning in RE improved significantly and pupils were able to take much more responsibility for their learning.

### Case study: Reorganising the curriculum

In one secondary school, a decision was taken to re-organise the Year 7 curriculum for those pupils who arrived at the school with a low prior attainment and weaker basic skills. RE is taught with English, the other humanities subjects and ICT by two primary-trained teachers as part of an integrated studies programme. Elements of RE are taught in blocked units for up to six periods per week for two or three weeks, allowing strong links to be forged with literacy and the development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS). The provision is leading to some outstanding practice in the teaching of RE. Very imaginative planning, careful preparation and the skilful interlinking of work developing literacy, oracy and key skills with RE is resulting in some high quality group work, discussion, and oral presentation by the pupils.

## RE and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

While the statutory requirement for RE does not extend to children under compulsory school age, it can form a valuable part of the educational experience of children in the EYFS. It can contribute particularly to

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- creative development.<sup>38</sup>

## RE post 14

As RE remains statutory beyond the age of 14 for all pupils in schools, including pupils in the sixth form (except those withdrawn from lessons), it is important that it continues to be part of a coherent curriculum that enables them to draw on their own values and beliefs in making independent decisions and choices, as they prepare for adult life. For provision beyond the age of 14, there is an illustrative programme of study for Key Stage 4 in the revised secondary curriculum published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA).

RE for this age group should, among other aims, be relevant to pupils' needs and to the rest of their curriculum, and provide opportunities for pupils to:

- reflect on, express and justify their own opinions in light of their learning about and from religion and their study of religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual questions

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<sup>38</sup> <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/taxonomy/33692/33658/33694/46384>

- develop their own values and attitudes in order to recognise their rights and responsibilities in light of their learning about and from religions and beliefs
- relate their learning to the wider world, gaining a sense of personal autonomy in preparation for adult life
- develop skills that are useful in a wide range of careers and in adult life generally, especially skills of critical enquiry, creative problem-solving, and communication in a variety of media.

Particular care also needs to be taken if pupils are following alternative curriculum pathways, for example college-based vocational programmes, where pupils at Key Stage 4 or in a school sixth form may find themselves studying partly in a school and partly in a college of further education. It remains the responsibility of the school where a pupil is registered to ensure that the pupil receives their entitlement (except where their right of withdrawal has been exercised). Schools should ensure that appropriate provision for RE is made, and that it is coherent and of good quality. The school where a pupil is registered may arrange with a further education college for the required RE to be provided, wholly or partly, at the college. It may be possible for aspects of statutory RE to be covered in the context of another subject or qualification – for example, GCSE, AS level, A level, or the Diploma in Humanities and Social Sciences.

In deciding on any particular model of curriculum delivery it is important to take account of the **parental right of withdrawal**.

#### Case study: RE post 14

One school was faced with the problem that pupils on college-based courses were missing every other RE lesson in a fortnight's timetable. This fragmented their learning and severely limited their progress in the subject. For the RE experience to be more coherent, the school decided to make alternative provision for this group of pupils by organising a series of additional RE-related activities.

## Qualifications

There is no legal requirement that pupils must sit public examinations, but it is increasingly the case that pupils from age 14 onwards are given the opportunity to have their learning and achievement in RE publicly recognised through accredited qualifications. Since 1996 the number of pupils gaining qualifications in 'religious studies' (RS) has quadrupled. The development of GCSE (Short Course) RS has revolutionised RE in key stage 4 in many schools. Similarly, the numbers of pupils taking A level RS has more than doubled in the past 10 years, since the introduction of AS level RS.

ASCs should include in their agreed syllabuses a requirement that RE should

be taught at the following ages through accredited qualifications so that schools provide:

- for all pupils aged 14 to 16, at least one course in RE or RS leading to an approved qualification<sup>39</sup>
- for all pupils aged 16 to 19, courses in RE or RS leading to an approved qualification<sup>40</sup> that represents progression from 14-16.

Accredited courses include courses leading to qualifications with the title 'religious studies' and other approved courses that require the study of religion and ethics. The introduction of Diplomas offers a unique opportunity to identify and contribute to pupils' spiritual and moral development, and make appropriate links with the study of religion.

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<sup>39</sup> Section 96, Learning and Skills Act 2000

<sup>40</sup> Section 96, Learning and Skills Act 2000

## 7 Support for RE

### Religion and belief communities

Members of religions and belief organisations can make a real contribution to RE both locally and nationally. By working with people whose beliefs they may or may not share in an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding, faith and belief representatives can act as models of community cohesion in action. They may also contribute a greater awareness of inter-religious perspectives, as well as representing their own individual traditions.

At a national level, representatives of different denominations, religions and communities of belief can contribute to the continuing improvement of RE. They might, for example, take part in consultation on RE matters through membership of national bodies, work with others to produce resources such as web-based materials for school use, act as consultants to publishers and respond to enquiries from teachers about their tradition.

At a local level, representatives of religious and other interests can serve as formal or co-opted members of SACREs and ASCs. This gives them opportunities to help make sure the RE curriculum deals accurately and sensitively with their own religious or other perspective, and that any concerns about RE are raised and considered. They may, for example, raise awareness of sensitive issues when a SACRE is giving advice to schools on resources recommended for use in RE lessons. Membership of a SACRE or an ASC gives community members a chance to raise and respond to questions from their own and others' communities as well as to contribute to wider public understanding of their beliefs, practices and values.

#### Case study: Religion and belief communities

Members of a Shi'a Muslim community wanted to contribute to a better public understanding of Islam and Muslims. They were already members of the local SACRE, since the LA had from its inception realised that both Sunni and Shi'a Islam were quite strongly represented in its city. The imam (a religious minister at the mosque) was invited to attend key meetings of the ASC writing group and to make comments on draft material.

He was keen to develop positive relations further and offered the Islamic Centre as a venue for a SACRE meeting. Working with the local RE adviser, the community hosts a number of visits from schools, including some by classes of pupils and others by groups of teachers as professional development activities. The imam consistently tries to make sure the visits are well adapted to the age or stage concerned, by having a team of appropriate hosts – for example a mother of young children who could receive visits from younger primary children. He also developed PowerPoint presentations on the religious life and activities of the community, adapted to different audiences, along with handouts and materials for teachers to take away. The community makes great efforts for visitors to feel welcome and provides refreshments for all who come. Members of the Islamic Centre team also go as visiting speakers to schools, including some in surrounding rural areas where there are no Muslim pupils or residents. The Islamic Centre holds an open day annually and invites adults in a variety of public service roles, neighbours and work colleagues and members of other local religious groups, so that they can experience the life of the mosque and ask questions about its community. The community also willingly welcomes and helps RE consultants to gather material for an education website about Shi'a Islam.

## Learning outside the classroom (LOtC)

Local members of religions and belief groups have an enriching contribution to make in hosting visits at local centres, places of worship or sacred spaces. Schools value the opportunity of bringing learning to life by giving pupils chances to meet and talk with people from the tradition they are studying, ask questions, experience an unfamiliar religious and cultural environment, and meet individuals who can respond to their thoughts and ideas. These visits contribute to pupils' spiritual development as well as giving many opportunities for exciting cross-curricular learning. Some centres have annual open days or events for the whole community, so that adults as well as pupils can enjoy the opportunity to find out about a new perspective.

Providers hosting such visits can be awarded the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge. The badge scheme means schools and other users can more easily identify organisations that offer good-quality learning opportunities, but it will also give providers a developmental framework through which to evaluate and develop their own learning provision.

Individuals or small teams may also be invited into schools to speak, answer questions or take part in panel discussions. Ideally, community members who take on such roles are those who have some experience of the age group concerned and who can work with the group's teacher to plan a visit which will marry well with the pupils' programme of learning. They will also need to be reasonably confident about answering questions at a level that pupils can understand. Visitors should not replace regular teachers of RE.

## Case study: LOtC: Widening horizons of understanding

This is how one school prepared and organised RE learning outside the classroom.

### What were we trying to achieve?

- To build on the school's work on community cohesion.
- To enrich and encourage pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning.

### Who went? How many?

Fifty children from years 3 and 4 took part in a series of visits, accompanied by three teachers. The school has a specialist hearing-impaired unit and support staff also joined the trip to enable all children to benefit in full.

### Preparation:

The school includes children from many different faiths, cultures and ethnic backgrounds, who are used to working and learning together in school. However, the children have little external experience outside their own circle. There was detailed pre-visit preparation so that children were clear about behaviour and etiquette in the mandir (Hindu temple) and were ready with questions and ideas.

### How did we organise the learning?

The Hindu faith tutor greeted the children at the mandir. She helped pupils get a feel for the sacred space and showed them some of the colourful and symbolic deities. With some structured guidance, children then had time to explore for themselves. In the final session they drew up questions in small groups and discussed similarities and differences compared with the other places they had visited. Just before they left the mandir, as a gift, those pupils who wanted to were given a taste of prasad. A key aim of the Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto is to 'make learning more engaging and relevant'. Children put this in their own way: 'You get more education than sitting in classrooms. You get to interact with everything.'

### What was the impact of the experience?

The life and symbolism of a Hindu temple provided much stimulation and children were able to reflect on the meaning of the deities: 'I like the one with Rama, Sita and Lakshman because it shows that people are one big community.' Another pupil was inspired by Hanuman: 'I liked the god who looks like a monkey because it was about helping other people and it made me think about helping others.' The inter-faith tutor made the point that, 'You can get so much more from a place that is live and running than you can in a classroom. The impact on the children today will be fresh for ever, I hope!'

**Follow up:** Pupils were able to compare the faiths and cultures they had experienced. They noted the variety of customs, the different significance of sacred texts, and how gender roles were fulfilled in different ways.

## Checklist for people who manage, plan, teach and support RE

- **What implications do the school's ethos, values and aims have for the provision of RE?** For example, the school's specialist status, religious character, or the nature of the school's community.
- **What about the school's overall curriculum priorities?** Are statutory requirements for RE being met? Is RE's contribution in terms of raising standards and achievement being taken into account?
- **Will RE be taught separately, be combined with other subjects, or both?**
- **Will RE be taught every week, term or year in the key stage?** Is the programme of study required by the agreed syllabus properly met? Is the provision evaluated as part of the school's self-evaluation process?
- **What about curriculum design?** Does the RE curriculum ensure an appropriate balance between RE-led units, whether systematic or thematic, and cross-curricular units?
- **How will the organisation of the RE curriculum be adapted to suit individual pupils with different abilities and needs?** For example, the needs of the most able pupils can be met by accelerating their learning, and the needs of less high-achieving pupils can be met by reinforcement techniques.
- **How will the design of the RE curriculum help pupils to make a smooth transfer from one key stage to the next and to make steady progress within a key stage?** For example, through the provision of bridging units to support transition from key stage 2 to 3.
- **What about curriculum enrichment?** What might need to be added to the RE curriculum to enrich pupils' learning in terms of, for example, fieldwork, LOtC, and special focus days?

## Checklist for monitoring and evaluating RE provision

- **Have RE curriculum decisions been based on the principles of effective planning?** Has there been sound application of these principles?
- **Can the parental right of withdrawal be accommodated, where necessary?** Does the model of curriculum delivery take into account how provision might be adapted?
- **Do pupils value and recognise the contribution RE makes to their understanding** - of different communities and ways of life, and to the concept of diversity?
- **Do pupils have real opportunities to explore and gain first-hand experience of religious and cultural diversity?**

- **Does the school help pupils to deepen their understanding** - of their own beliefs and values? Of other people's?
- **Does RE provide a context to build relationships with the local communities** - including those groups with whom it is more difficult to forge links?
- **Within the school, does RE provide a voice for religious and other minority groups?** Does it develop a culture of mutual understanding and respect?
- **Does the school treat religion and belief seriously?** Does it model ways of building respect?
- **Does the school know enough about the diversity of religion and ethical perspectives within the local community?** Does it explore ways of making links with those communities?
- **In a largely mono-cultural school, how well is RE working to foster a broader awareness of cultural and religious diversity?**

## Checklist for planning RE post 14

- **Do the pupils have opportunities to:**
  - reflect on, express and justify their own opinions and beliefs about religion and religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual questions?
  - develop their own values and attitudes so that they can recognise their rights and responsibilities in light of their learning about religion and belief?
  - relate their learning to the wider world, gaining a sense of personal autonomy in preparation for adult life?
  - develop skills that are useful in a wide range of careers and in adult life generally, especially skills of critical enquiry, creative problem-solving, and communication in a variety of media?
  - have their achievements in RE recognised by an approved qualification?
- **If the pupil is to study RE wholly or partly in a further education college:**
  - has appropriate provision been made?
  - is it coherent and of good quality?
- **Has a parent or pupil exercised their right of withdrawal?** Has this been taken into account in RE planning?

## 8 Further references

### Professional RE associations

There are many professional associations dedicated to the provision of high-quality RE in English schools. The details of these associations are listed in the RE Directory ([www.theredirectory.org.uk](http://www.theredirectory.org.uk)). Associations include:

- National Association of Teachers of RE ([www.natre.org.uk](http://www.natre.org.uk))
- Association of RE Advisers, Inspectors and Consultants ([www.areiac.org.uk](http://www.areiac.org.uk))
- Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education ([www.aulre.org.uk](http://www.aulre.org.uk))
- National Association of SACREs ([www.nasacre.org.uk](http://www.nasacre.org.uk))

### The Religious Education Council

All major faith communities and professional RE associations are members of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) ([www.religiouseducationcouncil.org](http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org)). This body acts as an umbrella group to represent the diverse groups and interests of the subject, and works in partnership with the DCSF. Members include academic and professional associations, along with the main faith communities of faith found in the UK. In addition to Christian denominations, these include Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and the British Humanist Association.

### Government agencies

#### Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) ([www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk)) works with the DCSF to develop and deliver the Government's policy on qualifications, curriculum and assessment. Core responsibilities for RE include:

- working with stakeholders and strategic partners, including standing advisory councils on religious education (SACREs) and faith and belief communities, to develop and review the curriculum, so that pupils in every school have access to a high-quality curriculum - this includes receiving SACRE annual reports
- developing and reviewing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), including GCSEs, A levels and the 14 to 19 Diploma
- providing guidance and support for religious education within the context of the wider curriculum.

## The Training and Development Agency

The Training and Development Agency (TDA) ([www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk)) supports training in RE, during initial teacher training (ITT) and through continuing professional development (CPD), by providing access to specialist subject knowledge for ITT tutors and mentors. This is delivered via the subject resource network RE-Net, established to support new and existing tutors, trainees, mentors and teachers. RE-Net offers a range of services, from publishing relevant materials and resources on its website to running conferences and information-sharing events and providing an induction programme for new ITT tutors. RE-Net also provides a package of CPD support and activity for RE tutors and teachers undertaking subject development or improvement projects in their own schools. This has been delivered through online materials and face-to-face mentor network events.

## Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) ([www.ssatrust.org.uk/humanities](http://www.ssatrust.org.uk/humanities)) works to support RE leaders and departments in humanities specialist schools through their Lead Practitioner programme and through middle-leadership development courses. These courses are designed to address the additional responsibilities of heads of specialist target-setting departments in humanities schools. RE subject leaders look at issues such as developing links with partner schools, businesses and the wider community. The head of RE in a humanities school has a wider-reaching role where their subject is one of the three specialist subjects. They are responsible for mentoring and coaching other subject leaders and for monitoring the impact of their specialist subject's reach across the school community. Other support materials, such as downloadable resources, are available on the humanities section of the SSAT website. The SSAT also provides regular email updates.

## Ofsted

Ofsted ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)) inspects and reports on all maintained schools, academies, city colleges and some non-maintained schools in England. The inspections take place at intervals that are described in regulations. After an inspection Ofsted must report on the quality of the education provided, how far it meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, the educational standards, the quality of leadership and management, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, the contribution made to the well-being of pupils, and the contribution made by the school to community cohesion.

Ofsted also inspects subjects as part of a three-year rolling programme. Each of the National Curriculum subjects RE, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and business studies are inspected in general terms and in relation to issues specific to that particular subject. In the case of RE, Ofsted inspects a sample of 30 primary and 30 secondary schools. A small number of additional visits can be made to schools identified as having particularly good practice in the subject. The outcomes of this work feed into the Her

Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) annual report but also, once every three years, result in a substantial report on the subject. Denominational RE at schools with a religious character that can teach according to the tenets of their faith is inspected separately and additionally by the relevant religious authorities themselves, under Section 48 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Subject visits are made to a cross-section of primary and secondary schools. Each visit involves an evaluation of achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and the leadership and management of the subject. In addition, the inspection programme focuses on specific issues relating to the subject to track the impact of recent initiatives and to investigate the need for future developments. The visits are followed by a brief letter to the school summarising the points made in the feedback and discussion at the end of the visit. The feedback letter is copied by Ofsted to the local authority (LA) and the SACRE, where appropriate, and is available to the next institutional inspection team. It is also published on the Ofsted website.

## **Publications**

### ***Religious education and collective worship*** (Circular 1/94)

Issued 31 January 1994, this circular contains extensive guidance on the duty of local education authorities, standing advisory council on religious education (SACREs) and agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs), regarding religious education and collective worship. This remains extant regarding guidance on collective worship. ([www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=8342](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=8342))

### ***Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools***

Published by the Council of Europe in 2007: Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN: 978-92-871-6223-6.

([http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_alia\\_sid=2191](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_alia_sid=2191))

### ***The Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools***

Published by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the text prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in 2007, ISBN 83-60190-48-8.

([http://www.osce.org/publications/odihhr/2007/11/28314\\_993\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/publications/odihhr/2007/11/28314_993_en.pdf))

### ***Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion***

Published in July 2007, DCSF Reference 00598-2007.

(<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00598-2007>)

***Face to face and side by side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society***, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, published following extensive consultation. ISBN: 978 1 4098-0315-7.

(<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/faceofaframework>)

### ***The non-statutory national framework for religious education***

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Department for Education and Skills, 2004, published following extensive consultation. ISBN 1-85838-574-1. ([http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_7886.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_7886.aspx))

### ***Faith in the system***

DCSF, 2007, Reference 00496-2007, ISBN 978-1-84478-955-9. (<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-00496-2007>)

### ***SACREs and self-evaluation – a guide***

Ofsted, May 2005, HMI 2467. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/SACREs-and-self-evaluation-a-guide>)

## **Useful websites**

### ***QCDA: Curriculum*** (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk>)

Includes details about National Curriculum subjects, including, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE).

### ***Learning Outside the Classroom*** ([www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk))

Information about the benefits of learning outside the classroom.

### ***Community cohesion*** ([www.community-cohesion.org.uk](http://www.community-cohesion.org.uk))

Web-based community cohesion projects.

### ***QCDA: Spiritual and moral development***

(<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/personal-development/Spiritual-and-moral-development>)

Information about spiritual and moral development in RE.

### ***QCDA: Primary RE*** (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/new-primary-curriculum/areas-of-learning/religious-education>)

Primary RE programme of learning.

### ***QCDA: Key Stage 3 RE***

(<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/key-stage-3/religious-education>)

Secondary RE programme of study for Key Stage 3.

### ***QCDA: Key Stage 4 RE*** (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/key-stage-4/religious-education>)

Secondary RE programme of study for Key Stage 4.

### ***RE Online*** ([www.reonline.org.uk](http://www.reonline.org.uk))

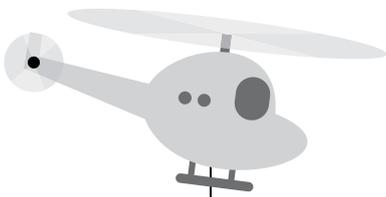
Resource for teaching and learning RE in schools.

### ***RE Today Services*** ([www.retoday.org.uk](http://www.retoday.org.uk))

Source of a range of publications and support for RE.

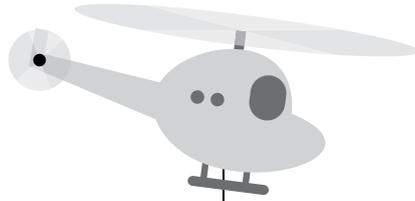
### ***RE-Net*** ([www.re-net.ac.uk](http://www.re-net.ac.uk))

Specialist RE support for mentors and tutors.



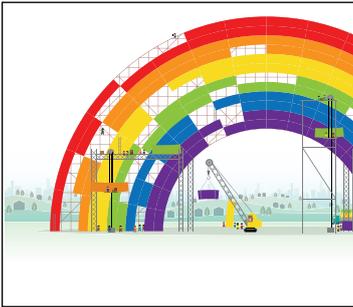
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PO Box 5050  
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Annesley  
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Tel: 0845 60 222 60  
Fax: 0845 60 333 60  
Textphone: 0845 60 555 60

ISBN: 978-1-84775-439-4

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