



# The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Religious Education (RE) is a vibrant, academically rigorous subject which covers multiple religious and non-religious worldviews. RE challenges young people to explore religion and belief in a way that enhances their transferable skills of literacy and reasoning in the classroom and allows them to gain a better understanding of the world around them. With the continued importance of religion and belief in public life, and substantial media coverage of issues relating to religion and belief, whether debates about ethical issues or coverage of conflicts with religious elements, it is crucial to ensure that all young people are religiously literate and

able to understand and question the accuracy of claims about different belief systems, regardless of whether they are themselves religious or not.

The importance of this subject is reflected in its legal standing. All state-funded schools, including academies and free schools, are legally required to provide Religious Education as part of a balanced curriculum.

## Key findings of the State of the Nation

The State of the Nation report looks at the extent to which schools in England meet their statutory requirements to teach RE. It provides a comparison between schools where the RE curriculum is determined in three different ways:

- 1) Schools, including some academies, following an RE curriculum determined by their religious character;
- 2) Academies and other schools such as Free Schools where the RE is determined by their funding agreements;
- 3) Schools where a locally agreed RE syllabus must be followed.

The report argues that it is vital that students receive high quality RE. It is neither educationally, morally or legally justifiable for schools to provide minimal time on the school timetable for RE, or to expect teachers with insufficient training or expertise to deliver the subject. Neither is it acceptable for any young person to leave school without the knowledge and skills delivered through RE which will allow them to understand the beliefs and values of our diverse British society, without which they will be ill equipped to take their place in the modern world.

## Findings from this report include:

- **28% of secondary schools told the Department for Education that they gave no dedicated curriculum time to RE.** It is estimated that this equates to 800,000 pupils being deprived of their legal right to learn about major religions and beliefs, leaving them without the religious literacy they need for life in modern multi-faith Britain.<sup>1</sup>
- **The level of provision of RE is largely dependent on the type of school pupils attend,** leading to widespread variation across the country.
- **Schools with a religious character typically provide a higher level of provision of RE,** suggesting that these schools place a higher priority on the subject than other types of school. 96% of schools with a religious character offer RE at KS4.<sup>2</sup> 90% dedicate at least 3% of their timetables (around 40 minutes a week) to RE at KS4.<sup>3</sup> In addition, 90% of these schools say that over half of their RE lessons are taught by a teacher with a relevant post A-level qualification.<sup>4</sup>
- **Academies are the least likely type of school to offer RE at KS4,** with just 73% of schools reporting that they offer RE at this level<sup>5</sup>, and just 27% providing more than 3% of curriculum time to RE.<sup>6</sup>



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Just 66% of academies said that over half of their RE lessons are taught by a teacher with a relevant post A-level qualification.<sup>7</sup>

- **Schools following a locally agreed syllabus for RE tend to have higher levels of provision than academies, but lower than schools of a religious character.** At KS4, 45% dedicate 3% or more of their timetables to RE.<sup>8</sup> As these schools convert to academy status and are no longer required to follow their locally agreed syllabus, there is a real concern that their level of RE provision may drop.
- Full course Religious Studies GCSE students should receive 10% curriculum time (more than two hours per week) of RE lessons and pupils taking the short course GCSE should spend 5% of curriculum time (one hour) on this subject.<sup>9</sup> This standard is very rarely met, meaning that **RS is not being treated fairly in comparison with other GCSE subjects and students across the country are not receiving the level of provision they deserve.**
- A worrying number of **schools are teaching RE full course on short course hours.** Almost half (42%) of academies and agreed syllabus schools (43%) reported that students taking the full course GCSE receive just one hour or less per week.<sup>10</sup>
- **Non-examined RE is often not sufficient to meet the aims of the subject and leads to schools simply not teaching it,** which fails pupils. Of the schools claiming to offer non-examined RE to Year 11 pupils, 83% admitted their students receive zero minutes of teaching per week.<sup>11</sup> It may be that offering RE is done as a tick-box exercise with schools claiming not to be resourced effectively in terms of trained or qualified staff or funding to deliver appropriate teaching.
- **The number of schools removing GCSE RS from their curriculum entirely has risen steadily between 2014 and 2016 (3% overall).**<sup>12</sup> Schools with a religious character are least likely to not enter any pupils for GCSE RS but more than 14% of academies do not enter a single pupil for any GCSE in RS.<sup>13</sup>
- **Only 47% of academies have at least 75% of their RE lessons taught by a fully qualified specialist.** This compared to 58% of agreed syllabus schools. Once again schools with religious character perform best, with 77% of respondents reporting this standard.<sup>14</sup>
- **Students at schools with religious character are significantly more likely to be taught RE by a teacher with a relevant post A-level qualification**

than students in an academy, meaning that once again, academy students are missing out.

- The number of schools entering between 90 and 100% of their year 11

cohort has fallen steadily from 49% in 2014 to 45% in 2016.<sup>15</sup> This reflects a move away from entering whole cohorts for either the short course of the full course, almost certainly prompted by the removal of the short course from accountability measures.<sup>16</sup>

## Summary of recommendations

### The Department for Education should:

1	Hold schools to account for the level of provision and standards of teaching of RE.
2	Encourage ministers to speak about the importance of RE in the curriculum and about its impact on wider educational outcomes, including on society at large.
3	Issue a clear public statement that it is not acceptable in any circumstances for a school to be failing to provide RE at any Key Stage as part of its broad and balanced curriculum.
4	Publish data about RE provision routinely in an accessible format (without the need to issue Freedom of Information requests) to allow local Standing Advisory Councils for RE (SACREs) and other bodies to more easily fulfil their duty to monitor provision for RE in their local area. This data should include school workforce data and GCSE entries.
5	Clarify and strengthen the mechanisms by which complaints can be made about schools failing to provide pupils with their entitlement to high quality RE.
6	Ensure that it is a condition of the successful completion of teacher training that there is evidence that newly qualified RE teachers have an appropriate level of RE knowledge, understanding and skills to take up their first post.

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### School leaders including headteachers and governors should:

<b>7</b>	Review the specific requirements for RE provision and ensure that they can demonstrate that each pupil on the school roll is receiving their entitlement to RE in each school year.
<b>8</b>	Review the specific content requirements (in particular where they include being taught an accredited course at Key Stage 4 if that is what is required in the syllabus).
<b>9</b>	Ensure that all specialist and non-specialist teachers who provide RE have access to subject specific CPD throughout their career.
<b>10</b>	Ensure that all non-specialist RE teachers who teach RE receive high quality subject specific training, such as the Teach RE course, before they commence teaching RE.

### Ofsted should:

<b>11</b>	Ensure that the level of provision for RE is monitored during routine inspections with an expectation that the curriculum cannot be considered 'broad and balanced' unless RE is provided.
<b>12</b>	Ensure that all those teaching RE are suitably qualified and/or trained to do so.
<b>13</b>	Review the training of inspectors so that they are aware of specific requirements for RE in each school that is inspected and can differentiate between strong and weak provision.
<b>14</b>	Carry out an investigation into the impact of different levels and quality of RE provision on wider pupil outcomes.

### Parents/Carers should:

<b>15</b>	Request information about the programme of RE taught at their child's school (this should be published on the school website). If RE is not mentioned, or if the practice does not seem to match the published plan, ask questions or complain if necessary.
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The State of the Nation report was commissioned and produced by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) and RE Today working in a joint venture as the RE PR Group.



