

## **Research review series: RE**

**Source: Ofsted** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education>

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### **Summary:**

The RE research review outlines the factors that can contribute to the quality of education in RE. It has drawn on a range of research, evidence and other literature to identify features of high-quality RE at primary and secondary level. Since there are various ways that schools can construct and teach high-quality RE, the review is not a simple checklist of activities that schools should cover. Rather, it outlines a conception of quality of education in RE.

The review highlights the important role that RE plays in preparing pupils to engage in a diverse and complex multi-religious and multi-secular society. It also identifies the significant challenges that limit high quality in RE.

The review refers to 3 different types of subject-specific knowledge that pupils learn in RE:

- substantive knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions.
- ways of knowing - where pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion
- personal knowledge - where pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about what they study

### **Introduction**

Ofsted acknowledges that there are a variety of ways that schools can construct and teach a high-quality RE curriculum. As a result of this, there is no single way of achieving high-quality RE. However, much of the current literature suggests that a move from local to national determination is necessary and that the current RE curriculum development in England has not kept pace with the academic and intellectual developments. Consequently, our pupils are not given the necessary knowledge to make sense of our complex multi-religious and multi-secular society.

Although most locally agreed syllabuses recommend spending the equivalent of 60 minutes per week (KS1) and 75 minutes per week (KS2) on RE, NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) argue that a significant number of schools give insufficient curriculum time to RE.

### **Curriculum Progression**

'A high-quality curriculum is ambitious and designed to give all learners the knowledge they need to succeed in life. This is particularly important for the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils are entitled to be taught RE. Leaders and teachers may, of course, need to adapt the curriculum depending on the specific needs of individual pupils.'

- A high-quality RE curriculum should be well-sequenced and interconnect the different types of knowledge in order for our pupils to know more and remember more of the planned curriculum. These broad types of knowledge are considered to be the 'pillars of progression' within RE and are: substantive knowledge, ways of knowing and personal knowledge. When subject leaders plan a sequenced unit of specific content and concepts, they should also consider the most appropriate methods of 'how' to study that content
- High quality RE should prepare our pupils to engage in a complex multi-religious and multi-secular world, the planned sequence of learning should contain enough substantive knowledge to ensure that our pupils are able to recognise the diverse and changing religious and non-religious traditions of the world and ensure that they are fully equipped to live and work alongside people from different cultural backgrounds
- However, simply covering a greater number of religious and non-religious traditions is no guarantee of a high-quality RE curriculum. Overloading the curriculum may lead to superficial caricatures
- Representations should be planned precisely without advocating a tradition or ignoring unpleasant manifestations of traditions. If not, misconceptions can arise and unsustainable stereo-types and poor generalisations are made
- A well-sequenced RE curriculum should enable our pupils to integrate new knowledge into their existing knowledge in order to make enduring connections between content, ideas and concepts.
- Similar concepts should be taught a number of times at different stages of the curriculum in increasingly detailed contexts thus enabling our pupils to build knowledge systematically and make connections between concepts
- Some substantive knowledge should be repeated in order for our pupils to gain automaticity
- A curriculum that includes 'ways of knowing' prepares our pupils to think in a critical and scholarly way about the representations of religion and non-religion encountered in the curriculum and the world beyond
- Ways of knowing should be matched to substantive content
- An RE curriculum should build pupils' personal knowledge and not induct pupils into any religious traditions. Pupils should be able to express their own religious/non-religious identities freely