

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education AGENDA

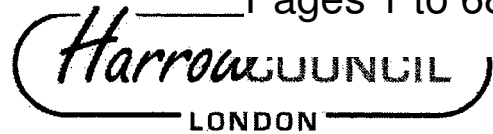
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Standing Advisory Council For Religious Education **AGENDA**

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Harrow SACRE Meeting

Tuesday 22nd June 2010 at 7.30p.m.



To be held in Committee Rooms 1 & 2
Harrow Civic Centre

Enquiries & apologies to:
Vivian Wright
Clerk to SACRE
vmwright@waitrose.com

or
Rachel Bowerman
SSIP, LA Lead Officer to SACRE
020 8736 6507

Chair:	Alison Stowe
Vice Chair:	Martha Besser
Chairs Group A:	Mike Bishop & Gill Ross
Chair Group B:	Rev. Giles Pinnock
Chair Group C:	to be confirmed
Chair Group D:	Cllr Nana Asante

HARROW STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

AGENDA

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**
2. **WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**
3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
4. **MEMBERSHIP**
 - a) **Welcome to new members**
 - b) **Reserve members**
5. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH MARCH 2010** (Pages 1 - 8)
6. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**
Rachel Bowerman and the Chair will report on actions relating to Minutes No.8. and No.10a)

Business items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

7. **SACRE MONITORING STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR RE IN HARROW SCHOOLS**
 - a) **Stag Lane Middle School RE Self-Evaluation Form (RE SEF)** (Papers will be mailed separately.)
Alexis Sobell, Subject Leader for Religious Education at Stag Lane Middle, will present her evaluation of the school's provision for RE and the outcomes for learners. Her evidence is based on a range of monitoring activities in the spring and summer terms 2010. She will also outline her priorities for development and the actions she has already taken to raise the status of RE, reporting particularly on the school's 2 day RE Festival in June 2010.
 - b) **Consultation on SACRE's draft RE SEF**
Rachel Bowerman will report on arrangements to consult headteachers and subject leaders on the proposed SACRE RE SEF.
8. **HMI REPORT: TRANSFORMING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**
Religious Education in Schools 2006 – 2009 (pages 9 – 66)
A report based on evidence from HMI visits to 94 primary and 89 secondary schools in England between 2006 and 2009. It is recommended that SACRE respond to this report because of its recommendations regarding professional support for schools and the future of a locally determined Agreed Syllabus.

9. SACRE'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITY TO RAISE ACHIEVEMENT IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the context of the changing Local Authority landscape, it is proposed that SACRE delegate to the Chair's Group the business of preparing a bid for funding to enable SACRE to provide a universal offer of support for schools in their implementation of the Agreed Syllabus and raising achievement in RE.

Information items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

10. CELEBRATING RE MONTH – MARCH 2011

A month long event to celebrate and publicise the value and importance of RE for every child and young person. SACRE might wish to consider how it will promote this raising awareness month in Harrow schools.

<http://www.celebratingre.org.uk/>

11. REPORTS FROM SACRE PARTNERS

- a) **Harrow Inter Faith Council**
including progress with the proposal for a Harrow Interfaith Youth Forum and DVD project.
- b) **Faith communities**
- c) **Harrow Hate Crime Forum**

12. DATES OF FUTURE SACRE MEETINGS

Autumn Term 2010: Wednesday 15th September 2010, 7.30p.m. at Harrow Civic Centre
and Tuesday 23 November 2010, 7.30p.m. at Harrow Civic Centre

To agree the following dates for meetings of the SACRE Chairs Group:

22nd July 2010, 10.00 – 11.30 and

3rd November 2010 10.00 – 11.30.

If members wish to propose items for the next SACRE Agenda, please contact your Group Chair.

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 9 MARCH 2010

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

* Mr Zia Baig	~ Miss Fatema Rahemani
A Mrs Martha Besser (Vice Chair)	A Mr Neville Ransley
A Mr Mike Bishop	* Mrs Gill Ross
* Dr Julie Crow	A Mr Shabban Saddik
A Mrs Niru Desai	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	~ Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mr Vijay Hirani	* Ven Sumana Sramaner
~ Dr Vinod Kapashi	~ Ms Beverley Wilson
* Councillor Asad Omar	

Group B: (Church of England)

A Mrs Mary Abbott * Rev'd. Matthew Stone

A Rev'd. Giles Pinnock

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

A Ms Heena Modi ~ Mrs Manju Radia
A Ms Bhavita Pandya * Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)
~ Ms Nancy Parsons

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:

* Nana Asante * Anjana Patel

A Lurline Champagnie,

Co-opted Members

Seconded from the Harrow Student Advisory Board: vacancies

Also attending:

* Ms Rachel Bowerman (Senior School Improvement Professional & Adviser to SACRE, nominated by the Director of Education)

* Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* denotes presence

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

Visitors from Park High School:

Sonal Shah, Curriculum Leader for Philosophy and Ethics

Chris Stump, Teacher

Diviya Devani, Yr 13 student

Senira Patel, Yr 12 Student

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the visitors from Park High School, who were attending in order to make a presentation about attainment in RE at KS 3, 4, and 5 and the quality of provision for Religious Education. (See 6a below)

2. Apologies for Absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mrs Martha Besser, Mr Mike Bishop, Cllr Lurline Champagnie, Mrs Niru Desai, Mrs Mary Abbott, Rev'd Giles Pinnock, Ms Heena Modi, Mr Neville Ransley, Mr Shabban Saddik, and Mrs Bhavita Pandya

3. Membership:

No new members or reserve members were in attendance.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 December 2009: (pp1-7 of documents previously circulated)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2009, having been circulated and taken as read, were signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- p.1. Attendance: Mrs Niru Desai was in attendance
- p.1. Attendance: "A denotes absence" should be "A denotes absence with apologies"
- p.4. Minutes 9, second bullet point: "take" *should be* "talk"
- p.4. Minute 10, first paragraph: "Julia" should be "Julie"

5. Matters arising from the minutes not included elsewhere on the agenda:

a) Minute no. 9. SACRE Annual Report

- Rachel Bowerman reported that the Annual Report is complete. The new SACRE website is almost ready and, when it is, the Annual Report will be uploaded.
Action: Rachel Bowerman
- The circulation list has been agreed with the Chair, but rather than send out paper copies to all representatives of places of worship, a letter will be sent, advising them of the website address and offering a paper copy of the report on request.
Action: Rachel Bowerman and Chair
- Head Teachers will be advised of the report via the Gold Bulletin and an electronic copy of the report can be sent to them.
- The website address is expected to be www.sacre.harrow.lgfl. This will be confirmed. The format is transferable when lgfl is no longer available.
- Minutes and paperwork for meetings will also be available on the website.
- In response to a question about the school that entered only a minority of its students for RS GCSE, Rachel Bowerman explained that she would defer reporting on this until Bhavita Pandya, who is an AST (Advanced Skills Teacher) and teaches within that RS Department, was present to outline current provision for RS.
- In response to a question about the number of students studying optional RS GCSE modules specific to their own faith tradition, Ms Bowerman referred to items 6a and 6b on the agenda, saying that this was the kind of data that might be gathered through a SEF. Information about pupils studying an RS GCSE module through their place of worship, would be of interest to members in building up their picture of young people and faith in Harrow, but was beyond the statutory remit of SACRE. It was agreed that SACRE members might wish to provide such information from their faith communities.

b) Minute no.10. Youth on religion

- Rachel Bowerman informed the Committee that a letter had been sent to Nicola Madge to inform her of Harrow SACRE's withdrawal from the project. Brent SACRE was considering joining the project. Rachel Bowerman had been asked for reasons for Harrow's withdrawal, but the email went to her home address and thus was overlooked.

c) Minute no 12c) Circulation of minutes

- The Clerk had produced the minutes within two days of the meeting but Rachel Bowerman had been unable to check them immediately. None the less, they went out well ahead of the meeting.

Business Items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

6. SACRE Monitoring Standards and Quality of Provision for RE in Harrow Schools

a) Philosophy and Ethics Curriculum Review Report (*Self Evaluation Form for Curriculum Leaders, p8-12 of documents previously circulated*)

Rachel Bowerman explained that each Curriculum Leader at Park High School produces a SEF and that the Philosophy and Ethics department had been enthusiastic in agreeing to present its RE SEF to SACRE. She welcomed Sonal Shah, Curriculum Leader for Philosophy and Ethics, Chris Stump, teacher and two students, Diviya Devani, from Yr 13 and Senira Patel, Yr 12. Ms Bowerman reminded members that the purpose of this presentation was to report evaluation of the quality of the teaching and the corresponding quality of the pupils' learning. This would assist SACRE in its monitoring.

- i) Firstly Sonal Shah took members through parts 1 and 5 of the 2008 - 9 RE SEF (*previously circulated*). Part 1 includes an assessment of attainment on entry in Y8 and an analysis of progress pupils have made by the end of the year; part 5 evaluates quality of teaching and the curriculum. She recognized a need for a more evaluative and succinct SEF under the new Framework and explained that this RE SEF would be updated using 2009 - 2010 monitoring evidence.
- ii) Ms Shah then explained that a Departmental Review had taken place earlier in the Spring Term 2010. Monitoring activities had included lesson observations by the Senior Leadership Team and an external RE specialist, scrutiny of pupils' books – with a focus on their learning and progress, and on teachers' marking and annotations – 'student voice' questionnaires and interviews with a focus group about preferred teaching styles and the effectiveness of teachers' feedback.
- iii) Although the Review report had not yet been completed, Sonal Shah was able to summarise the findings:
 - Teaching and assessment would be judged "good". Three out of four lessons observed had been "outstanding." Pupils reported that they regard listening to teachers' explanations as valuable, they also enjoy group discussions and role play.
 - Regarding pupils' achievement: at GCSE, RE results were amongst the highest in the school. KS3 outcomes were slightly lower than the school average, but this data should be seen within the context that RS is taught one period a week in 6 week blocks each term. The GCSE results show that students accelerate their progress and attain well in KS4.
- iv) **Provision for RE in Primary schools:** In response to a question about what the baseline assessment of Y8 pupils on entry to Park High in September 2009 had revealed about RE in primary schools, Sonal Shah replied that Philosophy for Children (P4C), included in the curriculum of the feeder primary schools, had equipped children with strategies for questioning and enquiry. As a result, Y8 pupils were able to contribute strongly to discussions in RE lessons. She observed however that there was a difference between P4C used as a pedagogical tool and the concepts and content of philosophy of religion.
- v) **AS and A2 Levels:** in response to a question about the difference between AS and A2, the representatives from Park High informed members that AS level concerned specific topics such as medical ethics, while A2 level built on the understanding gained at AS level, going into philosophy in greater depth and looking at how philosophical considerations influenced all areas of life. Students studied some modern philosophers such as JS Mill as well as the Ancient Greeks. Chris Stump informed members that the curriculum examines such topics as life after death from the perspectives of different faiths. Part of the course focuses on religious ethics. Students are encouraged to look at philosophical questions through their wider reading.

- vi) **Curriculum:** In response to a question, Ms Shah reported that evidence from students indicated that the Philosophy and Ethics curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners very well. Chris Stump confirmed that students enjoy studying responses to moral and ethical issues from both non-religious and religious perspectives. Rachel Bowerman brought to the attention of members a phrase that had been used by the teachers to describe the Philosophy and Ethics curriculum. She remarked that to describe the curriculum as “not overtly religious” might have been expected to dismay SACRE members and ventured to put this into contemporary context. She described traditional RE when she started as an advisory teacher: was often concerned with, for example, a chronological account of the life of Jesus and with assembling factual knowledge of the external phenomena of religions, a ‘naming of parts.’ She explained that the 2008 Harrow Agreed Syllabus was concerned with learning about religious beliefs, the sources of authority for those beliefs, and how these influence the ethical and moral choices of believers, their awareness of rights and responsibilities and their responses to social and global issues of justice, peace, sustainability and development.
- vii) **Comments on the draft SEF** (*p13-16 of documents previously circulated*). The visitors felt that this document would not be difficult to complete, especially for a school already expected to produce departmental SEFs. Analysis of a range of RE SEFs would give a very good indication of how RE was taught in Harrow schools. They felt that behaviour in RE would be difficult to quantify and might vary from year group to year group. The students felt that it depended very much on the teacher. They spoke highly of their own teachers.
- viii) **Student voice:** At this point, Diviya Devani and Senira Patel responded to a range of questions about the Philosophy and Ethics curriculum and pedagogy and its relevance to the needs and interests of young people
- In response to a question about whether Philosophy and Ethics teaching included much discussion, Diviya Devani expressed the view that teaching at Park High uses various methods to encourage students to understand philosophies and religious points of view. Students developed skills in asking probing questions and in challenging their own perspectives and assumptions.
 - In response to a question about whether students are encouraged to be critical of other religious points of view, Divya Devani gave a very mature and well-considered answer. She said that students were encouraged to ask for explanations and to endeavour to understand points of view different from their own, while at the same time sustaining a sensitive and respectful approach to conducting an argument. Rachel Bowerman pointed out how Diviya’s answer illustrated the very skills and attitudes, which should underpin the RE curriculum.
 - In response to a question about how RE was regarded, the students felt that RE enjoyed a high status at Park High because of the issues it covers. The key skills acquired in RE could be applied to other subjects, science for example. She affirmed that a knowledge of ethics was an essential for life. She regarded it as important that young people had an understanding of the many different religious faiths represented in school and in the wider community.
 - Sonal Shah felt that the status of RE at Park High was improving: it is perceived as exciting and as a demanding, academic subject. Last year’s A2 results showed that three students achieved marks in the high 90s and one had received an offer from Oxford University. Comments received on Open Evening revealed positive attitudes from pupils and parents.

Rachel Bowerman, the Chair and members thanked the students resoundingly for being such articulate ambassadors for their school. They had ably demonstrated the skills which they had described as central to Philosophy and Ethics. Cllr Anjana Patel suggested that they might include an account of this visit in their school newsletter.

Sonal Shah agreed to send SACRE a copy of the Department Review Report when it had been completed.

The visitors then left the meeting.

b) Draft Religious Education Self-Evaluation Form (RE SEF) (p13-16 of documents previously circulated)

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item by recommending that in order to fulfil its statutory remit and to advise the LA on standards and provision in RE in Harrow Schools, SACRE should develop “an independent mechanism to gather data about performance”. Ms Bowerman used the following questions and answers to explain her rationale for an RE SEF and principles for its usage:

- i) **Why would this be a sensible format to use for school reports?** The document uses headings similar to those used in the whole school SEF.
- ii) **What are the benefits to schools?** Involving RE subject leaders (primary and secondary) in completing an RE SEF would contribute to building their leadership capacity. A training programme in conjunction with the launch of the document would develop their monitoring skills and knowledge of the Ofsted criteria against which to make judgements. If SACRE monitored provision and standards in schools and was informed by schools about their priorities in RE, then SACRE should be well-placed to advise the LA on how to improve RE and establish its own strategies for this improvement.
- iii) **Who would SACRE need to consult before introducing this document?** If the draft document were agreed by SACRE, the next stage would be to pilot it in a small group of schools. Following this, there should be consultation with RE subject leaders in primary and secondary schools, head teachers, governors and the Local Authority. This consultation would include reporting on the experiences of those schools which had piloted the RE SEF for SACRE. Rachel Bowerman informed SACRE that a number of subject leaders had already expressed an interest in being involved in a pilot project.
- iv) **Would every school have to submit an RE SEF to SACRE?** SACRE did not have the authority to require schools to complete a SEF, indeed Ofsted could not in law compel schools to use its SEF. However, if SACRE had consulted the LA, head teachers and governors, and reached a shared understanding of SACRE's rationale for and the benefits of requiring schools to report their self-evaluation of RE to SACRE, SACRE might expect the LA to encourage schools to submit a report. A committee member commented that if the RE SEF were widely accepted, this should raise the status of RE in schools. SACRE should celebrate SEFs received and this, in turn, would encourage other schools. Another committee member commented that it would be very helpful to have a key to the abbreviations and acronyms commonly used.
- v) **What are the next steps for SACRE?** Rachel Bowerman suggested that SACRE develop some principles and protocols for the use of the RE SEF and develop a rolling programme so that no school would be asked to report more than once every five years. In addition, Rachel Bowerman suggested that SACRE members are trained so that RE SEFs would be scrutinised by a small group which would then produce summary reports for the full SACRE.

Comments and discussion

In response to the draft proposed document, members commented that:

- they did not share the view, expressed by Park High representatives earlier in the meeting, that evaluation of the contribution of RE to promoting equality and to community cohesion could be combined in one section of the RE SEF. Though connected, they were two different aspects of a school's effectiveness and accountability, would be evidenced differently and should both be of high status in a school's self-evaluation.
- The RE SEF would be a useful audit tool without appearing too onerous.
- This draft was a primary school version but there should also be a secondary school draft
- Training for RE subject leaders was essential to overcome reservations and develop capacity. Guidance notes for the completion of the SEF should be developed.

The Chair proposed that SACRE move on with the SEF to the consultation stage. This was agreed unanimously

Action: Rachel Bowerman will take this forward.

7. SACRE Leadership and Management

SACRE Chairs' Group:

In accordance with a proposal made at the last meeting (Minute 12.b.) Chairs were elected for each of the SACRE groups. Rachel Bowerman explained that there was no intention to by-pass the democratic processes of SACRE. The Chairs would be able to progress the work of SACRE between meetings and scrutinise evidence from schools. They could be among the first members to be trained to analyse RE SEFs and produce summary reports.

Chairs were elected as follows:

Group A: Mike Bishop and Gill Ross

Group B: Rev'd Giles Pinnock

Group C: Bhavita Pandya nominated in her absence

Group D: Cllr Nana Asante

8. Determinations

To receive an application for a determination "for a variation in the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1988 and Education Act 1993, that collective worship is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" from

Vaughan Nursery, First and Middle School (*p 17-25 of documents previously circulated*)

In the light of discussion at the last meeting (minute 11, paragraph 3) it was agreed that the religious categories were inconsistent and could give a misleading impression of the proportions of religious faith in a school.

At this point (9.15) Ven Sumana Sramaner left the meeting

Rachel Bowerman reaffirmed that she was not inclined to encourage schools to reapply for determinations. She explained that schools whose determinations were due to expire had already been sent renewal application before she took up her post. Ms Bowerman's professional advice was that Collective worship should be relevant to the age and abilities of pupils and inclusive of all pupils and staff, whatever their faith background. Collective Worship usually took place within the context of an assembly, but there was no legal requirement for an assembly.

It was suggested that Rachel Bowerman should write to the remaining schools who had received renewal forms for their determinations, suggesting that there was no need for them to reapply as SACRE was rethinking its policy on collective worship.

This suggestion raised concerns that SACRE would then be deprived of one means of obtaining information from schools about their provision for collective worship.

It was proposed that a more valuable way of gaining such information would be a programme of visits for SACRE members to observe collective worship in schools. Members could then report back. It was agreed that this could prove extremely useful and valuable. Rachel Bowerman agreed to introduce such a programme.

It was agreed that Collective Worship should be a major agenda item for a future meeting. The Chair informed members that her Farmington Fellowship report was entitled 'Using Qur'anic Stories in Collective Worship.' This can be accessed on the internet by googling "Alison Stowe".

After this discussion the following proposals were made:

Vaughan Nursery, First and Middle School should be granted its determination.
Agreed with one abstention and one vote against.

Action: Rachel Bowerman to write and inform the school of this decision

That determinations for schools should be discontinued on the strict understanding that a programme of visits to schools is implemented as a process for SACRE to monitor and evaluate the quality of Collective Worship

Agreed unanimously

Action: Rachel Bowerman will take this forward.

Information items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

9. Reports from SACRE Partners

a) Harrow Inter Faith Council

With regard to the proposal for a Harrow Interfaith Youth Forum and DVD project, the Chair reminded SACRE of the chronology of this proposal. Pat Stevens had applied for a NASACRE/West Hill Award in 2008 – 2009 but her bid had been unsuccessful. Pat had sought match funding for the project by the Achievement and Inclusion Service and Harrow Inter Faith Council; the LA required a clear outline of the project aim and intended outcomes. SACRE and HIFC could apply again for a NASACRE/West Hill Award, but the deadline for applications was 31 March 2010. The bid would need to map the role of project leader, experienced both in media and with RE expertise. The Chair also emphasised that SACRE must be clear about its role and that of the Harrow Inter Faith Council. Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal described her experience of working with Age Concern in developing DVDs. The Chair asked members to contact her if they were interested in developing the SACRE project plan.

Action: Chair/SACRE members

b) Faith Communities

- **Yom Ha-Shoah:** Mrs Doreen Samuels informed the meeting that Yom Ha-Shoah is the day of remembrance in the Jewish calendar for victims of the Nazi Holocaust. A service of commemoration would take place at Pinner Synagogue on Sunday 11 April. Posters advertising this event were circulated amongst members.
- **Maundy Thursday:** Cllr Nana Asante informed the meeting that a Maundy Thursday celebration would take place on Thursday 1 April between 12.30 and 1.45 at the Civic Centre.
- **Induction at St Anselm's, Belmont:** The Rev'd Mathew Stone informed the meeting that a new vicar, Rev'd Christine Robinson would be inducted at St Anselm's in Belmont on Monday 24 May.
- **Pesach:** Mrs Doreen Samuels informed the meeting that Moriah School was holding a model Seder on 24 March. She could obtain invitations for any SACRE members who were interested in attending.
- **International Humanist Day:** Julie Crow informed the meeting that International Humanist Day will be celebrated on 21 June.

c) Harrow Hate Crime Forum

The Chair was unable to attend the last meeting of the Harrow Hate Crime Forum, so had nothing to report.

10. Any Other Business

a) **Park High Visitors:** the Chair would write a letter of thanks to the Park High visitors for their presentation.

Action: Chair

11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings

Summer Term 2010: Tuesday 22 June 2010
Autumn Term 2010: Wednesday 15 September
Tuesday 23 November (Clerk to confirm with Mark Doherty)

The Meeting closed at 9.50pm

Signed: (Chair) (Date)

Transforming religious education

Religious education in schools 2006–09

This report evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of religious education (RE) in primary and secondary schools and discusses the key issues at the heart of RE teaching today. It is based principally on evidence from visits to 94 primary and 89 secondary schools in England between 2006 and 2009. The sample of schools represented a cross-section, including voluntary controlled schools, but did not include voluntary aided schools, for which there are separate inspection arrangements. The report builds on the findings of an earlier report, *Making sense of religion*.

Age group: 4–18

Published: June 2010

Reference no: 090215

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Executive summary

The past three years have seen significant changes and developments in the world of religious education (RE). The recent implementation by the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) of an action plan for RE has provided opportunities to strengthen support for the subject. The emphasis on promoting community cohesion has given added importance to RE within the curriculum. However, despite the very considerable commitment and energy which many teachers bring to the subject, in many of the schools visited the provision was no better than satisfactory quality, or in some cases inadequate, and the effectiveness of much of the RE observed was not good enough.

There is an urgent need to review the way in which the subject is supported at a number of levels. Among the questions to be considered are: whether the current statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum are effective; whether there is sufficient clarity about what constitutes learning in RE and how pupil progress can be measured; and whether the provision for professional development in RE is adequate.

The quality of RE in the sample of primary schools was broadly the same as that reported in 2007 and not enough was of good quality. In schools where achievement was satisfactory, several key weaknesses were common which inhibited pupils' learning. Most notably, the pattern of curriculum delivery of the subject often limited the opportunities for sustained learning in RE. Schools visited took the subject seriously but, in too many cases, teachers lacked the knowledge and confidence to plan and teach high quality RE lessons.

The quality of RE in the secondary schools visited was worse than in the schools involved in the 2007 survey. The proportion of schools where RE was inadequate was considerably higher than previously. Among the factors which detracted from the quality of the provision were the impact on RE of the recent changes to the wider curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3, and weaknesses in the quality of learning in much of the provision for the short course GCSE in religious studies.

There are also positive developments. Examination entries in religious studies at GCSE and GCE A level have continued to rise each year since 2006, reinforcing a key success of the subject in recent years. Results in the full course GCSE are rising, although for the short course GCSE the results show only limited improvement, with around 50% to 55% of those entered gaining the higher A* to C grades. Results at GCE A and AS level have remained broadly the same since 2006.

As reported in 2007, a key success of RE in the past decade has been the improvement in pupils' attitudes towards the subject. In most of the schools visited, pupils clearly understood the importance of learning about the diversity of religion and belief in contemporary society. Where pupils expressed more negative attitudes towards diversity, the RE provision was often inadequate and included few opportunities for them to develop an understanding of the beliefs and ways of life of others.

Section B of the report explores some of the issues arising from the survey findings. Although progress has been made in recent years in establishing greater clarity about the nature of RE, there are still serious areas of uncertainty about the subject which often inhibit teachers' ability to plan, teach and assess RE effectively, and undermine pupils' progress. A number of developments, including new programmes of study for RE by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency which built on the publication in 2004 of the non-statutory national framework for RE, and the recent publication by the former DCSF of updated national guidance on RE, have gone some way to deal with some of these concerns.

However, the inspection evidence indicates that further work needs to be done to develop these initiatives further and to ensure that their impact in the classroom is more effective. In particular, more work needs to be done to clarify the place and use of concepts in RE and to define progression in pupils' learning more effectively. This report includes a consideration of the way in which a stronger role for enquiry in the teaching of RE could help address some of these issues.

A major success of RE is the way that it supports the promotion of community cohesion. In many schools RE plays a major role in helping pupils understand diversity and develop respect for the beliefs and cultures of others. Inspectors found a number of outstanding examples of good practice. There is scope to develop this contribution further by extending the use of local religious and belief communities in RE and ensuring that the changing nature of religion and belief in the contemporary world is reflected more strongly in the RE curriculum.

Previous Ofsted reports have raised the question of the effectiveness of the statutory arrangements in supporting the promotion of high quality RE. The current round of inspections has highlighted this issue again. There is still very significant variability in the quantity and quality of support for RE provided to schools by local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. Many schools have difficulty finding effective training in RE at local level in order to support implementation of the locally agreed syllabus. This report concludes that a review is needed to determine whether the statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum which underpin the subject should be revised or whether ways can be found to improve their effectiveness.

Key findings

- Pupils' achievement in RE in the 94 primary schools visited was broadly similar to that reported in 2007. It was good or outstanding in four out of 10 schools and was inadequate in only one school.
- Students' achievement in RE in the secondary schools visited showed a very mixed picture. It was good or outstanding in 40 of the 89 schools visited but was inadequate in 14 schools.
- There has been a continuing rise in the numbers taking GCSE and A- and AS-level examinations in RE. Some concerns remain, however, about the quality of much of the learning that takes place in GCSE short courses.

- Most of the secondary schools in the survey with sixth forms did not fully meet the statutory requirement to provide core RE for all students beyond the age of 16.
- RE made a positive contribution to key aspects of pupils' personal development, most notably in relation to the understanding and appreciation of the diverse nature of our society. However, the subject's contribution to promoting pupils' spiritual development was often limited.
- The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion was a strength of the subject in most of the schools visited. However, there is scope to extend the opportunities within the curriculum to enrich pupils' learning through greater use of fieldwork and contacts with religious and belief groups in the local community.
- There is uncertainty among many teachers of RE about what they are trying to achieve in the subject resulting in a lack of well-structured and sequenced teaching and learning, substantial weaknesses in the quality of assessment and a limited use of higher order thinking skills to promote greater challenge.
- Where RE was most effective, it used a range of enquiry skills such as investigation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation and reflection. However, this use is not yet defined clearly enough or integrated effectively within guidance to schools and, as a result, is not embedded sufficiently into classroom practice.
- There were a number of specific weaknesses in the teaching about Christianity. Many primary and secondary schools visited did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive and systematic investigation of the core beliefs of Christianity.
- There were significant inconsistencies in the way humanism and other non-religious beliefs were taught, and some uncertainties about the relationship between fostering respect for pupils' beliefs and encouraging open, critical, investigative learning in RE.
- The reliance on a narrow curriculum model in primary schools based on RE being delivered in half-termly units taught weekly, often inhibited sustained learning in the subject and limited the opportunities to link the subject to other areas of the curriculum.
- The revised Key Stage 3 secondary curriculum, introduced in September 2008, was having a negative impact on RE provision in about a third of the 30 secondary schools surveyed in 2008–09, particularly in Year 7. Too often the impact of these changes was not being monitored effectively.
- There was often a lack of continuity and progression between the RE curriculum in Key Stage 3 and the GCSE short courses. In the worst cases, this lack of continuity distorted pupils' understanding of religion and belief.
- The effectiveness of specialist staff training in RE was inadequate in four out of 10 of the schools visited. They were not giving sufficient time and resources to support teachers' professional development in the subject.
- The effectiveness of local arrangements to support RE varied too much and many local authorities did not ensure that their Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education had sufficient capacity to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

Recommendations

The Department for Education should, along with the relevant delivery partners:

- carry out a review of the current statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum, to ensure that these provide the best means of promoting the high quality and consistency of RE in schools
- establish stronger mechanisms for supporting and holding to account the work of local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education, and Agreed Syllabus Conferences in relation to RE.
- establish clearer national guidance for Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences about the nature and use of key concepts in RE, the definition of progression, and the use of enquiry skills in RE in the design of agreed syllabuses
- provide more guidance on teaching about Christianity and non-religious world views, and effective ways of balancing the need to foster respect for pupils' religions and beliefs with the promotion of open, critical, investigative learning in RE.

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OfQual) should:

- review, and as necessary adjust, the short course GCSE specifications in religious studies to ensure that they are securing a stronger focus on extending students' ability to understand the place of religion and belief in contemporary society.

Local authorities, in partnership with their Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences, should:

- ensure that the work of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences has good access to subject expertise to enable them to support schools effectively in promoting high quality RE
- ensure that high quality professional development in RE is available to their schools and encourage them to make the most of these opportunities to improve the quality of RE teaching
- ensure that agreed syllabuses and related advice:
 - offer guidance about the systematic use of enquiry skills in RE to enable schools to plan the subject in a more coherent and rigorous way
 - provide greater clarity about the use of key concepts and the definition of progression in RE
 - include guidance to schools about ways of incorporating RE within more innovative and creative approaches to curriculum planning.

Schools should:

- ensure that RE promotes pupils' spiritual development more effectively by allowing for more genuine investigation into, and reflection on, the implications of religion and belief for their personal lives
- make proper provision for continuing professional development for subject leaders, specialist teachers and others with responsibility for teaching RE in order to improve its quality
- provide more opportunities to use fieldwork and visitors in RE.

Primary schools should:

- ensure that the delivery of RE incorporates more sustained learning and stronger links with the wider curriculum.

Secondary schools should:

- explore the most effective ways of teaching RE in the context of revisions to the wider curriculum and monitor carefully the impact of any changes on pupils' achievement
- ensure that there is effective continuity and progression in pupils' learning especially between Key Stage 3 and GCSE provision.

Context and recent developments in religious education

1. The legal requirements governing RE were set out in the Education Reform Act of 1988 and confirmed by the Education Acts of 1996 and 1998.
2. Uniquely, although RE is a statutory subject, it is not part of the National Curriculum. The content of RE is determined at the level of the local authority and each authority must review its agreed syllabus every five years. An agreed syllabus should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.¹
3. Each local authority must set up a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education to advise the authority on matters connected with RE. Each council comprises four representative groups: Christian and other religious denominations, the Church of England, teachers' associations and the local authority.
4. RE must be provided for all registered pupils in maintained schools, including those in Reception classes and sixth forms. RE in voluntary aided schools must

¹ *Education Reform Act 1988*, Section 8 (3);
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga_19880040_en_2#pt1-ch1-pb3-l1g8

be provided in accordance with the trust deed of the school and the wishes of the governing body. In community and voluntary controlled schools it must be provided in accordance with the local agreed syllabus. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE and this right should be identified in the school prospectus.

5. The survey evidence on which this report is based includes community and voluntary controlled schools with a religious character, but does not include voluntary aided schools with a religious character, for which there are separate inspection arrangements for RE. It is for the governing body of voluntary aided schools with a religious character to ensure that their RE is inspected under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.²
6. In 2004, the then Qualifications and Curriculum Authority produced, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the non-statutory framework for RE.³ Its purpose is to support those with responsibility for the provision and quality of RE in maintained schools. The framework gives local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and relevant authorities with responsibility for schools with a religious character a clear and shared understanding of the knowledge and skills that pupils should gain through their religious education at school.
7. The framework incorporates two attainment targets: 'learning about' religion and belief (AT1) and 'learning from' religion and belief (AT2). These set out the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. 'Learning about' religion and belief includes enquiry into, and investigation of, the nature of religion. 'Learning from' religion and belief is concerned with developing pupils' ability to reflect on and respond to their own experiences and learning about religion. The majority of local authorities, but not all, have incorporated these targets into their locally agreed syllabuses.
8. The wider curriculum context within which RE is placed is undergoing rapid changes and these are having a considerable impact on the subject. The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency has sought to tackle some of these changes by aligning the framework with developments in the secondary and primary curriculum, and by offering guidance on how it might be related to local agreed syllabuses and to the guidelines on assessing pupils' progress.

² For full information on the regulations and other guidance related to religious education, see: *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*, DCSF, 2010; www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/

³ *The non-statutory national framework for religious education*, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004; www.qcda.gov.uk/resources/publication.aspx?id=7e09932d-f66e-44f5-a2cf-3fe7e17cb00a

9. The Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants has organised conferences to share good practice in developing an effective agreed syllabus and this has been complemented by guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency. Further support has been provided by the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. The self-evaluation document, produced by the then Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in collaboration with Ofsted in 2005, is widely used by the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. It is currently being revised to reflect best practice and to update the guidance on the annual reporting process.⁴

10. In 2007, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales recommended to the then Department for Education and Skills that a funded and coordinated programme of training was required, as part of a national strategy for RE.⁵ These recommendations were not carried forward. However, an RE action plan was established and funded by the former DSCF. This included: the development of a training handbook for RE; the extension of a programme of training for members of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education; a research programme analysing resources in the subject; a 'round-table' review of the current provision for continuing professional development in RE, and support for the work of National Association of Teachers of RE. The Religious Education Council of England and Wales made a successful bid for funding from the then DCSF to develop a training programme for religious education teachers on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism, known as the REsilience project.⁶

11. Ofsted's report on RE in 2007 recommended that what was then known as the DfES should consider ways in which Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education might play a stronger role in promoting the priorities of community cohesion and educating for diversity.⁷ This wider role was also highlighted in a report published by the then Department of Communities and Local Government.⁸

⁴ Each Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education is required to publish an annual report that is sent to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency which, in turn, publishes an analysis of the work of SACREs periodically.

⁵ The Religious Education Council of England and Wales was established in 1973 to represent the collective interests of a wide variety of professional associations and faith communities in deepening and strengthening provision for RE. It provides a multi-faith forum where national organisations with an interest in supporting and promoting RE in schools and colleges can share matters of common concern. For more information, see: www.religiouseducationcouncil.org

⁶ For further information on the REsilience programme, see: www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/content/blogcategory/48/77/

⁷ *Making sense of religion* (070045), Ofsted, 2007; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070045a

⁸ *Face to Face and Side by Side: a framework for partnership in our multi faith society*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008; www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework

Part A: religious education in primary and secondary schools

Achievement and standards

Primary religious education

12. Achievement was good or outstanding in about four in 10 of the primary schools visited and was inadequate in only one out of the 94 schools. In six out of 10 schools it was satisfactory. In six schools achievement was outstanding. The challenge facing schools is how to ensure more achievement is of good quality. The picture remains much the same as at the time of the 2007 report.
13. Some of the best lessons were seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In many Reception classes, children developed a lively interest in exploring the features of different religions and beliefs. Where teachers gave them good opportunities for first-hand experience of artefacts, stories, places of worship and visitors, they quickly learnt to ask their own questions, recognise diversity and respect the special nature of religious material. Where RE was effective, young children developed the ability to respond to structured opportunities for quiet reflection and to express their ideas through play, art, music and other media.
14. Where RE was most effective at Key Stage 1, pupils began to develop a framework of understanding within which to locate their learning in RE. Their questions became increasingly perceptive and they started to undertake their own independent investigations. They related their learning to their experience, finding parallels between features of religion and belief and their own lives. They also began to explain the role which stories and practices play in the lives of believers. When they had the opportunity to use their imagination and engage with high-quality resources, they often offered very thoughtful insights. In the best instances, they were able to evaluate different aspects of religion as, for example, when a class of Year 2 pupils mounted a lively campaign to stop a 'story-stealer' who was coming to take away all the religious stories in the world!
15. At Key Stage 2, effective RE extended pupils' ability to undertake sustained independent enquiries into religion and belief. In the best lessons, pupils were able to take key concepts of the subject, such as 'belief' or 'myth', develop their own questioning and enquiry, investigate specific examples and relate these to their own ideas. They were able to evaluate different points of view sensibly. In the best cases, pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 showed considerable confidence in handling sophisticated ideas and arguments about matters to do with belief and practice.

16. The following example illustrates the high achievement seen in one primary school.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the children were able to talk confidently about key features of the festival of harvest and explain why people would think it was an important time of the year.

By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils linked their learning about the Torah to a wide range of other features of the Jewish faith. Following an opportunity to talk to a Jewish visitor, they offered a range of reasons why the rules are still important to Jews. They also produced their own rules for living and took great pride in trying to create their own scroll without making a mistake.

Pupils in Year 3 could write a letter as if they were Christian children explaining what happened at Eucharist and why it was important to them, showing they could interpret different parts of the celebration for themselves.

Pupils in Year 4 were undertaking an extended enquiry into the theme of creation, exploring a range of questions including: 'Why might creation stories be important?'; 'What similarities and differences are there between different creation stories?'; 'Are creation stories true?'; 'What do we think caused the world to begin?'

In Year 6, pupils engaged in a detailed investigation into worship within the Christian and Sikh religions, using a variety of media to explain their findings. All this related to the 'big' question: 'What does it mean to have a faith?'

17. In schools where achievement was satisfactory, several key weaknesses were common, including the following:
- the pupils used a narrow range of skills; although their knowledge was developing, they had little opportunity to apply higher order thinking skills, such as investigation, interpretation, analysis and evaluation
 - the pupils' understanding was fragmented and they made few connections between different aspects of their learning in RE
 - progress was uneven from year to year and from teacher to teacher. This was often linked to a lack of whole-school training to develop teachers' expertise in the subject
 - there was very limited evidence of pupils making any meaningful links between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion.
18. A particular area of concern was the way in which pupils developed their understanding of Christianity. Pupils' understanding of Christianity, while deeper

in some respects compared with their understanding of other faiths, was often unsystematic and confused. This is discussed later in this report.

Secondary religious education

19. Achievement was good or better in just under half of the 89 secondary schools visited, although it was outstanding in only three schools. In nearly one in five schools visited, achievement in RE was inadequate, compared with one in 10 schools in the earlier sample. This pattern of achievement compares unfavourably with that reported in 2007. In the last year of this survey, 2008/09, achievement was inadequate in nearly one in three of the 30 secondary schools visited.
20. Where achievement at Key Stage 3 was good, students made increasingly sophisticated use of interpretation, investigation, analysis and evaluation when undertaking enquiries into religion and belief. Through a careful balance and integration of the work across the two areas of attainment, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, they were able to offer their own ideas on what they encountered and to engage with significant issues. In these cases, the students responded enthusiastically to the challenge of the learning and used a range of media to communicate their findings and responses. Their work was of particularly high quality where they were encouraged to think for themselves and to challenge each other's views when considering beliefs and values, or when exploring the links between belief and practice. The example below shows how progression and challenge were built into the concluding lesson of a well-structured unit of work on Buddhism in Year 8.

During the unit, the students had used an enquiry-based approach to learning. In the final lesson, the teacher aimed to extend their understanding and provide an opportunity for them to connect their study of Buddhism to wider aspects of exploring religion.

To begin with, the teacher explained briefly the following dimensions of religion: ritual, mythical, experiential, doctrinal, social and ethical. In groups, they considered how they could use these to structure their learning about Buddhism and which aspects of the religion would link with which dimension.

The main group task was to select one of the dimensions and develop an argument to support the view that it was the most important in interpreting Buddhism. They were very successful in drawing their learning together and in structuring their thinking to improve their understanding. One group, for example, selected the dimension of ritual and developed an argument that practice is crucial to the Buddhist way of life as it expresses belief and prepares devotees for their life in the outside world.

21. Such examples of good practice, however, were not well established in many of the schools visited. Where the provision for RE was at best satisfactory, the students continued to gain a basic level of knowledge and understanding of religions and beliefs, but they were not learning to use the higher order skills of enquiry such as interpreting texts or images, examining religious material independently or evaluating ideas. Too much work was merely descriptive or, where provision was inadequate, it was confined to recording or recounting information. The quality of oral work was also limited, with students not learning to discuss concepts in a structured or systematic way.
22. Short and full course GCSE entries have continued to rise. In 2009, just over 25% of students were entered for the full GCSE course and around a further 40% for the short course. Over 73% of full course students gained A* to C grades, with nearly 33% receiving the highest A* or A grades. In the short course, just over 54% gained A* to C grades, a slight reduction from the 2006 figure. Over 17% achieved the highest A* or A grades. The proportion attaining the A* to C grades for the short course has remained consistently around 50% to 55%, in contrast to the steady improvement in the results for the full course. While the survey evidence on which the report is based does not include voluntary aided schools with a religious character, the data about examination results relate to all schools.
23. Although achievement in the full course was relatively consistent across the schools visited, the pattern in the short GCSE course was extremely variable. Success was affected by a number of factors, including:
 - the amount of time allocated to the subject, which could vary greatly between schools
 - whether the subject was taught by specialists or non-specialists
 - whether the students had positive or negative attitudes towards the requirement to study the subject.
24. In the schools where examination results were good, the students were often given the opportunity to focus on important questions related to religious, philosophical, ethical and social issues. The following example from an outstanding Year 11 lesson illustrates this.

The students were comparing the Hindu and Christian perspectives on salvation and focusing on a number of key questions: 'Is there a bigger picture of which we are a part?'; 'Is there anything to escape from?'; 'Are there any ideas in the Christian or Hindu view of the world which appeal to us?'

They watched an extract from a science fiction film and considered how it related to the idea of salvation. They then examined the Hindu concept of 'samsara', the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Working in groups, they analysed and annotated a text, highlighting the key features of the

concept. The whole class pooled its ideas before comparing the Hindu and Christian perspectives. During this, good use was made of the views of students with known religious affiliations.

At the end, the students were asked to write an account of reality from their own perspective. They engaged enthusiastically with what they saw as a challenging task. Some offered a view which reflected their own sense of living in a diverse world, where people no longer believe in certainties.

25. In contrast, and particularly on the short GCSE course, inspectors encountered instances where students' knowledge of religion and belief was narrow and superficial. This is discussed later in this report.
26. The schools visited rarely assessed the achievement of Key Stage 4 students who were following non-examination courses. Where provision was limited, as was often the case, students made little or no progress in making sense of religion and belief. However, where provision for non-accredited courses was good, students welcomed the opportunities to debate issues openly, without the pressure of preparing for an examination.
27. Non-accredited courses took a variety of forms. In some schools, for example, RE formed part of a carousel of units, together with personal, social, health, and economic education and citizenship. In other schools, the normal timetable would be suspended from time to time and a whole day devoted to considering aspects of religion and belief. These days were particularly successful when they were led by a team of teachers, who were committed to using high quality resources, a variety of media sources and outside speakers to engage students in lively discussion.
28. Over the past three years, there has been a rise in the number of students entered for A- and AS-level examinations, building on the success of the subject at GCSE. In 2009, around 17,000 students in England took A-level GCE religious studies compared with just over 15,000 in 2006. Over 21,000 students were entered for AS-level courses in 2009 compared with nearly 19,000 in 2006. The performance of students in these examinations has remained fairly stable over that time and the results compare well with those of other subjects. In 2009, just over 26% of A-level students and around 23% of AS-level students gained a grade A.

Personal development

29. The previous RE report presented a positive picture of the subject's contribution to pupils' personal development. The subject made a similar and, in many cases, even stronger contribution in the schools visited for this survey. The increased focus on promoting community cohesion and the contribution that RE can make to this had clearly given the subject added importance. This is discussed in more detail in Part B.

30. The personal development of pupils in RE was good or better in four fifths of the primary schools visited and was outstanding in just over a fifth of schools. At secondary level, it was good or better in nearly three quarters of schools.
31. Most of the pupils interviewed appreciated the value of RE and considered it to be a worthwhile subject. The small minority who expressed negative views were critical of the provision made for the subject rather than its intrinsic value. In a number of the schools where provision for RE was inadequate, the pupils showed notably less respect for, and tolerance of, diversity than their peers in other schools.
32. Pupils usually saw the value of RE in terms of how it contributed to their understanding of and respect for religious and cultural diversity. They often commented on how it helped them to understand others and contributed to a more harmonious society. Pupils recognised that RE provided a context in which issues related to the 'spiritual' were raised. However, it was only when RE was at its most effective that they had genuine opportunities to explore and reflect on the meaning and purpose of their lives and on the more intangible aspects of their experiences.
33. In the primary schools where RE was of high quality, pupils often had opportunities to relate their learning about religion to aspects of their own lives. A characteristic of RE where provision was only satisfactory was that these connections were not explored in depth. These shortcomings related directly to limitations in learning, discussed later in this report.
34. In the secondary schools, RE generally contributed positively to students' personal development. However, this tended to focus on the moral, social and cultural aspects of their lives. In about six in 10 of the schools visited, there were few opportunities for students to explore the more spiritual aspects of the subject. For example, they rarely engaged with challenging or evocative material drawn from religious and belief traditions that might stimulate more profound feelings or ideas.
35. A positive contribution to spiritual development involves opportunities for pupils to:
 - explore how different beliefs, religious or otherwise, inform their own perspectives about life
 - develop a sense of fascination about themselves and the world around them
 - explore and reflect on the more intangible and puzzling aspects of their experience
 - use imagination and creativity in their learning.

It is these aspects of learning which were often weakest where the provision for RE was no better than satisfactory.

36. Pupils often referred to the way that RE lessons provided an important and 'safe' opportunity to express their views without fear of ridicule. Too often, however, and particularly in the weaker provision in secondary schools, opportunities for discussion and debate were not organised effectively. Progress in helping pupils to develop their skills of argument and debate was therefore limited.
37. A number of schools visited, mainly primary, were involved in national projects such as the 'Spirited Poetry' and 'Spirited Music' projects organised by the National Association of Teachers of RE.⁹ Where these opportunities were used effectively, the potential of RE to contribute more powerfully to pupils' spiritual development was being realised more successfully.

Teaching and learning

Primary schools

38. The quality of teaching and learning in RE was good or outstanding in just over half of the 94 primary schools visited. However, it was outstanding in only six schools. There was no school where it was inadequate.
39. In the large majority of the lessons seen, many good generic features of teaching were evident, including positive relationships between teachers and pupils, good classroom management, and the use of a range of engaging resources and activities.
40. Where teaching and learning were good or outstanding, these features were extended to include:
- clear understanding, on the part of teachers and pupils, about the underlying purpose of RE
 - imaginative use of challenging and evocative resources to stimulate the pupils' imagination and encourage them to explore their personal responses
 - sustained learning, linked to work in other areas of the curriculum, notably English, art, drama and music
 - careful use of creative activities that supported and enhanced the central focus of learning in RE rather than detracted from it
 - effective use of teachers' subject knowledge to ensure a staged development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding
 - high expectations about pupils' ability to use the skills of enquiry.
41. The last two features are clearly illustrated in the following examples.

⁹ For further information, see: www.natre.org.uk.

A unit of work for Year 5 on the creation stories was carefully sequenced into a series of stages which ensured clear progression in the pupils' thinking.

Stage 1: Formulating questions

The teacher helped the pupils identify what they wanted to know about creation stories. They agreed on five questions:

'Who or what created the world?'

'Can we identify similarities between different creation stories?'

'Why are creation stories important to people?'

'What might have caused the world to begin?'

'How do we know what is true?'

These questions were displayed prominently in the classroom and regularly referred to during subsequent activities to check on the pupils' progress.

Stage 2: Planning the enquiry

The pupils were asked to think how they might find answers to these questions, to identify what resources they needed and to decide how best to sequence the activities.

Stage 3: Conducting the enquiry; comparing and analysing evidence

The pupils read and listened to a range of stories to identify what they had in common and how they differed from each other. They also found out what different people's opinions of the stories were; for example, whether they thought they were true.

Stage 4: Presenting findings

They were involved in a number of debates to consider the questions they had asked at the beginning. In doing so, they were able to develop arguments and offer explanations and interpretations.

Stage 5: Reflecting and responding

Finally, they were asked to think about their own ideas about these stories by considering whether they would agree with the idea that the stories should be banned.

This carefully designed unit of work enabled the pupils to understand that creation stories had some common features and often used similar but

different kinds of symbolism. It also enabled them to identify how science and religion had different ways of trying to explain the idea of creation.

In a Year 5 lesson, the teacher wanted to build a significant challenge into the pupils' study of the Christian nativity story and to raise their understanding to a new level.

After quickly recalling the main elements of the story, the teacher introduced the word 'covenant' and presented a cartoon account of Noah and the Flood. The pupils were asked to work in groups to research the meaning of 'covenant', to decide what they thought the story of Noah was about and what the relationships to the nativity story might be.

The lesson proved highly successful, with pupils offering their own interpretation of the ideas and explaining how both stories represented a fresh start, a chance to put things right and an agreement between God and his people. In arriving at their conclusions, they were involved in the higher order skills of analysis, interpretation, evaluation and the development of an argument.

42. Where teaching and learning in RE were less effective:

- the creative tasks in which the pupils were involved distracted from the aspects of learning that related specifically to RE
- opportunities for pupils to apply and develop higher order thinking skills were limited
- the links between the study of religion and the pupils' experience were not well structured
- teachers lacked confidence and were reluctant to risk new approaches
- the provision for RE was confined to single weekly sessions, which limited the scope to forge links with other areas of the curriculum and develop more sustained learning
- teachers relied too heavily on published schemes of work or poor quality worksheets
- some of the tasks were not sufficiently challenging to extend the knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils, particularly the more able.

Secondary schools

43. The quality of teaching and learning was good or outstanding in just under half of the 89 secondary schools visited and was inadequate in nine schools. This broadly reflects the findings of the sample in the previous report. However, in 2008/09, the final year of the survey, the quality of teaching was inadequate in nearly a fifth of the lessons observed.

44. In a large proportion of lessons in Years 7 and 8, where RE was integrated with other curriculum areas, the lack of a specific focus on the subject limited students' progress.
45. As in the primary schools visited, many of the generic features of teaching and learning, such as the management of lessons, were good. Where provision was good or outstanding it was characterised by:
- strong subject expertise
 - challenging activities designed to develop higher order thinking skills
 - careful matching of tasks to students' differing needs and abilities
 - specific strategies to tackle underachievement of specific groups such as boys
 - effective use of a good range of resources, including electronic media
 - well-structured discussion and investigative work to promote learning
 - regular visits and visitors to enrich learning
 - carefully planned activities that promoted collaborative learning through problem solving and discussion
 - a consistent focus on enabling students to express their personal beliefs, feelings and fears without danger of ridicule or criticism
 - careful use of data to analyse students' performance, to set clear and challenging targets and to monitor progress
 - effective arrangements for assessing students' progress through peer and self-assessment and plenary sessions
 - high quality marking that helped students to identify how they were progressing and precisely what they needed to do to improve their work.
46. The weaker aspects of teaching and learning included:
- a persistent lack of challenge in many tasks
 - limited adjustment of tasks to take account of the varying needs and abilities of different students, particularly in mixed ability classes
 - limitations in the structure and sequencing of learning, so that students were unable to see the connection between tasks and the overarching purpose of the lesson
 - poor assessment, related to a lack of clarity about what constituted making progress in RE
 - narrowness of learning, with an over-emphasis on providing students with information rather than encouraging enquiry and engaging with more challenging concepts

- mechanistic teaching that did not enable students to understand the principles of effective argument or the impact that religious beliefs can have on people's lives
 - ineffective questioning.
47. Some of these weaknesses are clearly illustrated in the way that a Key Stage 3 unit on Sikhism was presented.

The unit started with the question: 'Why does the English cricketer Monty Panesar wear a turban?' This was used to make a connection to students' experiences but not to provide a focus for learning. The rest of the unit consisted of a series of lessons, each based on a key question such as:

'What do Sikhs believe?'; 'What are the five Ks?'; 'Why is the Khalsa important?'

In practice, each lesson was similar in structure, focusing on a range of different ways to gather and record information relating to the question. Each lesson demanded a similar level of skill to the previous one, with no increase in challenge or integration of learning into a bigger picture.

The final task required the students to produce a booklet which Monty might give to his friends to explain why he wore a turban. They put a great deal of effort into presenting the work but the content was no more than a recycling of the information they had already gathered. There was no attempt to encourage them to apply higher order learning.

The work was not differentiated and, because the students had not been given the opportunity to conduct their own research and analysis, they could not see ahead and work at their own pace.

How might it have been improved?

The teaching needed a challenging key question to drive the learning. For example, the students might have been asked: 'Why is it so important for Sikhs to preserve their sense of identity?' As a result, they might have been prompted to explore the concept of 'identity' and how it related to their own lives. This would have provided a context for investigating Sikh belief and practice to see how each area might help to answer the overarching question. This could have been done in differentiated groups to ensure that each student was given an appropriate challenge. The progress in their learning could have been evaluated by asking the students to explain their response to the key questions and to show how it built on previous responses. They could also have been given the opportunity to extend their discussions and investigations further by exploring what provided them with their personal sense of identity and how religion might be a central element in some people's view of who they are and what they might become.

Promoting challenging learning in religious education

48. In the schools visited, the promotion of challenging learning in RE related primarily to engaging pupils with stimulating ideas and enquiries in ways that encouraged independent thought and reflection. Pupils were challenged in RE when, for example, they :
- linked aspects of their learning together
 - designed and carried out their own investigations into beliefs and practices
 - interpreted and challenged religious material such as stories, images or metaphors
 - used skills such as prediction, speculation or evaluation
 - engaged with some of the more evocative, personal and imaginative dimensions of religion and belief, relating these to their own lives
 - used talk, writing and the arts to express their ideas and responses.
49. Where provision for promoting challenge in RE was most effective, it was characterised by:
- opportunities for pupils to explore thought-provoking material, drawn directly from the faith traditions, and to use this to develop a deeper understanding of religion and belief
 - effective planning where learning was sequenced in such a way as to help pupils develop their critical skills systematically
 - opportunities for pupils to develop their own investigations, hypotheses and interpretations
 - using creative activities in ways which promote rather than detract from the learning objectives relating specifically to RE
 - the effective use of a wide range of media and new technology to explore concepts.
50. The example below, from a Year 7 lesson with a small group of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, illustrates some of these features.

The lesson focused on the meaning of the story of Noah. The students heard a number of versions of the story, including one from the Qur'an. The teacher asked them to ask any questions they had about the stories. These included: 'How did the world get people again?'; 'How did they get the elephants on board?'; 'Did the flood cover the whole world?' 'Why aren't all the stories the same?'

The teacher asked them to think about what the purpose of the story might be. This led them to ask further questions about what God was trying to do. One suggested that the story might be a myth.

The teacher introduced a DVD of the Babylonian Gilgamesh story. The students were encouraged to ask questions and think about what might happen next. This stimulated a whole range of questions with several very interesting references to floods that had happened recently in Cornwall.

Throughout the discussion, the teacher returned to the questions about whether the stories might be true and why different people might have different ideas about them: 'What might an atheist think?'; 'What might a Christian think?'; 'Which story is more believable?'

At the end of the lesson, the students were asked to write a short piece using the word 'because'. 'An atheist might think the story is untrue because...'; 'A Christian would say the story might be true because...'. The students were successful in offering their ideas and seeing the possibility of different viewpoints. They finally contributed well to a discussion on whether a story has to be true to have a special meaning.

51. In many of the secondary schools visited, opportunities for promoting challenge were very limited. Work related to 'learning about' religion rarely required any skills beyond recounting or recording information. Discussions and questioning often lacked depth, had no clear purpose and did little to extend students' understanding of religion. There was a greater focus on providing challenge in 'learning from' religion but this was too often divorced from 'learning about' it.
52. In many of the primary RE lessons seen, the arts and other practical activities were used to simulate thinking, but too often these experiences had only a tenuous link to the subject's key concepts and ideas. A typical lesson consisted of an introduction from the teacher on a topic such as a festival or a particular religious practice, followed by questions to check on the pupils' understanding. This would lead to a practical activity. While these tasks were often well planned and imaginative in terms of developing pupils' expressive skills, they did not advance their understanding of the religious material. The following example of a Year 2 lesson illustrates this.

A lesson on the story of Rama and Sita came at the end of a sequence of lessons exploring aspects of Hinduism. The aims of the lesson were ambitious and focused on how Hindus use prayer, songs, dance and stories in their celebrations. To extend the challenge further, the teacher also wanted to involve the pupils in a range of creative activities.

Therefore, after hearing the story being re-told, they were divided into four groups where they worked on:

- producing a short play based on the story
- creating a poster about one of the key characters in it
- using pictures with speech bubbles to sequence the events
- developing a simple celebratory dance, using Indian music.

They participated well, enjoyed the activities and used a variety of creative skills. However, these skills were developed at the expense of the RE-related learning because the teacher did not ensure that during the activities the pupils focused sufficiently on the main objective, namely to understand the role of celebration within the Hindu religion.

How might it have been improved?

The teacher could have ensured that, from the beginning, the activities were placed firmly in the context of Hindu practice, for example by showing a picture of a Hindu girl in front of a shrine to Rama and Sita. The main focus would then be on understanding why Rama and Sita were so important to her and thinking about ways in which she might celebrate the stories. The pupils could decide what information they needed and what questions they could formulate to find the relevant answers. The story-telling and creative tasks could then proceed as planned but, rather than pursuing them in isolation, they could relate them to specific questions such as:

'Who are Rama and Sita and what can the story tell us about why they are important to a Hindu child?'

'What different ways might a Hindu use to celebrate or remember the story?'

Assessment

53. The quality of assessment was good or outstanding in only a fifth of the primary schools visited. It was satisfactory in over half and inadequate in a quarter. This was one of the weakest aspects of the provision in the primary schools visited and presented a worse picture than in the previous survey.
54. Assessment was also one of the weakest aspects of RE provision in the secondary schools. It was good or outstanding in just under a third and inadequate in three of 10 of the schools visited. Compared with the previous survey, the number of schools with good or better assessment had increased, but the proportion in which assessment was inadequate had also risen.
55. In both the primary and the secondary phases, most teachers were experiencing significant difficulties in using the levels of attainment set out in the locally agreed syllabus. This contributed to several problems.
 - Very few of the pupils with whom inspectors held discussions were able to say how much progress they had made in RE. They frequently told inspectors that, in comparison with other subjects, they did not know what they had achieved or what they needed to do to improve.

- Very few of the schools were using levels effectively in developing assessment tasks. Many of the tasks, particularly in secondary schools, did not challenge pupils because they were not pitched at the right level.
 - Very few of the schools used any exemplification materials to help to make and moderate judgements about pupils' work.
 - In most of the schools visited, judgements about pupils' progress made using levels were very inaccurate. As a result, the data available to subject leaders were too unreliable to provide an effective basis for self-evaluation.
 - Few of the schools used levels effectively when planning the curriculum. As a result, work rarely built on earlier learning.
56. In the secondary schools, RE departments were increasingly using sub-levels in their assessment, in response to requests from senior managers. In most cases, this was a fairly meaningless exercise because the levels were not defined clearly enough to sustain this degree of differentiation.
57. In the primary schools, assessment was most effective where:
- planning clearly identified the criteria to be used in assessing progress
 - the wording of the levels was reflected in the planning and in the reports to parents
 - the planning identified specific points when assessment would take place
 - teachers were encouraged to use simple methods of recording, such as annotating plans or asking teaching assistants to note examples of pupils' achievement
 - pupils were helped to understand how they were being assessed and to apply the criteria in evaluating their own or each other's work.
58. In the best primary practice, coordinators for the subject understood that assessment was most useful where it:
- gave pupils an idea of what progress meant in RE; for example that it might be reflected in improvements in the way that they framed questions or presented explanations
 - helped them to evaluate whether the teaching and the curriculum were effective
 - helped to inform the next stage of planning.
59. High quality assessment in the secondary schools was characterised by:
- regular reference to assessment criteria so that the students understood how particular tasks were designed to help them achieve higher levels
 - a clear focus on ensuring that the levels were presented in language that the students understood

- clear identification of specific assessment tasks, matched to levels, which were carefully differentiated to enable all students to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do
 - extensive and systematic use of peer- and self-assessment, where the students could apply the criteria relating to the levels themselves
 - regular opportunities for students to grade specimen answers to help them to understand what was meant by 'good' work
 - very careful exemplification and reinforcement of how to develop a good argument, to use evidence effectively and present explanations clearly.
60. A key area where these schools were better than those visited in the previous survey was in using data on students' progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Most of the schools visited were using this information effectively to identify and tackle underperformance in the full GCSE and GCE A-level courses. Assessment was far less effective in the case of short GCSE courses where high numbers of students, non-specialist teaching and very restricted time for the subject limited the scope for identifying and supporting students who were not making enough progress.

The curriculum

Primary schools

61. The quality of the curriculum was good or outstanding in four in 10 primary schools visited. It was inadequate in only one school and outstanding in seven. These proportions were similar to those in the previous survey.
62. Where the curriculum for RE was good, it was characterised by:
- effective interpretation and adaptation of the locally agreed syllabus and published schemes of work, with a clear understanding by teachers of the purpose of each element of the planning
 - well-defined continuity and progression, with content related clearly to core ideas and skills
 - patterns of delivery which ensured sustained learning and strong links to the wider curriculum.
63. In the majority of the schools visited there was a reliance on a curriculum model based on six half-termly units of one lesson a week. This model often led to fragmented learning and limited the opportunities to build links with other areas of the curriculum. The schools gave several reasons for this approach. The most common reasons were as follows.
- The schools assumed, wrongly, that there was a legal requirement to teach RE every week and/or in each half-term.

- The guidance provided in the local authority scheme of work or in the agreed syllabus assumed that this was how schools should organise their RE provision.
- This model made it easier to monitor how the subject was taught.

64. Some of the schools visited were exploring new patterns for providing RE, including through blocks or units which allowed more time for sustained learning and for making stronger links with other subjects. Schools that had introduced this approach successfully were able to show that pupils were now being given more challenging work and were making better progress than previously. The following example from a primary school illustrates this.

Traditionally, the school had organised RE into six half-term units a year, taught by the class teacher once a week. The lessons were adapted from a scheme of work published by a neighbouring local authority.

After careful reflection, the school decided to try a new approach, organising the subject into two or three more substantial units each year. These units were to be taught as the main class topic for four or five hours each week for four or five weeks. The positive impact on the quality of pupils' learning was immediate and significant.

From the beginning, the pupils were encouraged to ask pertinent questions about the topic and to use their skills of investigation to find the answers. The way that the units were organised gave them time to conduct extended research and to produce work of a high standard. For example, Year 1 pupils who were studying celebrations confidently linked different aspects of their work and used subject-specific vocabulary to present their conclusions. Pupils in Year 4 developed their own enquiries into key aspects of belief, based on key questions they framed in relation to the topic 'What do we believe?'

The teachers, who had previously often felt restricted by over-structured schemes of work, became much more effective in promoting good investigative work. Learning was managed skilfully to promote successful group work and independent research. More effective links were made with other areas of the curriculum, most notably English and the arts. Teachers were much more confident in asking questions and intervening to ensure that they maintained and extended the main focus of the learning.

65. A recurring problem faced by many RE subject coordinators was that the agreed syllabus did not provide enough clarity about planning. As a result, teachers had to rely very heavily on published schemes of work, the quality of which was variable. Often, these schemes were extremely detailed but did not give teachers an insight into planning. The teachers therefore adapted the schemes, selecting random activities which they thought they could teach and that pupils would enjoy. Although the individual activities were often good in

themselves, learning in the subject was not built upon progressively because the activities were no longer integrated into a coherent programme of work.

Secondary schools

66. The quality of the curriculum was good in four in 10 of the secondary schools visited and outstanding in only one school. In nearly one in five schools, it was inadequate. This was a worse picture than that reported in 2007 when the curriculum was good or better in half the schools visited.
67. During the time of this survey, significant changes took place in the wider curriculum at Key Stage 3.¹⁰ The revised Key Stage 3 secondary curriculum was introduced in September 2008 as part of a major reform of 11–19 education and qualifications. The purpose of the changes was to provide more flexibility for schools to design their curriculum so that it matches the needs of learners, and the local context.
68. RE was in an unusual position in relation to the review of the secondary curriculum because the content of the subject is determined at the level of the local authority. Prior to the review, the framework had stood as a separate document. In 2008 the secondary section was re-aligned and incorporated into the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum on a non-statutory basis. In some of the schools, this led to some confusion about whether to follow the framework, as incorporated within the new secondary curriculum, or the locally agreed syllabus, and how the various local and national initiatives related to each other.
69. A few of the local authorities had provided training and guidance to help schools to forge links between the agreed syllabus and the revised curriculum. This minimised the potential tension between local determination and the national initiatives. However, most of the local authorities where inspectors visited schools had not acted to help teachers understand how the locally agreed syllabus might be used or re-interpreted in the light of the national changes, and how they might develop their schemes of work against a background of wider curriculum review.
70. Evidence from the 30 schools visited in 2008/09, the final year of the survey, found that these changes had begun to have a direct impact on RE in half of the 30 schools visited. In most cases, this involved RE in the development of some form of integrated course with other humanities subjects. While these usually included some subject content, the focus was often primarily on the development of pupils' general learning skills.
71. In just under half the schools visited in 2008/09, plans to review the Key Stage 3 curriculum did not involve RE directly. In some cases, this was because the

¹⁰ For further information, see: www.qcda.gov.uk.

schools had made a conscious decision not to revise the curriculum; in others, they had not recognised the implications or the potential of the review for RE.

72. In the schools where modifications to the Key Stage 3 curriculum had had a positive impact on RE, the subject leaders had a clear and confident grasp of the nature and distinctiveness of the subject and ensured that these factors were not forgotten. The most successful changes were being phased in gradually, with time being allowed for careful planning and evaluation. Examples of positive developments included:
- opportunities for RE teachers to work with teachers in the humanities and other subject areas on providing students with challenges that would extend their thinking skills
 - linking RE to literacy and personal learning and thinking skills, with mutual benefits as the level of challenge increased
 - a move to more sustained blocked units of work, leading to much greater engagement by students, more imaginative teaching and some high quality provision that included more opportunities for fieldwork
 - creating a broader context and greater relevance for RE, as in one example where a unit on 'Living in the community' provided opportunities to explore the place of religion in society and its potential role in promoting community cohesion.
73. Despite this, in most schools where RE had been affected by changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, the impact was negative. This was particularly the case in the schools with weaker leadership, limited access to subject specialist expertise or, in some cases, where there was a lack of flexibility in interpreting the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Examples of negative impact of changes in the curriculum arrangements for RE included:
- RE provision being fragmented into short blocks, with limited continuity and progression
 - superficial links being made between RE and other subjects
 - the increasing use of non-specialist teachers who focused on their subject interests when delivering integrated topic work with the result that, in some classes, RE was marginalised
 - the use of RE specialists to teach integrated, cross-curricular programmes in Key Stage 3, resulting in more examination classes having to be taught by non-specialists
 - difficulties in matching new approaches to curriculum planning to the demands of a locally agreed syllabus which required a high level of content to be covered.
74. In the worst cases, the innovations in Key Stage 3, combined with other developments, led to a situation where a clearly identifiable and coherent RE

programme disappeared from the school curriculum. In a school which had placed RE within a Year 7 competency-based programme, the planning for the subject lacked any coherence or structure. The school had plans to extend this into Year 8 and to start a Key Stage 4 programme in Year 9; RE would be placed within a personal, social and health education programme, alongside citizenship, and taught by form tutors with no specialist input. No examination provision was planned for the subject. The result was that there was not enough work for an RE specialist who then had to be redeployed to teach other subjects.

75. Most of the schools visited in 2008/09 had not evaluated the impact of the changes on students' progress in RE. Many of the schools which had introduced integrated courses on personal learning and thinking skills into Year 7 were intending to extend these into Year 8 without considering how effective they had been. Few of the schools had considered including the progress students make in RE as a criterion for judging the success of the new integrated programmes.
76. Other schools that had modified provision in Year 7 had made little progress in revising the rest of the Key Stage 3 curriculum in the light of such changes. For example, most of the work on Christianity in one school had traditionally been concentrated in Year 7. With the introduction of an integrated course this was no longer the case. However, no consideration had been given to how the programme for the rest of the key stage would be altered to ensure that students continued to have an opportunity to study religion.
77. These findings echo those in Ofsted's report on the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. The report noted that:

'The geography, history and religious education surveys found 24 schools of the 84 sampled with integrated courses in place or planned for. While these usually included subject content from the humanities subjects, the focus was on the development of students' general learning skills... Strengths of the best of these included good levels of interest on the part of students, good thematic and conceptual links that made learning more coherent, and shared approaches to the development of students' general learning skills. However, subject inspectors also identified emerging problems with the courses. These included the loss of subject content and subject skills development; lack of continuity from primary school experience; lack of rigour and challenge; uneven quality of teaching and artificial 'links' or themes. These problems were especially manifested where courses had been given insufficient planning time and where the component subject departments were not fully involved in planning.'¹¹

¹¹ *Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum* (080262), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080262

78. An earlier report by Ofsted identified key factors which were also evident in this survey in those schools that had been most successful in incorporating RE into the wider curriculum changes at Key Stage 3. The report said:

'Successful innovation was linked principally to strong leadership at all levels. This ensured that everyone involved had a clear understanding of the rationale behind innovation and the roles and responsibilities of individuals.

Other factors in successful innovation included detailed planning linked to rigorous self-evaluation; clear systems, timescales and criteria for evaluating impact that drew on detailed data and information from a wide range of stakeholders; carefully designed professional development programmes for staff to implement the new approaches.

The most successful schools based their reforms on considerable background research into theories of learning and different ways of approaching the curriculum.¹²

79. There was some good provision for RE at Key Stage 4 and, in one in 10 of the secondary schools visited, there was evidence that the quality had recently improved. More schools, for example, were developing a range of RE pathways, including full and short course GCSE and entry level qualifications, to ensure that the needs of different students were better met.
80. However, in other schools there had been a recent deterioration in the provision at Key Stage 4, as the following examples show.
- In one school, where all students had followed the short course GCSE, half had chosen not to attend the examination. Therefore, the decision was taken to dispense with the short course and only offer an optional full course.
 - Another school had decided to dispense with the short course and to teach RE through citizenship. In practice, this had no clearly identified RE component.
 - One school decided not to enter any students for the short course GCSE. Instead, in Years 9 to 11, all pupils would pursue the full course for one lesson a week. Results declined dramatically and the limited time meant that teaching and learning were driven by examination requirements with students having few opportunities to explore and reflect on issues in depth.
 - In a number of the schools visited, decisions about short course provision for RE were made in an ad hoc way. In one case, all students had started the short course in Year 10 but were then told that half of them would have to drop it in Year 11 to focus on the core subjects. The senior leaders then

¹² *Curriculum innovation in schools* (070097), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070097

considered the possibility of introducing a short course which could be started in Year 9 and completed in Year 10. However, they had no clear educational rationale for such changes.

- Staff absence in one school triggered a decision to drop the short course in RE, leaving no provision for the subject in Key Stage 4. The school was part of the National Challenge initiative and it chose to use the time saved to boost students' performance in English and mathematics.
81. In a small number of the schools visited, Key Stage 4 students who were pursuing work-related courses at local colleges were not receiving their statutory RE entitlement because of difficulties in timetabling it.
 82. The short course GCSE in religious studies has continued to be a success story in terms of the increase in the number of students leaving with an accredited qualification. If the GCSE short course is managed well and taught effectively, it has the capacity to make an important contribution to students' education. However, visits to the secondary schools showed that, too often, these short courses paid limited attention to exploring religious beliefs, values and perspectives and contributed very little to students' understanding of those aspects of RE. While the learning often involved examining religious perspectives on ethical and social issues, investigation and analysis of those perspectives were often superficial or contrived. Too often, the students did not acquire a sufficiently incisive understanding of the religion or belief perspective which they were seeking to apply to moral or social issues. As a result, their understanding of the impact of religions and beliefs on people's decision-making was often distorted.
 83. In some of the schools visited, weaknesses in the way that Christianity had been explored at Key Stage 3 meant that GCSE students lacked the depth of understanding necessary to apply Christian perspectives to considering moral and social questions.
 84. There was often a lack of continuity and progression between the RE curriculum in Key Stage 3 and the GCSE short courses. One key finding was that the recent changes in the teaching of RE were distorting the balance and progression in the subject, sometimes leading pupils towards a narrow and superficial understanding of the world of religion and belief. Specifically, many of the newer patterns of provision at Key Stage 3 were not providing pupils with sufficient depth of knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. The focus on philosophy and ethics at GCSE from a religious perspective presupposes a depth of prior knowledge about religion which was often no longer present. As a result, students had to learn by rote ways of explaining and evaluating those perspectives in order to meet examination requirements. This often had the effect of undermining the quality of learning and distorting pupils' understanding of the meaning and significance of religion and beliefs. In these situations, pupils also did not have enough opportunity to examine

critically issues related to the function and role of religion and belief in contemporary society.

85. Since 2009, revised specifications have been introduced with a view to improving the quality of the GCSE short courses. There will be a need to monitor the impact of the new specifications. They will need to ensure that these courses focus more strongly on developing students' ability to investigate, understand and evaluate issues related to the nature, role and function of religion and belief in contemporary society.

Christianity: a tale of uncertainty

86. In the majority of the schools visited, weaknesses in the provision for teaching Christianity were reflected in several ways. The primary schools in particular were often uncertain about whether Christian material should be investigated in its own right, as part of understanding the religion, or whether it should be used to consider moral or social themes out of the context of the religion. For example, it was common for teachers to use Jesus's parables to explore personal feelings or to decide how people should behave and not to make any reference to their religious significance. As a result, they lost the opportunity to extend pupils' understanding of Christian beliefs.
87. Many of the primary and secondary schools visited did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive investigation of the core beliefs of Christianity. This was one reason why the pupils' ability to explore and apply Christian perspectives to moral and social issues in the short course GCSE was often so limited.
88. In many cases, the study of Jesus focused on an unsystematic collection of information about his life, with limited reference to his theological significance within the faith.
89. Insufficient attention was paid to diversity within the Christian tradition and to pupils who were actively engaged in Christian practice. Often, their experience was ignored and they had limited opportunity to share their understanding. This sometimes contrasted sharply with the more careful attention paid to the experiences of pupils from other religious traditions.
90. The following example from a Year 4 lesson on the story of the miracle of the healing of the blind man illustrates some of the weaknesses in the teaching of Christianity. The pattern adopted was not uncommon in lessons about Jesus.

The teacher began by asking what a miracle was. She offered 'something unexpected' as a definition. The pupils were not given the opportunity to consider what questions they might want to raise about miracles. Instead, they were asked if they knew of any examples. One pupil offered the story of the healing of the 10 lepers. The teacher explained what leprosy was and suggested that people believed that illnesses were caused by evil

spirits, so Jesus forgave sins to heal people's illnesses. The pupils were confused and began to lose interest.

The story of the healing of the blind man was told. The teacher explained that the purpose was to understand what it would feel like to be blind. The pupils were shown a Braille alphabet and used a 'feely bag' to explore how difficult it is to be blind. The main task was to write a poem about what they would miss if they were blind.

The plenary session involved talking about how people cope with being blind and how lucky the children were to have their sight. The lesson ended with a moment of quiet reflection when the pupils were invited to say thank you to God for their sight.

How might it have been improved?

The main problem was that the purpose of the lesson was unclear. Was it meant to help the pupils understand what it feels like to be blind? Or was it meant to extend their understanding of miracles and what they represent in terms of belief? Specifically, the planning reflected confusion about the two attainment targets. The teacher thought that attainment target 2 'learning from religion' could be achieved by increasing pupils' empathy with blind people. However, this was not related to any understanding about the religious significance of the story. Therefore, nothing was being learnt 'from' religion in this context. If the focus was on 'miracles', the teacher needed to give the pupils the opportunity to identify relevant questions such as:

- 'Are miracles the same as magic?'; 'Do miracles still happen today?'
- 'Why doesn't Jesus or God just cure everyone?'
- 'Did Jesus really perform miracles or are these made-up stories?'
- 'What do Christians believe about Jesus?'

These questions might have helped to place the miracles in context and focus the pupils' attention on central elements of Christian belief.

91. Despite their general concern about the teaching of Christianity, inspectors found examples of good practice. The following illustrates what can be achieved when a strong, well-focused, enquiry-based approach is adopted. It also illustrates how the review of the Key Stage 3 curriculum can have a positive impact on RE:

Lower-attaining students in Year 7 were following a unit on Christianity as part of an integrated humanities programme designed to promote their learning and literacy skills. Within the programme, RE was taught for up to six hours a week in blocks of three to four weeks.

The unit began with a review of what the students already knew about Christianity and what areas they wanted to explore further. Their knowledge was fragmentary and they decided that the key question they wanted to pursue was what Christians believed. To focus their enquiry, they were introduced to a resource entitled 'The Christian Story' which provided a simple version of the basic Biblical narrative from chaos, creation and fall to redemption and hope.

Drawing on new and existing knowledge, they related the birth, death and resurrection of Christ to the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and Moses and to the four key ideas of chaos, creation, fall and hope.

They then reflected on how aspects of their own lives and the modern world might also relate to the key ideas. This enabled them to explain how Christians might believe that the Christian story is useful in helping to make sense of the world. Finally, they worked in groups to prepare presentations on their findings and ideas.

Leadership and management

Primary schools

92. The leadership and management of RE were good or outstanding in just over half the primary schools visited, the same proportion reported in 2007. Only one school was inadequate in this respect. The following features were evident where leadership and management were effective in primary schools.
- The subject leaders showed a high level of commitment.
 - RE had a high profile in the school and the subject was integrated effectively into a programme to promote pupils' personal development and well-being.
 - Arrangements to support teachers' planning and professional development were good.
 - The arrangements for monitoring, self-evaluation, review and action-planning in the subject were effective. In the schools that had clear strategic action-planning for RE, this usually resulted in high quality teaching.
 - Resources for RE were good, with effective use being made of information and communication technology to support learning and teaching.
 - As part of the school's commitment to community cohesion, RE was used effectively to promote links with local religious communities.
 - Good use was made of the training and support provided by, for example, the local authority and the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education.

93. Features of leadership and management of RE which were less effective in many of the primary schools visited included:
- very limited monitoring of the quality of the RE provision which led to weak self-evaluation of the subject
 - narrowly focused development planning which concentrated on completing management tasks such as reviewing the subject policy rather than on improving the quality of provision and raising pupils' attainment
 - very limited training for staff with little opportunity for the subject leader to support other teachers in planning RE.
94. A particular area of concern was the increasing use of teaching assistants to deliver RE instead of qualified teachers. Around a third of the primary schools visited deployed their teaching assistants in this way for at least part of the RE provision. In most cases, this was seen as a convenient way of releasing class teachers for a lesson a week so that they could complete planning, preparation and assessment. Too often, this had the effect of isolating RE from the rest of the curriculum, limiting the opportunities for sustained and integrated planning and detracting from the quality of the learning. However, where the teaching assistants were very carefully supported, managed and monitored, their enthusiasm and interest in the subject could have a very positive impact on pupils' learning. This was evident in the following example from a school where the leadership of RE was outstanding.

The RE subject coordinator benefited from strong support from the senior leadership team and from the very active involvement of the link governor in developing and reviewing the subject. Good use had been made of training opportunities and support from the local authority.

A clear set of priorities for improvement had been established, linked to robust action-planning and well-targeted monitoring. A strength of the process was the clear focus on raising standards and improving the quality of pupils' learning.

The teaching assistants who took a lead in RE in three of the classes were enthusiastic about their work and collaborated closely with the class teachers in preparing lessons. The impact of their involvement was carefully evaluated and thought was given to ensuring that their use did not limit the scope for innovation in the way the subject was developed.

Good progress had been made in developing assessment and in ensuring that pupils contributed to evaluating the effectiveness of the provision.

A particular strength of the subject leadership was the careful monitoring of the curriculum. It had been recognised that, while the use of the local authority scheme of work had provided a good structure for developing the subject, introducing more innovative thinking about the curriculum

was providing opportunities to improve RE further. In some classes, new models of integrated and enquiry-based RE had been introduced, moving beyond the local authority guidance. These had been carefully monitored to evaluate their impact on pupils' learning.

Secondary schools

95. The leadership and management of RE were good or outstanding in around half the secondary schools visited, compared with two thirds in the previous survey.
96. Non-compliance with statutory requirements continues to be an issue. Around one in 15 of the secondary schools visited during this survey did not meet the statutory requirements to provide for RE for all in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus at Key Stages 3 and 4. Some of the schools had recently tackled a previous failure to meet statutory requirements, often by introducing more effective provision at Key Stage 4. However, in other schools, the provision for RE had deteriorated and statutory requirements were no longer met. Often, this was connected to decisions on staffing or to the introduction of new, integrated courses in Key Stage 3. In schools that faced difficulties in finding subject-specialist teachers, provision for the subject often became non-compliant. Where this was combined with a lack of commitment by senior leaders to resolving the staffing problems, this situation could persist year after year. Some schools were finding it difficult to timetable RE at Key Stage 4 for a small number of students who spent part of their time at local colleges on vocational courses.
97. The previous report on RE recommended that the statutory requirements to provide RE for all students in sixth forms should be reviewed. In the schools with sixth forms visited during this survey, the provision for RE was very variable and rarely met the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus. In the best cases, the school incorporated some opportunities for students to explore religious and ethical questions, usually through some form of curriculum enrichment, such as off-timetable days or a general studies programme. In other schools, however, no provision was made for any RE-related learning, apart from the optional opportunities to join extra-curricular religious societies, such as a Christian Union.
98. The features of effective leadership and management of RE in the secondary schools visited included the following.
 - Dynamic leadership at departmental level, demonstrating a drive for improvement and a strong sense of direction.
 - Strong support from the senior leadership team.
 - Specialists working effectively as a team to ensure that all aspects of the work of the department were driven by a shared commitment to high standards and the enrichment of students' wider personal development.

- Close links with local subject groups and good use of the support provided in this way.
- Good use of data to analyse students' progress and evaluate the provision.
- Effective monitoring arrangements, including a good contribution from line managers to challenge and support the work of the department, as well as regular feedback from students.
- Well-focused improvement planning for the subject, based on accurate self-assessment, with a set of clear and appropriate priorities focused on improving provision and raising standards.

99. The impact of effective leadership and management is reflected in the following example:

The senior leadership team was committed to ensuring that RE made a positive contribution to the personal development of Key Stage 4 students. The team was reluctant to subsume RE within a programme for personal, social and health education or to make it part of a carousel of subjects because they felt that this might reduce its importance.

It was therefore decided to provide a GCSE short course for all, even though there was some concern that this might result in fewer students opting for the full course. A compromise was reached where most students were taught the short course for one hour each week by a team of non-specialists, while RE specialists taught the full course, which included short course units.

The school advertised internally for a teacher to lead the short course RE programme, to plan the schemes of work, organise resources and manage the team of teachers. A history teacher with three years' teaching experience was appointed. He was creative and imaginative, had a good grasp of the importance of beliefs and values in students' lives and was full of ideas about how the course could be developed. The senior leadership coordinated the selection of teachers from a variety of subjects, who were chosen specifically for the quality of their teaching and their interest in philosophy and ethics. The head of RE contributed extensively to developing the planning. Each non-specialist taught one group. Regular team meetings considered issues as they arose. Teaching and learning were carefully evaluated. Considerable emphasis was placed on gathering the views of the students who recognised the subject's high profile and contributed enthusiastically. The arrangement provided a significant stimulus for the subject.

100. Weaknesses in leadership and management in the secondary schools were characterised by:

- very limited use of the locally agreed syllabus to develop, evaluate and review the provision

- a lack of recent subject-specific professional development and insufficient opportunity for training non-specialists
- a failure to enlist any external support to help interpret and implement the locally agreed syllabus
- a lack of proper management of long-term absences of staff
- little effective monitoring of the subject and no specific action-planning, despite the need for a strategic approach to improvement
- poor use of data, linked to weak assessment, which often led to significant over-grading of the quality of the provision in the subject, particularly at Key Stage 3.

101. The heavy reliance on non-specialist teachers in RE has been raised frequently in previous reports and remains a matter of concern. However, this survey identified some changes in the way that non-specialists were being deployed. With the development of integrated humanities courses in Key Stage 3, the number of non-specialists who were teaching the subject had increased. In some cases, where good provision had been made for training, this change had enriched rather than weakened the quality of provision for RE. However, in many cases, non-specialists were not given subject-related training and they had a negative impact on students' progress in RE.

In-service and initial teacher education

Continuing professional development

102. One of the weakest aspects of RE was the provision of continuing professional development, which was inadequate in nearly four in 10 schools visited. It was good or better in only three in 10 schools.
103. Where the provision of training was inadequate, there was no systematic analysis of the RE training needs of the staff. The schools found it very difficult to gain access to any local RE training events or advice that would support the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus. In the primary schools visited, RE was rarely the focus of staff meetings or in-service training and teaching assistants who taught the subject were often not trained to do so. The secondary schools gave little consideration to providing time for non-specialist teachers to develop their expertise in the subject or to participate in planning or training. Although staff were often involved in training on generic skills, they had insufficient support to relate these effectively to their own subject.
104. In the primary schools visited, where training was effective:
- professional development was built into action-planning for the subject and linked closely to a phased strategic programme of monitoring and review of the subject, often over a three- or five-year cycle

- displays and assemblies were used effectively as a way of sharing ideas and promoting interest in the subject
- the subject leader had opportunities to:
 - attend local support groups where good practice was developed and shared
 - work with other teachers and support staff to guide their planning and evaluate their work
 - share ideas and resources in staff meetings and maintain a high profile for the subject.

105. In the secondary schools, effective continuing professional development was often associated with:

- active involvement in training initiatives within the local authority
- participation in local authority networks looking at, for example, standardising assessments and developing schemes of work linked to the agreed syllabus
- effective opportunities to embed whole-school initiatives to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning within the work of the department
- opportunities for RE staff to visit other schools to observe good practice
- dedicated time for the subject leader to plan and review work with non-specialists who taught RE.

Initial teacher education

106. Ofsted's 2007 report on RE highlighted the good quality of much secondary RE initial teacher education. Since then, RE has been identified as a recruitment priority to boost the numbers training to teach the subject in secondary schools. The provision of 'golden hellos' for secondary RE trainees has helped to improve recruitment. This applies to those who complete a postgraduate initial teacher education course and take up a permanent position in a maintained school or non-maintained special school in England.

107. A high percentage of trainee RE teachers do not have a degree in religious studies or theology. In many cases, their qualifications are in subjects such as philosophy, psychology or anthropology. During their training, therefore, they depend heavily on the government-funded courses to enhance their subject knowledge in RE. However, from 2009, it was decided that funding for these courses would be significantly reduced.

108. The 2007 report expressed concerns about the variable quality of the RE departments within which some secondary trainees were placed for their training. This is a continuing concern, particularly in relation to the employment-based Graduate Teacher Programme, where the quality of the school placements is crucial to success. The most recent Ofsted inspections of

initial teacher education which focused on these employment-based routes found that a number of trainees had been placed in inappropriate settings; the quality of RE was not good enough to provide them with the experiences necessary to become effective RE teachers.

109. There is also a continuing concern about the quality of RE training for primary trainees. Newly and recently qualified teachers interviewed during the subject inspections often reported that they had had little training on RE in their initial training courses and very limited or no opportunity to teach RE in their placement schools.

Part B: the challenges facing religious education

Defining religious education

110. In reviewing the overall findings about the quality of RE in schools, it is evident that there is uncertainty among many teachers of RE about what they are trying to achieve in the subject. The uncertainties are related to:

- the core purpose of the subject
- how attainment is defined
- the way pupils' progress is defined
- how key concepts and questions can be used in RE
- how to secure continuity and progression in the RE curriculum
- the way to structure and define a clear process of learning in RE
- the approach to teaching about Christianity
- ways of balancing the need to foster respect for pupils' religions and beliefs within open, critical, investigative learning in RE
- the place of teaching about humanism and non-religious beliefs.

111. This list reveals a set of uncertainties which often undermine pupils' progress and inhibit teachers' ability to plan, teach and assess RE effectively. A number of developments, including the introduction of the non-statutory framework in 2004; guidance on RE by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency which builds on the framework; and the recent publication by the then DCSF of new national guidance on RE have gone some way to deal with some of these concerns. However, the inspection evidence indicates that further work needs to be done to develop these initiatives and ensure their impact in the classroom is more effective.

112. Lack of clarity about the core purpose of RE provides the basis for stimulating and lively debate within the subject community but inhibits the effectiveness of classroom practice. Inspectors found that teachers were often working with a variety of different perspectives about the basic purpose of the subject. Teachers were often very unsure how these perspectives could be combined or

prioritised to promote coherence and progression in RE programmes. Many of those interviewed were unsure which of the following objectives represented the core purpose of RE:

- to develop pupil's skills in investigating and evaluating the world of religion and belief
- to help pupils develop positive values, attitudes and dispositions
- to enable pupils to develop their own spirituality and reflect on deeper aspects of their own human experience
- to foster respect for diversity of religion and belief.

113. The non-statutory framework, most agreed syllabuses and many RE policy statements refer to all these objectives. However, many teachers remain unclear how to prioritise and organise them within a coherent RE curriculum and the teaching of the subject. As a result, much of the work observed in the RE visits lacked a clear focus and structure.

114. Lack of clarity about the core purpose of the subject is reflected in continued uncertainty about how to define attainment in RE. The majority of the schools visited used the two attainment targets, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion and belief. However, a persistent problem was uncertainty about how to interpret each target and how to relate one to another. 'Learning about' religion and belief was often linked to relatively low-level tasks, such as gathering information about key features of religions. 'Learning from' religion and belief was perceived to be about offering pupils opportunities to reflect on their own experience. But this was often disconnected from any 'learning about' religion and belief. As a result, pupils' personal reflection on their own experience was not enriched or informed by their study of religion.

115. There was considerable uncertainty in the schools visited about how to define pupils' progress in RE. Many of the teachers referred to the difficulty they had in interpreting and using level descriptions. They felt that they were insufficiently precise to provide an effective basis for planning and assessment. Assessment was one of the weakest features of RE provision across both the primary and secondary schools visited.

116. An important development in RE in recent years has been the move towards using key concepts and questions to organise the curriculum. This is, in part, an attempt to raise the level of challenge in RE and to deal with concerns about an over-emphasis on content. In practice, the schools in the survey had to deal with two problems. First, some agreed syllabuses advocate a concept-focused approach to RE but, in practice, still identify a considerable amount of content to be taught. Second, and more importantly, many of the teachers observed were uncertain about how to use concepts as a basis for curriculum planning. Few agreed syllabuses provide clear guidance on which concepts to include in the RE curriculum or on how to sequence them. The key concepts could include:

- concepts which are specific to particular religions, such as the Christian 'resurrection' or the Hindu 'atman'
 - concepts which are common across a number of religions, such as 'divine', 'spirit', 'sacred'
 - concepts which are used by students of religion in the course of their enquiries, such as 'belief', 'symbol', 'myth', 'ritual'
 - concepts which characterise the aspects of human life which underpin the quest for meaning, such as 'belonging', 'identity', 'death', 'suffering'.
117. Without some clarity about the key concepts and questions of the subject, teachers find the process of planning RE difficult. In the survey, this was particularly evident in some of the most recently designed 'integrated' Key Stage 3 programmes where the RE teachers often found it hard to identify a focus for their planning.
118. Such problems have led to uncertainty about how to secure continuity and progression across the RE curriculum. A recurring complaint among subject leaders was the lack of clarity in the agreed syllabus about what constitutes progression in RE. As a result, in the majority of the schools visited, there was a lack of understanding of how to build a structured sequence of learning into the curriculum. There was a particular problem in securing effective continuity and progression between the RE programme in Key Stage 3 and the short course GCSE.
119. There were also uncertainties about how to structure an effective process of learning in RE. This is discussed in detail in the next section. While some of the schools visited were keen to embrace an enquiry-based approach to RE, they were uncertain how this might relate to the overarching purpose of the subject. They were particularly unclear about how the skills which lie at the heart of RE should be incorporated and structured within such an approach.
120. Uncertainty about the core purpose of RE and how to plan the curriculum was particularly evident in the evidence discussed earlier in the report about the way that schools taught about Christianity. The approaches taken were often ill-conceived and did not provide a sound basis for promoting progression in pupils' learning about the religion.
121. The sample of schools visited included schools with a high proportion of pupils with a strong religious background, many of whom received very intensive teaching about their faith within their local community. Many of these schools had made sensible decisions about the balance of the curriculum, ensuring that work on the faith of the pupils had a high profile. However, there was often uncertainty about the place of an open, critical, investigative approach to RE in the context of teaching about the pupils' faith, particularly with older pupils. More guidance is needed on how to balance respect for the religion and belief of pupils with an open and critical approach to RE.

122. Finally, inspectors found uncertainty about how to incorporate teaching about humanism and non-religious beliefs into the curriculum. The framework and many, but not all, agreed syllabuses include the study of non-religious belief systems within RE. However, few of the schools visited approached this in a coherent and sustained way. Reference might be made to non-religious ideas in discussing questions about the existence of God. However, it was rare to find secondary schools engaging in a more systematic study of the core principles of humanism, for example. Some local authorities had not included non-religious perspectives within their agreed syllabus, despite the clear guidance of the framework.

Can an enquiry-based approach to learning help to improve the quality of religious education?

123. The most recent Ofsted report on mathematics indicates that, at secondary level, teachers often have good subject knowledge and effective classroom practice. At primary level, they often have a good generic understanding of pedagogy and effective classroom practice. In both phases, however, there are weaknesses in teachers' grasp of pedagogy; understanding how pupils' learn in each subject.¹³

124. The situation is very similar in RE. In most of the secondary lessons seen, teachers had good subject knowledge, managed their classes effectively and related well to their pupils. In most of the primary lessons, teachers had a very good understanding of how pupils learned and how to engage and maintain their interest. What limited the effectiveness of both secondary and primary teachers was their understanding of subject pedagogy.

125. The following weaknesses were evident in many of the primary and secondary schools visited.

- Lessons tended to focus on gathering information rather than on developing pupils' skills of investigation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation and reflection
- Literacy activities were limited to writing accounts, with pupils rarely being challenged to use writing to discuss, persuade or explain.
- Teachers focused on 'fun' activities to engage pupils' interest rather than on providing them with challenges to help extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Individual tasks and activities were often managed effectively. However, there was insufficient focus on helping pupils to see how successive activities related to each other.

¹³ *Mathematics: understanding the score* (070063), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070063

- The teacher controlled the pace and nature of the work and scope for independent learning and exploration of ideas was limited.
- Assessment tasks were confined to recalling and re-ordering information.
- The focus of the lessons was limited to low level 'learning about' religion with very little reference to 'learning from' religion.
- Teachers with limited RE background often found the subject difficult because of an over-emphasis on content, as opposed to helping pupils develop their learning by planning and conducting their own investigations.

126. The most effective lessons were based on a clear model of how pupils learn that matched the nature of the subject. This was most evident in the schools that adopted a clearly defined enquiry-based approach to the subject. This had a number of benefits.

- It provided a clear but flexible framework for structuring and sequencing activities that focused on the process of learning as well as on content.
- It promoted challenge because it involved pupils in planning activities and enabled them to develop higher-level skills such as investigation, interpretation and analysis.
- It promoted confidence among teachers without a specialist background in the subject because they were working with a structure and process of learning which they could understand and apply.
- Assessment focused not just on what pupils knew but also on the progress they were making in becoming effective explorers of the world of religion and belief.

127. Some of the best practice was seen in local authorities where the locally agreed syllabus focused very clearly on developing skills and conceptual understanding as well as content. This is illustrated by the following example.

The syllabus identified five key skills which were built systematically into any conceptual enquiry which the pupils undertook. These skills, in sequence, made up a process of learning. For example, pupils might start by **enquiring** into the meaning of a specific concept relevant to the study of religion and belief. From there, they would move to exploring how the concept might be placed in the **context** of one or more specific religions or beliefs. They would then **evaluate** the concept, looking at it from different viewpoints. The next step would be to **communicate** their responses to the concept and finally to **apply** the concept to their own experience. Pupils' progress in RE was assessed in relation to their increasing competence in using these skills.

128. An example of this model in practice is seen in a series of six lessons where a Year 3 class explored the concept of angels:

Lesson 1: The teacher **focused the enquiry** by explaining to the pupils that they were on a quest for angels and asking them what thoughts and questions came to their minds when they heard the word 'angels'. They were then given a number of questions to discuss in groups including: 'What might/do angels look like?'; 'What is their job?'; 'Are they real or imaginary?'; 'Are they like fairies?' 'What would you do if you met an angel?'; 'What difference could an angel make?' The outcomes were shared and recorded.

Lesson 2: The pupils **contextualised** their learning by considering how angels figured in Christianity. They were asked to work out the meaning of the Greek word 'angelos'. To help them do so, they examined two stories from the Bible: the first about the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus; the second about an angel telling Gideon that he would save the Israelites from their enemies. The pupils were asked to consider a number of questions: 'What did the two stories have in common?'; 'Was the angels' role similar in the two stories?' Through such questions, they came to the conclusion that 'angelos' meant 'messenger'. The lesson ended with a written activity where the pupils were asked to select a moment from one of the two stories and explain why it was important.

Lesson 3: The pupils developed their understanding by examining artists' images of angels, annotating the pictures and adding their own thoughts. They then selected questions that they might ask the artists about their works. Finally they decided on questions they would like to ask the angels depicted.

Lesson 4: This lesson focused on **evaluating** what it would be like to believe in angels and pupils were asked to think about the question 'as if you were a Christian'. Working in pairs, they discussed what 'being a Christian' meant. Then, in groups, they examined sets of statements about angels such as 'Angels are messengers from heaven'; 'Angels are around us all the time, watching us'; 'Angels are an artist's way of showing how God talks to us'; 'Angels are frightening.' They sorted the statements into those which were most or least likely to reflect a Christian's view.

Lesson 5: During this lesson, the pupils **communicated** their own views of what angels were by drawing their own representations, discussing them with each other and writing comments to go with each picture.

Lesson 6: Finally, the pupils **applied** their learning by interviewing each other and reporting back on their views on such questions as: 'Do you ever think of angels?'; 'What would you do if you saw one?'; 'What difference could an angel make to you?'; 'Do you believe in angels?'

Religious education and the promotion of community cohesion

129. In September 2007, the duty was placed on schools to promote community cohesion. Although the promotion of community cohesion was not formally evaluated in institutional inspections until September 2008, attention was given in survey visits to how RE contributes to this process.
130. In just over six in 10 of the primary schools visited and eight in 10 of the secondary schools, the contribution of RE to community cohesion was good or outstanding. In most of the schools, pupils were clear that the subject was one of the main contexts in which they could develop their understanding of diversity and the importance of respect towards others, two key contributors to developing community cohesion. In some cases, pupils spoke powerfully about the way that their RE teachers were models of anti-racist attitudes in the school.
131. This positive picture reflects the contribution that RE makes to pupils' moral, social and cultural development. However, as other evidence from the survey shows, the level of enquiry into religions and beliefs is often superficial and uncritical. Therefore, the potential for the subject to be a cornerstone of excellent practice in relation to community cohesion is not always fully realised.
132. In the best cases seen, the schools had given careful thought to the way that the subject could contribute to promoting community cohesion and had audited its impact alongside that of other subjects. On rare occasions, this work linked to wider involvement with interfaith networks or initiatives organised by the local authority or the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education.
133. In some of the schools, the subject's contribution to promoting community cohesion went further and included opportunities, for example:
- to explore controversial issues relating to religion in the modern world, such as misrepresentations by the media of particular faiths
 - for representatives of 'hard to reach' or marginalised religious communities to work with the school and develop confidence that their traditions were respected
 - for pupils with strong religious commitments to share their experience in a safe context and see that their faith was valued and respected
 - for learning outside the classroom and providing first-hand engagement with religious diversity in the local area
 - for 'off-timetable' theme days or assemblies, often organised in conjunction with subjects such as citizenship; for example marking Holocaust Memorial Day.

134. Particularly successful practice was seen where:

- RE was a context for analysing patterns of religious diversity in an area and for forging links, for example with local mosques, that could help to extend the learning opportunities for pupils and their families
- a school with a mainly White intake had twinned with a school with a high percentage of pupils from the Muslim tradition to extend the curriculum enrichment opportunities for RE and promote cross-cultural understanding
- a school in another predominantly white area had invited parents with varied experiences of a range of cultures to contribute to RE and other areas of the curriculum
- a school had built links with a diversity of religious communities through a local interfaith network.

135. The majority of the primary schools visited made only limited use of visitors and fieldwork to enrich pupils' understanding of the local and wider communities. In some cases, links with religious communities were confined to churches and there was little contact with members of traditions other than Christianity. A similar pattern was seen in two thirds of the secondary schools visited. Often, opportunities to engage with local religious communities through activities outside the classroom were limited to pupils who were studying RE at GCSE level or optional visits open to pupils from families willing to contribute financially.

136. Despite this, inspectors identified schools which had developed new ways of involving representatives from those communities in pupils' learning, as in the following example:

A school decided to invite representatives from the local faith communities to its training on RE where they were introduced to the process of enquiry-based learning. As a result, they gained a greater appreciation of their role in supporting the overall programme for RE and were therefore able to make a richer contribution to it. Instead of simply imparting information, their meetings with pupils became conversations and discussions where they shared their experiences and views and contributed to the process of research and enquiry. Pupils' visits to local places of worship focused less on facts about the building and more on religious commitment and living.

137. There is scope for schools to focus further on the contribution that RE can make to promoting community cohesion. Specifically, schools could extend the opportunities for using RE to forge links with the diversity of religious and belief communities locally, regionally and nationally. They also need to find out more about the diversity of beliefs, religious or otherwise, among their pupils and their families, so that these can be acknowledged and valued through the subject and in the wider life of the school.

138. Some of the schools visited which had a significant number of pupils with a high level of religious involvement took care to find out about the education they were experiencing within their local religious community. This helped to inform the way the religion was studied in the school. However, other schools missed opportunities to make these links. For example, in a primary school which admitted a very large number of Muslim pupils, the teachers had assumed the pupils would have a good knowledge of stories from their tradition because they regularly attended the local mosque schools. In practice, this was not the case and many of the pupils had very limited understanding of this aspect of their faith.
139. Schools also need to ensure that the changing nature of religion and belief in the contemporary world is reflected more strongly in the RE curriculum. More provision needs to be made for pupils to explore areas of controversy in the world of religion and belief, while recognising the important ways in which different religions and beliefs often work in collaboration in pursuing social harmony. For example, teaching about the Muslim faith in some of the secondary schools visited made no reference to immediate questions about the place of Islam in Britain and the modern world. As a result, the teachers missed opportunities to explore diversity within the religion and to confront stereotyping in the media.

Local determination: a time for review?

140. The previous report recommended that the then Department for Education and skills should review the principle of the local determination of RE. These arrangements place responsibility for RE in community and voluntary controlled schools in the hands of local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and Agreed Syllabus Conferences. This survey identified continuing wide variability in the quality and level of local provision which was often exacerbated by the impact of wider curricular developments. This makes the need for a review of the current statutory arrangements even more pressing, to determine whether they should be revised or whether there are ways of improving their effectiveness.
141. Inspectors found strong advocates for the local determination of RE. Their arguments focused on:
- the opportunities that local determination provides for promoting innovation and original thinking about the subject
 - the importance of securing the confidence and agreement of local religious and belief communities about the RE that their children and young people will receive in schools
 - the opportunities which local determination provides for teachers to be actively involved in developing and shaping the provision for RE.

142. Evidence from the survey showed that the non-statutory national framework for RE had generated greater consistency in the quality of agreed syllabuses. However, these still varied greatly in the degree to which they supported and sustained high quality RE and some were not providing a sound basis for the subject.
143. The effectiveness of local arrangements varied significantly between local areas. In the best cases, where the agreed syllabus was well constructed and providing a good basis for planning and assessment, and where the guidance and support for schools were strong, local arrangements were successful in promoting high quality provision. Indeed, in some cases, the locally agreed syllabus was a key lever for improving provision for the subject. However, other syllabuses were over-prescriptive, too complex and lacked clarity. As such, they did not provide a fully effective basis for planning and assessing RE.
144. The statutory distinctiveness of the subject, placing it outside the structures of the wider National Curriculum, separates RE from planning in other subjects. In addition, it means that RE is not in a good position to capitalise on national training and curriculum developments because each agreed syllabus has its own distinctive local requirements. While RE remains locally determined and agreed syllabuses vary in their approach, content and structure, it is difficult to align national training (both in initial teacher education and continuing professional development) and those local requirements. Many agreed syllabuses require a locally specific programme of training which, in practice, cannot be sustained or resourced effectively. Most of the schools visited reported that they found it difficult to obtain effective advice and training to support the implementation of the agreed syllabus and to enable teachers to plan effectively.
145. An argument offered in support of local determination is that it provides greater flexibility for, and less prescription on, teachers than is found in the requirements of the National Curriculum. In the schools visited, however, the heavy content load and over-complex structures of some agreed syllabuses imposed more rather than less prescription.
146. The wider curriculum context within which RE is working is undergoing rapid changes. These changes are having a significant impact on the subject. The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency has sought to tackle some of these changes by aligning the framework with developments in the secondary and primary curriculum and by offering guidance to Agreed Syllabus Conferences on how to use the framework within their own local context.¹⁴ This includes advice on how to relate RE to the national guidelines on assessing pupil progress. Because the framework is non-statutory, these evolving features feed into more effective provision for pupils only if they are incorporated within

¹⁴ For further information on Agreed Syllabus Conferences, see: www.natsoc.org.uk/schools/curriculum/re/re3.html

agreed syllabuses and local authorities' guidance to schools. Evidence from this survey indicates that, in practice, this process of incorporation is not happening in a rapid, coherent or systematic way. Moreover, agreed syllabuses are required to be reviewed only every five years; in most of the schools visited, no recent guidance had been received about ways in which the current agreed syllabus might be interpreted in the light of the wider changes to the curriculum.

147. This report has highlighted a range of problems in defining the nature and scope of RE. While recent national guidance has begun to tackle some of them, more work needs to be done. It is questionable whether the majority of Agreed Syllabus Conferences have access to the subject expertise they need. Therefore, further action is required to support them.
148. Inspectors found examples of local authorities providing significant levels of expertise to support the subject. In some cases, this had led to the development of innovative agreed syllabuses which did not follow the specific structure of the framework. The extensive, high quality materials produced to accompany these syllabuses were very helpful to schools within the authorities but of limited use in sharing good practice more widely.
149. Despite these examples of good practice, the survey showed that many local authorities did not ensure that their Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education had sufficient capacity to fulfil their responsibilities effectively in relation to supporting schools with the process of implementing the locally agreed syllabus. Few local authorities and their advisory councils undertook a rigorous analysis of the impact of their agreed syllabus on standards and the quality of provision to inform the process of reviewing the syllabus. Currently, no formal arrangements exist for evaluating the quality and impact of different agreed syllabuses or for monitoring whether local authorities, advisory councils and syllabus conferences are carrying out their functions effectively.
150. The then DCSF undertook a revision of the 1/94 Circular on RE and issued new guidance in spring 2010.¹⁵ This has provided helpful clarification and re-interpretation of the subject's basis in legislation. However, evidence from this survey suggests that a more thorough review is needed to determine whether the statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum which underpin the subject should be revised, or whether ways can be found to improve their effectiveness.

¹⁵ For further information, see *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance* (DCSF-00114-2010), DCSF, 2010; www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=14671

Notes

This report is based on evidence from inspections of RE between 2006 and 2009 in a range of maintained schools in England. The sample of 183 schools across over 70 local authorities was selected to form a cross-section of schools geographically and by institutional type, including voluntary controlled schools. The survey evidence on which the report is based does not include voluntary aided schools with a religious character, for which there are separate inspection arrangements. However, the data about examination results relate to all schools. No school judged inadequate in its last whole-school inspection was included in the sample.

The sample included six primary schools and one secondary school selected specifically on the basis of known good practice. To allow for fairer comparison between primary and secondary schools, the judgements made on the quality of provision in these schools have not been incorporated into the figures quoted in the report.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Curriculum innovation in schools (070097), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070097

Making sense of religion (070045), Ofsted, 2007;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070045a

Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum (080262), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080262

Other publications

Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society (9781409803157), Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008;
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework

Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance (DCSF-00114-2010), DCSF, 2010;
www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=14671

Religious education teaching and training in England: current provision and future improvement, Religious Education Council of England and Wales (978-0-905437-09-5), 2007; www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/content/view/75/56/

Annex: Schools visited for this survey

Primary schools

Alverton Community Primary School
 Anchorsholme Primary School
 Ashley Junior School
 Ashton Primary School
 Baldwin's Gate CofE Primary School
 Bethune Park Primary School
 Beaumont Primary School
 Bridport Primary School
 Brixworth CofE VC Primary School
 Brockholes Wood Community Primary School and Nursery
 Brookhill Leys Primary and Nursery School
 Brookside Primary School
 Bure Park Primary School
 Chalgrove Community Primary School
 Cheswardine Primary School
 Chickerell Primary School
 Childer Thornton Primary School
 Clough and Risegate Community Primary School
 Cockington Primary School
 Coltishall Primary School
 Cranbourne Primary School
 Drake Primary School
 Downham Market, Hillcrest Primary School
 East Markham Primary School
 Easton Community Primary School
 Elizabeth Woodville Primary School
 Estcourt Primary School
 Feniscowles Primary School
 Fibbersley Park Primary School
 Grange Valley Primary School
 Green Park Community Primary School

Local authority

Cornwall
 Blackpool
 Hampshire
 Lancashire
 Staffordshire
 Kingston upon Hull
 Bolton
 Dorset
 Northamptonshire
 Lancashire
 Nottinghamshire
 Leicestershire
 Oxfordshire
 Oxfordshire
 Shropshire
 Dorset
 Cheshire West and Chester
 Lincolnshire
 Torbay
 Norfolk
 Bracknell Forest
 Plymouth
 Norfolk
 Nottinghamshire
 Suffolk
 Leicestershire
 Kingston upon Hull
 Blackburn with Darwen
 Walsall
 St Helens
 Kent

Greenfyld Church of England First School	Somerset
Hall Green Primary School	Sandwell
Heyes Lane Junior School	Trafford
High Green Primary School	Sheffield
Hinstock Primary School	Shropshire
Horningsham Primary School	Wiltshire
John Clifford Primary School	Nottinghamshire
Keelham Primary School	Bradford
Kirk Hammerton Church of England Primary School	North Yorkshire
Lavendon School	Milton Keynes
Lancaster Lane Community Primary School	Lancashire
Lee-on-the-Solent Junior School	Hampshire
Little Hoole Primary School	Lancashire
Lothersdale Community Primary	North Yorkshire
Marfleet Primary School	Kingston upon Hull
Market Drayton Infant School	Shropshire
Lytham St Annes Mayfield Primary School	Lancashire
Meadowbank Primary School	Stockport
Milefield Primary School	Barnsley
Millfield Primary School	Norfolk
Misterton Primary and Nursery School	Nottinghamshire
Moseley Primary School	Coventry
Moss Park Junior School	Trafford
Mowmacre Hill Primary School	Leicester
North Walkden Primary School	Salford
Oakthorpe Primary School	Leicestershire
Palmers Cross Primary School	Wolverhampton
Park Community Primary School	Lincolnshire
Park Road Community Primary School	Warrington
Penpol School	Cornwall
Queensbridge Primary School	Bolton
Quernmore Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Lancashire
Reepham Primary School	Norfolk

Regents Park Community Primary School	Birmingham
Reigate Priory Community Junior School	Surrey
Rosa Street Primary School	Durham
Rosewood Primary School	Lancashire
Rough Hay Primary School	Walsall
St Anne's CofE Lydgate Primary School	Oldham
St Columb Major Community Primary School	Cornwall
St John with St Mark CofE Primary School	Bury
St Martin's Church of England Junior School	North Somerset
St Mary Magdalene CofE Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Sandwell
Sharples Primary School	Bolton
Sherard Primary School and Community Centre	Leicestershire
Shortbrook Primary School	Sheffield
Simmondley Primary School	Derbyshire
Sproatley Endowed Church of England Voluntary Controlled School	East Riding of Yorkshire
Stanwell Fields CofE Primary School	Surrey
Stratford-SubCastle Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Wiltshire
Stourfield Junior School	Bournemouth
Swanland Primary School	East Riding of Yorkshire
Temple Sowerby CofE Primary School	Cumbria
Thanet Primary School	Kingston upon Hull
The Martin Wilson School	Shropshire
Tywardreath School	Cornwall
Valewood Primary School	Sefton
Waterloo Primary School	Sefton
Watton Westfield Infant and Nursery School	Norfolk
Westwood Primary School	Oldham
Wheelock Primary School	Cheshire East
Whipton Barton Junior School	Devon
William Ransom Primary School	Hertfordshire

Secondary schools

Accrington Moorhead Secondary
 Attleborough High School
 Aylsham High School
 Blyth Community College
 Brannel School
 Brookfield Community School
 Broomfield School
 Camborne Science and Community College
 Carlton Le Willows School and Technology College
 Catmose College
 Chaigeley School
 Chapel-en-le-Frith High
 Chilton Trinity Technology College
 Churston Ferrers Grammar School
 Costello Technology College
 Cottingham High School
 Culcheth High School
 Drayton Manor High School
 Ellesmere Port Specialist School of Performing Arts
 Endon High School
 Fairfield High School
 Framingham Earl High School
 Foxford School and Community Arts College
 Frankley Community High School
 Fulwood High School and Arts College
 Grange School
 Grange Technology College
 Great Wyrley Performing Arts College
 Grove Park Business and Enterprise College
 Harlington Upper School
 Harper Green School

Local authority

Lancashire
 Norfolk
 Norfolk
 Northumberland
 Cornwall
 Derbyshire
 Enfield
 Cornwall
 Nottinghamshire
 Rutland
 Warrington
 Derbyshire
 Somerset
 Torbay
 Hampshire
 East Riding of Yorkshire
 Warrington
 Ealing
 Cheshire West and Cheshire
 Staffordshire
 Halton
 Norfolk
 Coventry
 Birmingham
 Lancashire
 Oldham
 Bradford
 Staffordshire
 Southampton
 Central Bedfordshire
 Bolton

Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre	Essex
Highcliffe School	Dorset
Hornsea School and Language College	East Riding of Yorkshire
Kingsdale Foundation School	Southwark
Kennet School	West Berkshire
Kingsbury School and Sports College	Birmingham
King James's School	Kirklees
Kingsmead Technology College	Staffordshire
Kingswood College of Arts	Kingston upon Hull
Lees Brook Community Sports College	Derby
Litcham High School	Norfolk
Lode Heath School	Solihull
Longsands College	Cambridgeshire
Madeley High School	Staffordshire
Moorside High School	Salford
Morley High School	Leeds
Moseley Park and Technology College	Wolverhampton
Nether Stowe A Specialist Mathematics and Computing College	Staffordshire
Newland School for Girls	Kingston upon Hull
North Walsham High School	Norfolk
Palatine Community Sports College	Blackpool
Pendeford Business and Enterprise College	Wolverhampton
Poole High School	Poole
Priesthorpe School	Leeds
Ricard's Lodge High School	Merton
Roade School Sports College	Northamptonshire
Royal Manor Arts College	Dorset
St Peter's High School	Essex
Sandye Place Middle School	Bedfordshire
Shaftesbury School	Dorset
Shavington High School	Cheshire East
Silverdale School	Sheffield
Simon Balle School	Hertfordshire
Spalding High School	Lincolnshire

Springwood High School	Norfolk
Stretford High School	Trafford
Swakeleys School	Hillingdon
Testwood Sports College	Hampshire
The Brakenhale School	Bracknell Forest
The Charles Read High School	Lincolnshire
The City of Portsmouth Boys' School	Portsmouth
The Earls High School	Dudley
The Grove School	Shropshire
The Latimer Arts College	Northamptonshire
The Lindsey School and Community Arts College	North East Lincolnshire
The Oldershaw School	Wirral
The Roseland Community College	Cornwall
The Snaith School	East Riding of Yorkshire
The West Bridgford School	Nottinghamshire
Tibshelf School	Derbyshire
Torpoint Community College	Cornwall
Uffculme School	Devon
Ullswater Community College	Cumbria
Upton-By-Chester High School	Cheshire West and Chester
Wellfield Business and Enterprise College	Lancashire
Wareham Middle School	Dorset
Wildern School	Hampshire
Woodlands School	Essex