

Dear Colleague

## **Religious Education and the proposed English Baccalaureate**

Central Bedfordshire is proud of the high quality provision for Religious Education which is found in its schools. One of the success stories in recent years has been the dramatic rise in popularity and take-up of GCSE exam courses in Religious Education/Religious Studies. Students find the courses stimulating, challenging and relevant. Levels of motivation are high, and so are the levels of attainment. For these reasons, the new Agreed Syllabus in RE (to be launched on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011) has chosen to base its provision for key stage 4 entirely on all students following an accredited external examination course. Whether students are entered for the exam itself at the end of the course is at the school's discretion, but their key stage 4 entitlement in RE is clear and unambiguous.

At a recent meeting of SACRE a number of concerns were raised about plans being discussed in some schools to set aside the legal requirements of the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education at Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 in order to address other concerns such as general timetable pressures as well as the specific desire to ensure that students are able to meet the requirements of the English Baccalaureate.

SACRE wishes to draw governors' attention to the fact that every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school except for those withdrawn by their parents.

Governors should be aware that the complaints procedure in relation to statutory duties set out in section 3, page 12 and paragraph 14 of the Guide to the Law for School Governors 2010 applies.

14. A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if a person believes that a governing body or LA is acting "unreasonably", or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly (see Sections 496 and 497 of the Education Act 1996). However, intervention can only occur if the governing body or the LA has failed to carry out a legal duty or has acted unreasonably in the performance of a duty.

Central Bedfordshire SACRE fully appreciates the potential dilemmas faced by headteachers in seeking to respond constructively to the demands which will be placed on their schools by the introduction of the EBacc. SACRE recognises that there may well be a temptation to find time for the required Humanities subjects by cutting the time for RE, and perhaps by deploying experienced teachers with a wealth of expertise in RE in other subject areas. Such a strategy may adversely affect the provisions of the Agreed Syllabus and thereby deny pupils their legal entitlement and could marginalise and downgrade Religious Education at a time when being religiously literate and aware is an essential skill for citizens today and in the future.

On behalf of Central Bedfordshire SACRE, I remind you that RE remains a statutory subject for all schools and that your curriculum planning should make appropriate provision for all students to receive their statutory entitlement in the subject. SACRE's Chair, Jane Chipperton is available to provide advice if contacted ([readviser@stalbans.anglican.org](mailto:readviser@stalbans.anglican.org)).

Please accept our best wishes and continuing good will as we work together with you and your school to provide the highest quality of educational experience for our young people.

Yours sincerely

## **Curriculum Time for RE**

### **Recommendations from the new Agreed Syllabus for RE**

In order to deliver the aims and expected standards of the syllabus, the Agreed Syllabus Conference strongly recommends a minimum allocation of curriculum time for RE based upon the law and DCSF and QCDA guidance: a minimum 5% of curriculum time is required for teaching RE. In 2010 QCDA advised schools about time for each area of learning. This advice gave a starting point of 60 minutes per week for Key Stage 1 RE and 75 minutes per week for key stage 2 RE, and offered numerous examples of timetabling in which RE is allocated 60 -75 minutes per week (QCDA, 2010). These recommendations are further supported in 'Designing the Curriculum' (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, 2008).

#### **Notes**

- RE is a core subject of the curriculum for all pupils. The requirements of this Agreed Syllabus are not subject to the flexibility of the Foundation Subjects.
- Curriculum time for Religious Education is distinct from the time schools may spend on collective worship or school assembly. The times given above are for Religious Education.
- Flexible delivery of RE is often good practice: an RE themed day or week of study can compliment the regular weekly programme of lessons.
- RE should be taught in clearly identifiable time. There is clearly a common frontier between RE and such subjects as literacy, citizenship or PSHE. But the times given above are explicitly for the clearly identifiable teaching of Religious Education.
- Any school in which head teachers and governors do not plan to allocate sufficient curriculum time for RE is unlikely to be able to enable pupils to achieve the standards set out in this syllabus.
- Whilst schools are expected to make their own decisions about how to divide up curriculum time, schools must ensure that sufficient time is given to RE so that pupils can meet the expectations set out in this Agreed Syllabus to provide coherence and progression in learning.

This means in practice that schools are expected to allocate:

- Key Stage 1: 36 hours of tuition per year (e.g. 50 minutes a week).
- Key Stage 2: 45 hours of tuition per year (e.g. an hour a week)
- Key Stage 3: 45 hours of tuition per year (e.g. an hour a week)
- Key Stage 4: 5% of curriculum time, or 70 hours of tuition across the key stage (e.g. an hour a week for five terms).
- 16-19: Allocation of time for RE for all should be clearly identifiable.

**This means that RE can be delivered in approximately an hour a week.**

### **Flexible delivery and high standards in RE:**

Religious education must be planned for high standards. There are different ways that schools can do this. All pupils, 4-19, in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton are entitled to good learning in RE, so schools must plan sufficient time for the subject to be well taught.

Subject leaders for RE, senior staff, head teachers and governors will all take an interest in ensuring provision enables the best possible standards. This might be done in various ways:

- Many schools use **one or two weekly lessons of RE** as the standard way of running the curriculum plan. The advantages of this are that pupils get used to the RE lesson, the progress they make can be steady and continuous and teachers 'know where they are'. The main disadvantage is that pupils' weekly experience of RE can be too spread out for the deeper learning that the subject requires to flourish.
- Some schools use a **themed curriculum approach to RE**. A series of lessons in the humanities are themed for RE, e.g. for half a term, and pupils spend five hours a week or more doing RE and relating study to history or geography. In the next half term, the focus may be more on one of the other subjects. The main advantages of this are that pupils get a deeper and more continuous experience of RE. A disadvantage is that some schools use arbitrary themes or fail to plan RE into the programme at sufficient depth. Specialist teachers involvement in planning is crucial.
- Some schools use an **'RE Week' or an 'RE Day'** to focus learning, then follow up the 'big experience' with linked lessons over several weeks. Such 'big events' planning is demanding of teachers, but can for example help the whole school to focus and develop the subject. A day is about 5 hours, so is not, of course, a substitute for a term's work! Effective work on a week about respect for all religions, or a 'Creation Week', or a week on Spring Celebrations in different faiths is possible, as are many other themes. The key to success is clarity about the RE learning that is planned. A guide to this kind of opportunity, with some practical ideas and outlines, is included on the Agreed Syllabus Disc.