



Richard Kueh

What is Ofsted saying about RE?

Dr Richard Kueh is the recently appointed OFSTED national subject lead for Religious Education, coming to the job straight from leading and teaching RE across a family of schools. He's taught primary and secondary RE and has experience in initial teacher education as well.

Richard spoke to the NATRE executive at its meeting in November 2020, as well as at Strictly RE in January 2021, and made some important key points, including these:

The Ofsted curriculum unit, where Richard works, is a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) leading on subject-specific training and research linked to Ofsted's education inspection framework (EIF). The EIF has a specific focus on subject education as a way of exploring the overall quality of education in schools.

Teachers' thinking about and planning of the curriculum in subjects, like RE, is important for all pupils. Subject associations can support teachers to improve education.

Ofsted recognises the debates about RE's aims and purposes, and the fact that different aims and objectives may be framed differently in different schools. Depending on how a school constructs its RE curriculum, RE could relate to two judgement areas: the quality of education and personal development.

The quality of education considers the substance of what pupils learn and remember in individual subjects. RE leaders and teachers can plan a well-sequenced and ambitious subject curriculum (Ofsted call this 'intent'), how this curriculum is taught ('implementation') and whether pupils know more and remember more because of it ('impact'). These '3Is' in RE are central to the judgement inspectors make about the quality of education. In constructing their school RE curriculums, subject leaders will draw on the locally agreed syllabus (where it applies), but can also draw on subject research, professional reflection and the work of subject associations.

Religious educators are also often interested in how other aspects of learning, for example SMSC, the fostering of tolerance and the promotion of good community relations, contribute to pupils' education. In these ways, RE may contribute to personal development.

In personal development (unlike the quality of education), Ofsted considers intent and implementation, but does not comment on impact. This is because schools can do what they can to shape young people but cannot always determine how well young people draw on this.

In terms of the judgement Ofsted makes about the quality of education, inspectors look at the journey of the curriculum, how well it is taught and whether pupils have learned it. Progress (or 'getting better at RE') is defined as 'knowing more, remembering more and therefore being able to do more'. So if pupils have learned and remembered the curriculum, they have made progress.

An ambitious RE curriculum is one that enables pupils to work towards ambitious end goals. An example of an ambitious end goal might be: pupils have built up accurate knowledge about the

complexity and diversity of global religion and non-religion. If pupils are to work towards such a goal, leaders and teachers need to think carefully about content decisions.

Decisions about the content of a school's RE curriculum means that we might need to problematise the nature of subject-specific knowledge in RE. Ofsted recognises the distinct forms of knowledge in different subjects and that subjects organise them differently. In RE, we must ask: what are the categories of knowledge in RE?

Ofsted has considered three categories of knowledge in RE:

A: The substantive content and concepts of RE.

Examples might include religious beliefs, practices, ways of living and ways of looking at the world, as well as texts and other artefacts in different religious traditions. Substantive knowledge also includes concepts, such as 'dharma', 'incarnation' and 'ritual'. In constructing a curriculum, subject leaders consider what is the best sequence and structure for pupils to learn this substantive content.

B: The 'ways of knowing'.

This category is not so much about 'what to know' but 'how to know' in RE. Within RE, we draw on a range of 'ways of knowing', for example the different methods, tools and lenses of different disciplines. RE is polymethodic (to use a term of Professor Ninian Smart). Here, for example, questions about who has authority and who does not are relevant. When subject leaders construct their RE curriculums, they can think about how to build pupils' knowledge of 'ways of knowing', and how that relates to the substantive content.

C: The idea of 'personal knowledge'.

Others in RE have described this as personal worldview and positionality. The idea of personal knowledge (from the philosopher and scientist Michael Polanyi) is about the perspective and experiences that pupils themselves bring to the RE classroom. For example, when pupils learn concepts of loyalty and duty in the story of Rama and Sita, pupils might bring their own ideas of loyalty and duty to what they learn.

Ofsted considers quality of education through curriculum choices and sequencing: why this piece of content? Why now on the curriculum journey? How does this enable pupils to build towards complex composite tasks, such as extended writing, classroom debates and other products of the curriculum?

Through a high-quality RE curriculum, pupils build both a receptive expertise (building knowledge of the curriculum over time), as well as a productive expertise (building the capacities to 'do' more in RE).

(Summarised by the RE Today editor Lat Blaylock, and agreed with Richard Kueh)