

Appendix

Key Recommendations of Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead “A New Settlement Religion and Belief in schools

Recommendations on the Act of Collective Worship

We recommend that the current requirement in statute for an Act of Collective Worship should be abolished, and the decision about the form and character of school assemblies should be left to the governors of individual schools. Schools should be required to set out their statement and strategy for promoting Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education, with school community assemblies as an important part of that strategy, upon which they would be inspected by OFSTED. The government should provide non-statutory guidance to help achieve this.

Recommendations on RE

The kind of commitment which is needed to improve RE teaching, provide better RE resource material, and give real focus to the subject will only come if a national RE curriculum is established.

The law should be amended to require that the curriculum for Religious Education should now be set in accordance with a nationally agreed syllabus and programmes of work. We would suggest that this covers

Key Stages 1-3 of the curriculum. We turn below to the discussion about Key Stage 4. This approach would not be dissimilar to those for the other National Curriculum subjects, but with one very important difference: the nationally agreed syllabus would not be determined by the Secretary of State independently, but in agreement with a newly created national statutory ‘Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)’ which would be established to discuss this syllabus with the Secretary of State.

An important consequence of these changes is that, like the changes which we recommend in relation to the act of collective worship, the argument for parents to have the right to withdraw their children from this part of the curriculum should no longer exist, as the curriculum would have lost its ‘instructional’ or ‘confessional’ nature. We therefore recommend that this right be removed if the changes we recommend are introduced.

On balance, and recognising the complexities, we think that when a more holistic change at Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum is considered, there is a strong case for changing the requirement to study RE to a requirement to study religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values. Such reform should better integrate RE and other elements of the curriculum such as PSHE, sex and relationship education, and education about values, and help ‘de-exceptionalise’ RE. This area of study would be different from and complementary to the GCSE in RE.

We recommend that the best way to promote community cohesion across the school system is to make the kinds of curriculum change which we are proposing and to establish a strong inspection system to ensure that all schools, faith or not, play a constructive role in their practice. This will help ensure that Islamist and other extremist ideas are tackled by way of serious critical discussion in the classroom, in the context of a proper engagement with

religious and non-religious traditions. We believe that this offers a more robust and effective way of dealing with extremist beliefs amongst young people than driving such ideas underground or presenting 'British values' as a kind of 'counter-propaganda'. Values of respect, liberalism and democracy can then be promoted in practice as well as in theory.

Recommendations on the RE Curriculum

We recommend that consideration be given to using the phrase 'Religious and Moral Education' rather than 'Religious Education' in describing this part of the statutory curriculum.

We recommend that the Religious Education syllabus in county and voluntary controlled schools should no longer be set by a system of agreed local syllabuses, but by an agreed national syllabus which would have a similar legal status to the requirements of other subjects in the National Curriculum.

We recommend that the nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created 'National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)' comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies, and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally-agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years.

We recommend that the government discusses with the faith school providers, including academies and free schools, the merits of voluntary aided and foundation faith schools adopting this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all maintained schools to adopt this syllabus.

We recommend that the government also discusses with faith school providers including academies and free schools, the importance of making a distinction within schools between religious instruction, formation and education, including agreement that religious instruction (even of a kind which does not include coercion, or distortion of other religions or beliefs) does not take place within the school day.

In addition, we recommend that the government discusses with independent schools whether they should adopt this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all schools to adopt this syllabus.

If these changes are agreed we recommend that the right of parents to withdraw their children from the Religious Education part of the curriculum should be abolished.

We recommend that the legal requirement for Religious Education at Key Stage 5, after the age of 16, should be removed and that, within the context of a general reform of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, consideration should be given to modifying the legal requirement for Religious Education to a wider study of religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values.

We recommend that all faith schools, and possibly all schools in receipt of state funding, clearly advertise and explain the kind of religious (or nonreligious) ethos and formation which they offer, so that prospective parents and pupils can make informed choices.

We recommend that the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of

the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of religious instruction.

We recommend that an important, though not the only, way to promote community cohesion and to counter radicalisation across the school system is to make the kinds of curriculum change which we are proposing. Consideration should be given to OFSTED re-establishing a strong inspection system to ensure that all schools, faith or not, properly fulfil their duty to promote community cohesion.