

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
15th November 2023
Report of the Director for Children and Families

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present members of SACRE with a brief update on publications in the RE community which are being discussed.

2 Summary

2.1 Members of SACRE will receive a copy of the report

3 Recommendation

3.1 That members of SACRE receive the report and note the contents

4 Background

4.1 Since the previous meeting the Religious Education Council have published a National Content Standard- the first edition.

There is a ongoing debate which includes the following from the REN-

The Religious Education Network (REN) says it's concerned about aspects of the recently published 'National Content Standard for Religious Education' (NCS).

The standards are designed to help improve religious literacy in UK schools, but there's disagreement among campaign groups about how that should be done.

Last month, a group of more than 30 MPs and peers [wrote to the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan](#), asking her to address what they described as the "crisis" in the UK's Religious Education (RE) standards. The cross-party group, including the Bishop of Durham, the Rt Rev Paul Butler, said that while some children were receiving a comprehensive RE education, others get either "tokenistic" RE or none at all, and leave school "ill-prepared to play their part in our complex religious and non-religious society, with all the opportunities created by its diversity".

Unlike a subject included in the National Curriculum, RE has no national programme of study that has to be followed.

The Religious Education Council's, whose vision is "for every young person to experience an academically rigorous and personally inspiring education in religion and worldviews", has come up with a document, which it says provides a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work.

The style of the paper mirrors that of a National Curriculum Programme of Study but rather than specify certain content to be taught and learnt, the REC says presenting 'principles' will allow greater freedom of selection, which they say reflects the current legal framework for

RE in different types of schools, including academies, as well as most schools with or without a religious character.

But in a public statement, the Religious Education Network, said it believes the NCS aligns with a troubling 'worldviews' agenda that it believes should be rejected.

The REN claims the standards being suggested will lead to confusion for teachers, who are already in short supply, and say the proposals would place an excessive burden of additional material on the RE syllabus, potentially impacting the quality of education provided.

The group also says the emphasis on encouraging children to develop their own 'personal worldview' is contrary to Freedom of Religion and Belief, and would be detrimental to community cohesion and learning.

The REN calls upon the Department for Education (DfE) to provide more support for the subject of Religious Education, without adopting the new direction proposed by the Religious Education Council through the NCS and other recent publications. The REN strongly welcomes the recent announcement of bursaries for initial teacher training (ITT) in RE.

The REN says its concerns have been passed to Members of Parliament, and it remains committed to ensuring the continued integrity of Religious Education in the UK.

5 Equal Opportunities

5.1 This report has been prepared in accordance with the County Council's policies on equal opportunities.

6 Financial implications

6.1 Financial implications may be raised by individual items. These have been dealt with elsewhere or will be raised at future meetings of SACRE.

Contact Officer

Mary Gale 07816374873