



Ofsted's Research Report on RE with Headings and Comments from Jennifer Jenkins, RE & Spirituality Officer

In the document below, I have copied key paragraphs from Ofsted's very recent Research Report on RE (May 2021), arranged under **key headings** I have added and with my own comments in **red**, as well as charts and images, drawing on some of the key messages I have been giving over the past year.

The majority of the report is represented here but not in its entirety. You should access the entire report here: [Research review series: religious education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/research-review-series/religious-education) and share with SLT and relevant governors if they are not aware of it. I have attempted to make links with the current resources we have available locally and to tie in with recent and upcoming CPD.

The text highlighted in **grey** provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your RE curriculum in light of this new guidance. This may inform staff CPD in your school and the way in which your RE curriculum develops.

Legal Requirements for Teaching RE

*Further, the report found that 44% of all academies reported no timetabled RE. If schools do not teach pupils any RE, this is **illegal**.*

All schools must teach RE as a legal requirement, including academies

The RE Curriculum

The RE curriculum should set out what it means to 'get better' at the subject as pupils move through the journey of the curriculum at primary and secondary level. Pupils build 3 different forms of knowledge in RE, which we will explain in this section. In high-quality RE at primary and secondary level, leaders and teachers think about how these 3 forms of knowledge are interconnected and sequenced within the RE curriculum. It is this RE curriculum that pupils need to know and to remember.

Your RE curriculum must be thought out, intentional and sequenced to allow for knowledge to build sequentially. The placing of systematic units before thematic units in year groups/phases can assist this as pupils will

build up in depth knowledge about a tradition which they can then 'do something with' as they engage with thematic units. In the Coventry & Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus (CWAS) systematic units tend to be 'Believing' units and will focus on one tradition in depth e.g. Who is a Muslim and what do they believe?

Creating progression units for each tradition in your RE curriculum can assist you with seeing the progression in the subject, as well as support teachers in identifying where what they are teaching builds on prior learning. Teachers can also ensure retrieval practice engages with all prior learning from past units and not just current learning. These documents can take a while to produce but are worth the effort as they detail the knowledge progression within your specific RE curriculum. You may also ask teachers to photograph work in books for each unit and save into a PowerPoint in a central area e.g. Year 2 Islam work, so that all teachers are able to access work from prior year groups to remind pupils and therefore link learning together.

Types of Knowledge in the RE Curriculum

This report refers to 3 different types of knowledge used in RE. These broad types of knowledge are 'pillars of progression' within RE. 'Getting better' at RE both at primary and secondary level comprises knowing more and remembering more of these pillars as they are set out within the RE curriculum:

- **first, 'substantive' knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions**
- **second, 'ways of knowing': pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion**
- **third, 'personal knowledge': pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study**

Substantive knowledge- the facts and information about religious and non-religious worldviews you want pupils to know

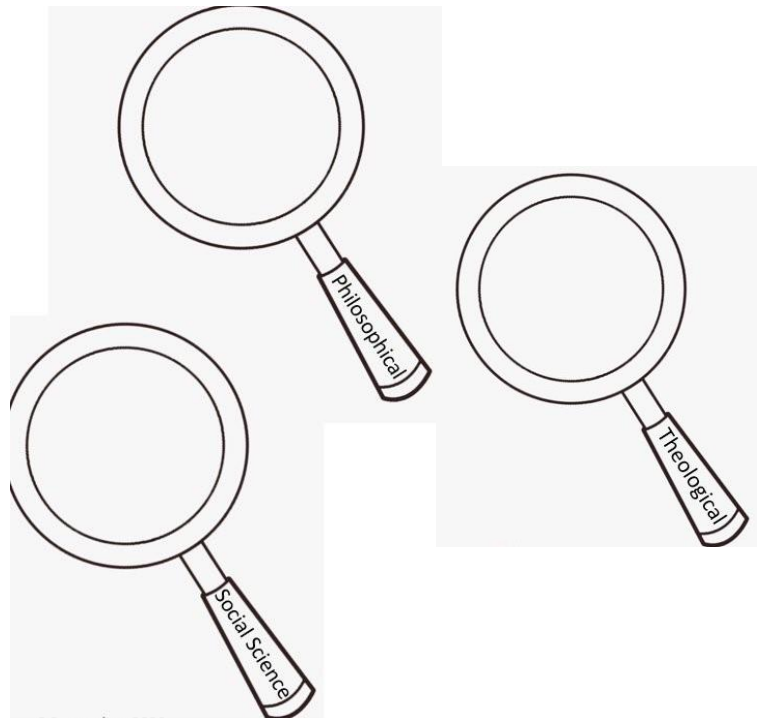
Ways of knowing- the disciplinary knowledge you want pupils to acquire about the different disciplines of study within RE e.g. theology, philosophy and human and social sciences. These provide the lenses through which the key enquiry questions about religion and worldviews (such as those that form the titles of the CWAS units) can be approached and studied. For more information of disciplinary knowledge, see Balanced RE CPD in Section 8 of the Warwickshire SACRE website: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education \(SACRE\) – Education settings \(warwickshire.gov.uk\)](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk) and the

Balanced RE website: [Balanced RE](#) In our CWAS, these 3 disciplines are described as 'Believing' (theology), 'Expressing' (philosophy) and 'Living' (human & social sciences)

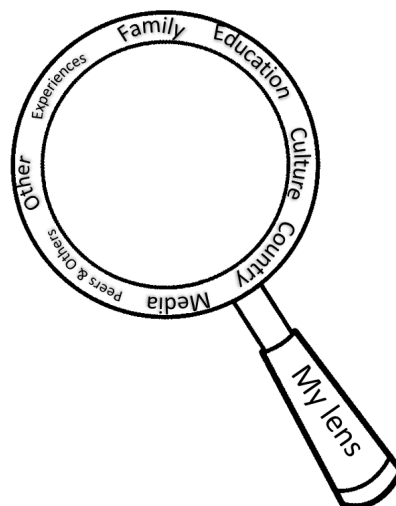
Believing
(Religious beliefs, teachings, sources; questions about meaning, purpose and truth)

Expressing
(Religious and spiritual forms of expression; questions about identity and diversity)

Living
(Religious practices and ways of living; questions about values and commitments)



Personal knowledge is developed through supporting pupils to understand their own worldview and the lenses through which they see the world, how these were constructed and what influences their beliefs and understanding.

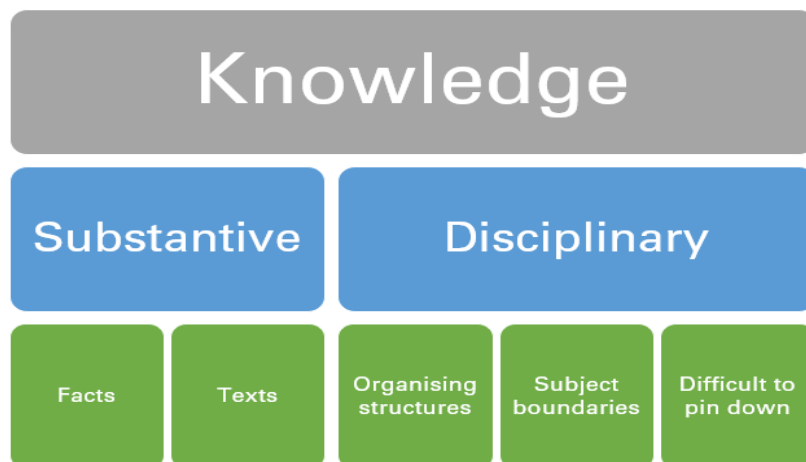


In high-quality RE curriculums, these 3 types of knowledge are not artificially separated from each other. For example, when subject leaders plan a sequence of specific content and concepts for pupils to study, they also need to consider the most appropriate methods that pupils need to know to study that content.

Units in the CWAS are labelled as either Believing, Expressing or Living (top of left-hand column of unit) but you will notice within units that other disciplines will also feature, so that in a theology unit pupils may also be engaging in philosophical debate about concepts or exploring practices and lived religion.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features:

- *A consideration of the knowledge that pupils build through the RE curriculum, because accurate knowledge about religion and non-religion can be beneficial for achieving different purposes and aims for RE.*
- *High expectations about **scholarship** (so that RE is an academically-rigorous subject with ample curriculum time and pupils regard themselves as theologians, philosophers and human & social scientists- for information on how to explore these with pupils, see the **Balanced RE CPD on Warwickshire SACRE website**) in the curriculum to guard against pupils' misconceptions. What is taught and learned in RE is grounded in what is known about religion/non-religion from academic study (scholarship).*
- *Carefully selected and well-sequenced substantive content and concepts (identifying what the key concepts in your RE curriculum are and how these will be revisited again and again is very helpful. You may also want to use dual-coding of words with simple black and white images to support pupils in their understanding of what different concepts are)*
- *'Ways of knowing' are appropriately taught alongside the substantive content and are not isolated from the content and concepts that pupils learn.*



This is a helpful diagram explaining how both substantive and disciplinary knowledge (ways of knowing) make up a curriculum

- *A consideration of when pupils should relate the content to their own personal knowledge (for example, prior assumptions).*

Substantive Knowledge in the RE Curriculum

The substantive knowledge of RE includes the 'substance' of religious and non-religious traditions that primary and secondary level pupils study in the curriculum. Substantive content includes:

- *different ways that people express religion and non-religion in their lives, including diverse lived experiences and the complexity of the fluid boundaries between different traditions*
- *knowledge about artefacts and texts associated with different religious and non-religious traditions*
- *concepts that relate to religious and non-religious traditions, such as 'dharma', 'incarnation', 'ritual', 'authority', 'prayer', 'sacred', 'anatta' and 'moksha'*
- *the very concepts of 'religion' and 'non-religion' and debates around these ideas*
(this may seem obvious but may not have ever been explicitly talked about with pupils)

There are well-established conventions within RE to refer to ways of categorising subject-specific concepts:

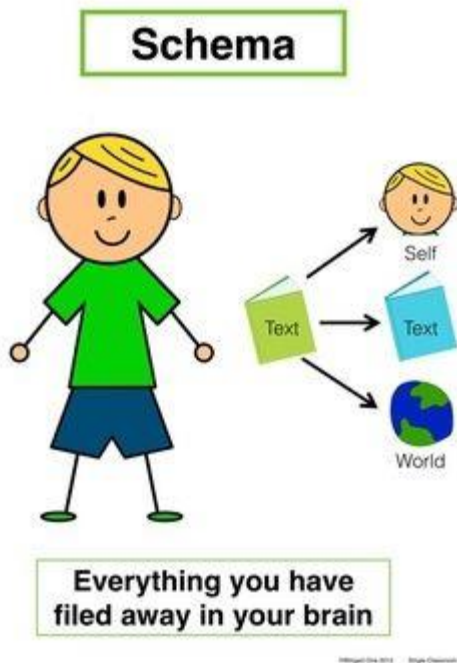
- *concepts that are common to religious and non-religious experience (such as 'interpretation')*
- *concepts that are common to multiple forms of religious experience (such as 'sacrifice')*
- *concepts specific to a religious tradition (such as the Christian notion of 'incarnation')*

Almost all the words associated with the concepts of religion will be tier 3 words specific to RE. See the 'Teaching Religious Vocabulary CPD in Section 8 of the Warwickshire SACRE website for ideas on how to teach religious vocabulary with intention: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education \(SACRE\) – Education settings \(warwickshire.gov.uk\)](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk)

Pupils, of course, cannot learn all possible substantive content in RE. Subject leaders and curriculum designers select RE content for pupils to learn. This means that any curriculum content is a representation or reconstruction of religious and non-religious traditions, worldviews and concepts.

This is important for subject leaders and teachers to grasp- you cannot teach it all- and for pupils to understand- there is always more to know. Good practice signposts pupils to where they can find out more if their curiosity about a tradition or concept is stimulated.

New knowledge that pupils learn becomes integrated within and across schema, which are complex structures in long-term memory that link knowledge and create meaning. Pupils receive many of their values, opinions and ideas from their home environments and communities. However, they will base their knowledge and conceptual models about religion and non-religion to a considerable degree on the representations they learn in the curriculum. There is a responsibility, therefore, on subject leaders to think carefully about the representations they select and to ensure that these are as accurate as possible.



Within the RE curriculum pupils often engage with sacred texts. Schema comes into play when they do this, impacting upon the way in which they interpret what they read due to the specific lens of their worldview and their unique schema for religious ideas and concepts. We call this 'hermeneutics' or the art of interpretation, and future SACRE CPD is planned to support RE teachers and leaders in better understanding this within the context of RE.

The schema that pupils build concerning RE are important in their lives beyond school. They form part of the basis on which young people go on to speak and to act in society in matters of religion and non-religion. What pupils learn needs to resemble the complex picture of religion and non-religion in society, and show them how and why that picture came to be. The representations in high-quality RE curriculums will enable pupils to build up a 'mental model' that reflects the global and historical complexity of religion and non-religion.

Religion as 'messy' and diverse so that complexity is well-represented and presented

High-quality RE prepares pupils to engage in a complex multi-religious and multi-secular world. To reach this goal, leaders and teachers might think about the overall conception of religion and non-religion that pupils build through the RE curriculum. To consider the overall concept of religion and non-religion that pupils build through the curriculum is perhaps more useful than thinking about the quantity and weighting of traditions to include.

At the very least, subject leaders can ensure that the planned representations express the variety of religion and non-religion (for example, ways of living found in Abrahamic traditions, dharmic traditions and non-religious traditions). High-quality RE curriculums capture the diversity, fluidity and complexity of global religion/non-religion in their curriculum representations. Importantly, the content is sequenced so that pupils can make sense of its complexity.

Subject leaders and teachers might select, for example, representations of religious and non-religious traditions that would, over the span of the curriculum, enable pupils to grasp 'big ideas' about religious and non-religious traditions. These are theories about religion and non-religion. An example of a 'big idea' is that religious and non-religious traditions are concerned with the pursuit of a good life. In terms of 'big ideas', the curriculum is 'cumulatively sufficient' when the planned representations allow pupils to learn, over time, these scholarly theories. These theories may be useful for some level of curriculum planning as organising structures or 'conceptual pegs'.

For more on a 'Big Ideas' approach to teaching RE, see Barbara Wintersgill's Big Ideas for Religious Education: [Nordidactica \(diva-portal.org\)](http://Nordidactica.diva-portal.org)

Subject leaders and teachers might also plan a sufficient range of representations to illustrate or indicate complexity. For example, subject leaders may select representations of Hindu and Buddhist traditions because of the way that they share similar concepts, such as 'karma' and 'dharma'. They may plan representations of 'cultural Christians' or 'secular Muslims' as well as representations of Roman Catholic Christians or Sunni Muslims. In high-quality RE curriculums, a range of illustrative or indicative representations will enable pupils to build sophisticated conceptions that relate to the realities of the world's religious landscape.

High-quality RE curriculums do not require excessive content but do need cumulatively sufficient content. This means that subject leaders should ensure that their curriculums contain collectively enough substantive knowledge to enable pupils to recognise the diverse and changing religious and non-religious traditions of the world.

It is important for subject leaders in primary and secondary schools to plan precise and accurate representations of religious and non-religious traditions in their curriculums. When those representations are inaccurate, pupils end up having misconceptions. For example, if subject leaders plan for pupils to learn about humanism only in relation to atheism, pupils will not gain wider knowledge of humanism as a way of life.

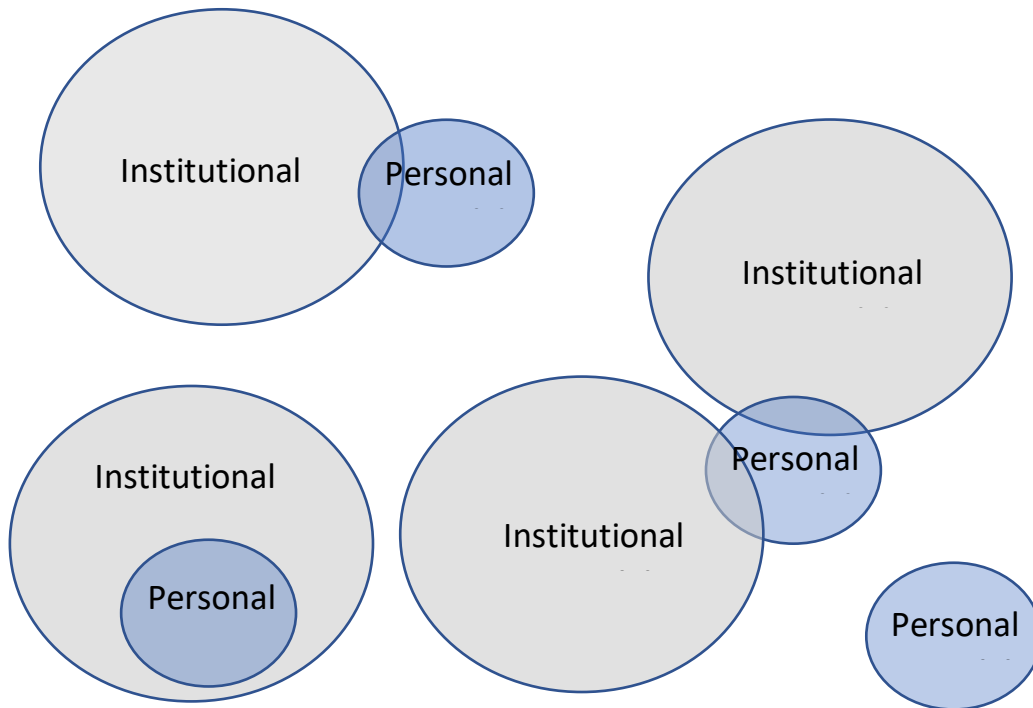
In RE that does not focus on the nurture of and/or induction into faith traditions (non-confessional RE), the accuracy of representations is particularly important. The

representations should allow teachers to be able to teach accurately without advocating a tradition or ignoring unpleasant manifestations of traditions. This means that subject leaders may have to plan representations that include morally displeasing aspects of that tradition, as well as more agreeable ones. For instance, when subject leaders plan representations of Buddhist traditions, but ignore all anti-social aspects of the traditions, then the curriculum communicates inaccurate stereotypes to pupils. Subject leaders and curriculum designers need to question whose version of the tradition is being represented in the curriculum. Constructing representations that are informed by scholarship can prevent unintentional partisanship.

This requires the controversial aspects of religion to find their way into the classroom as well as the traditionally taught 'nice' bits. Confidence and courage of teachers is something that needs nurturing. Techniques such as silent debates can offer a starting point for tackling controversial issues in a safe way.

Subject leaders also need to be alert to the ways in which the 'authenticity' of traditions can be lost. Sometimes, subject leaders plan for pupils to learn generalisations (for example, 'Christians believe...' or 'Islam is...'). This becomes problematic when the planned representations give the impression that traditions are given, fixed and stable and do not attend to the fluidity, change and dynamism of 'living traditions' as traditions in transition. Generalisations might capture a tradition as it once was, but no longer is now. This is especially problematic when generalisations bear no resemblance to the living traditions of pupils and their families. In turn, this raises the question of whether these representations sufficiently prepare pupils for religion and belief diversity. It is crucial that subject leaders plan well-informed representations that do not present pupils with unsustainable stereotypes and poor generalisations.

A worldviews approach to teaching religion and worldviews helps here. This is where pupils understand that every human being inhabits a specific worldview unique to them; a distinct way of seeing the world- their lens for gaining meaning. This is commonly termed a 'personal worldview'. Individuals may align that worldview within an 'institutional' or 'organised' worldview, such as a specific religious tradition. Yet even when this is the case, individuals who view themselves as adherents to a specific tradition e.g. Muslims, will differ in their lives experience and interpretation from other Muslims. Understanding this and valuing all the worldviews in the classroom, as well as those that are encountered through different individuals through visitors and visits/trips, make RE a subject relevant to everyone.



This illustration shows how personal and institutional/organised worldviews interact in different and unique ways.

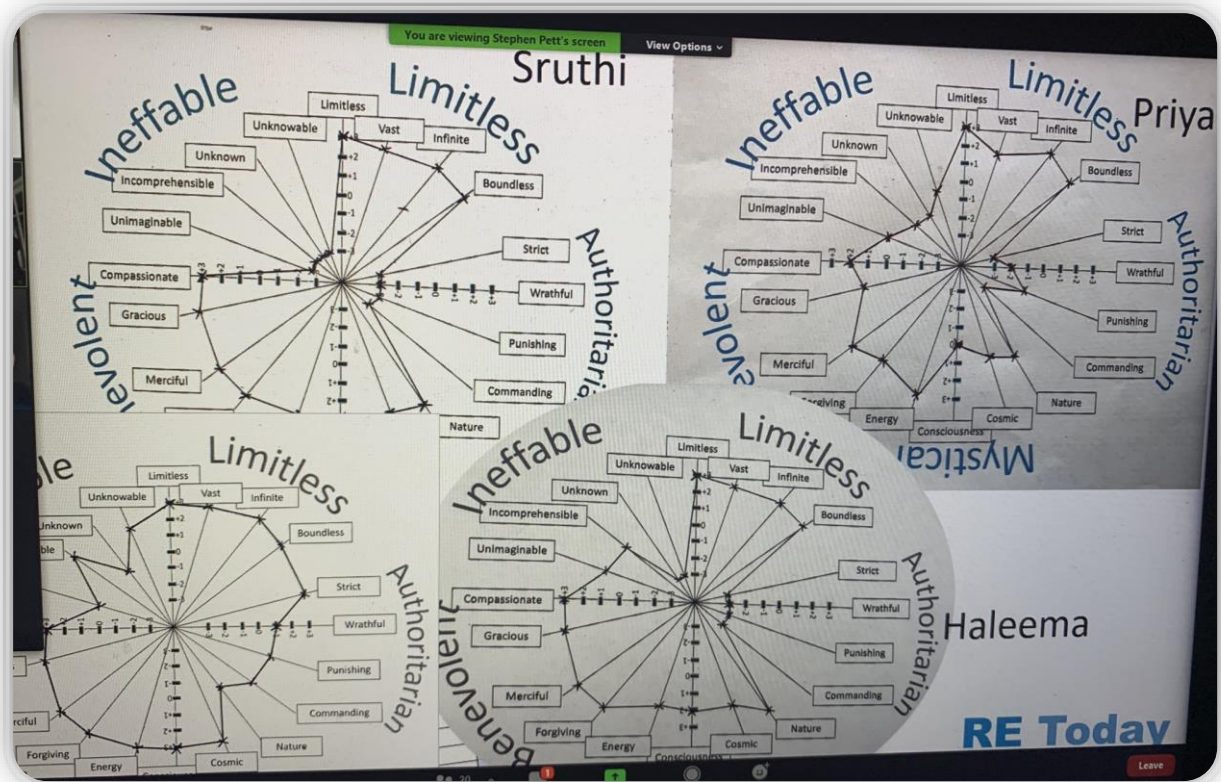
That said, there may be times, particularly in the primary phase, when generalisations are necessary in the RE curriculum. For example, teachers may need to use generalisations to explain simply common features of specific traditions, such as specialist vocabulary, widespread commonalities and shared subject-specific concepts. In doing so, teachers might emphasise aspects of traditions that bind some communities together, such as creeds. As part of using generalisations in this way, simple modifications to planning to make the representations as precise as possible (for example, 'some', 'many', 'majority of European' or 'traditions from South Asia') can add helpful degrees of clarity. Concerns that what pupils learn should be accurate should not be confused with making the curriculum unnecessarily complex. The initial learning of a concept is inevitably incomplete, and can be developed and corrected over time. Pupils can therefore build more sophisticated knowledge about those traditions at a later stage. Also, pupils can learn why greater nuance in their knowledge is more useful.

Some level of generalisations during the early primary phase may be necessary when first introducing pupils to concepts of religion and specific traditions.

As pupils move on from early generalisations, they need to learn the complexities of religious and non-religious traditions. To support this, leaders and teachers might plan for pupils to learn about 'organised worldviews', 'institutional traditions' or '-'

isms' (such as Judaism) alongside learning how real people (such as individual Jews) live out traditions in their lives.

The RE curriculum should therefore focus on encounter with Muslims rather than 'Islam', Hindus rather than 'Hinduism', etc, through a focus on the diversity of lived experience of religion.



This snowflake activity illustrates the ways in which a personal worldview can differ despite being affiliated within an institutional/organised worldview. Sruthi and Priya in the example above would both describe themselves as 'Hindu' but their personal worldview snowflakes are quite different. In fact, Sruthi and Haleema (someone describing themselves as Muslim) are very similar and Haleema's snowflake differs quite a bit from the snowflake on the left which was completed by another individual who would describe themselves as Muslim.

With regard to 'isms' there is a current move towards replacing some of the Western 'ism' terminology typically used to describe religious traditions with terms more suited to the tradition itself:

e.g. Sikhi instead of Sikhism, Sanatan Dharma instead of Hinduism, Buddhist worldviews (to acknowledge the massive plurality of expressions) instead of Buddhism. This change is particularly applicable to

the indo-religions where more western terminology and structures have been used and are often not a good fit with the reality of how the tradition is expressed.

They may plan for pupils to learn, for example, testimonies from faith practitioners or leaders of organised religious groups that relate to generalisations. Pupils will then learn both the generalisation and an example of the 'living' traditions. This lets them 'test' the generalisation when learning it alongside instances of the 'lived reality' of religious traditions. This also prevents pupils from making incorrect inferences about how common individual experiences are because it also provides them with knowledge of how widespread they might be.

Imprecise questions sometimes encourage pupils to use weak generalisations or unsustainable stereotypes (for example, 'what's the difference between Islam and Christianity?'). Instead, rich and precise questions, which emphasise 'social actors' and their uses of traditions, promote the use of accurate representations (for example, 'how have different Muslims understood Islam's relationship with Christianity?').

It is of course important that leaders and teachers try to portray the diversity of religion and non-religion in the RE curriculum. However, attending only to the breadth of knowledge that pupils build is insufficient for high-quality RE. Curriculum leaders at primary and secondary level must also consider the depth of knowledge.

Depth and Breadth

Depth of knowledge in particular areas of the RE curriculum is important because it provides pupils with detailed content on which to build ideas, concepts and theories about religion. Concepts, particularly ones about abstract RE topics like 'forgiveness' and 'impermanence', that are secure in the mind rest on knowledge of a range of examples. If pupils are to make sense of the 'bigger picture' of a multi-religious, multi-secular world, then they need depth of knowledge about religious and non-religious traditions.

Depth of study prepares pupils with many crucial components of the curriculum. What teachers consider to be crucial components will depend on those aspects of the RE curriculum that are useful 'hooks' or conceptual 'pegs' that enable pupils to approach current and new content on a firm foundation. These components may include specific vocabulary and concepts, pertinent facts, examples, illustrations, and aspects of disciplinary procedures necessary for later study in the curriculum. Pupils need to acquire these components through typical forms of RE content, which are not separated out from their in-depth context. These forms may include:

- *narratives, stories and texts*
- *aspects of living religion (such as rituals and cultural artefacts)*
- *codified beliefs*
- *arguments*
- *thought experiments*
- *case studies*

The RE curriculum needs to build pupils' schema with a range of detailed knowledge from specific forms of content like the above. Pupils can then consider more complex ideas about religion from a knowledgeable position. Leaders and teachers therefore need to plan carefully the depth of study in the curriculum.

The curriculum can relate specific traditions to historical context, cultural settings, sacred literature and ways of thinking and living in the world. Pupils will build knowledge of the rich intellectual and spiritual histories of religious and non-religious traditions, the ideas that gain prominence within them, how they relate to culture and how they have shaped – and continue to impact – the globe. This in-depth knowledge enables pupils to dig beneath the surface of contemporary political and public faces of the traditions. On this in-depth basis, pupils can then explore the historical, geographical, metaphysical and cosmological aspects of traditions.

In-depth contextual knowledge is especially important when aspects of exams focus on very narrow representations of religious traditions. For example, sacred texts are sometimes used as 'proof-texts' in religious studies exams in England. This can misrepresent centuries of practices about how sacred texts inform religious traditions. In-depth contextual knowledge ensures that pupils are better informed and can see the limitations of such uses.

Pupils in KS3 and KS4 in particular should be engaging with religious texts for their own sake, regarded as whole texts and unlocking knowledge and understanding of belief and practice, rather than simply to be taken out of context to bolster arguments.

The image shows a 'Guided Reading' worksheet template. At the top left is the logo 'guided READING' with a book icon. The central part of the page is a large box containing the text 'TITLE OF ARTICLE' and 'Brief summary'. Surrounding this central box are 12 numbered question areas, each with a set of horizontal lines for writing. The questions are numbered 1 through 12. The layout is as follows:

- Top row: 5 Question, 6 Question, 10 Question
- Left side (vertical): 1 Question, 2 Question, 3 Question, 4 Question
- Right side (vertical): 11 Question, 12 Question, 9 Question
- Bottom row: 7 Question, 8 Question

Engaging with texts or scholarly articles in RE can support pupil knowledge and development of understanding.

Some curriculums do not cover religious and non-religious traditions in detail. Instead, they focus on generic themes in RE, such as 'festivals' or 'rites of passage'. This approach can be problematic. Many of the curriculum themes are superficial and, in some instances, lead to pupils' misconceptions. For example, themes such as 'founders of religion' or 'holy books' end up perpetuating misconceptions that some religious traditions are not 'real religions' because they do not fit neatly into the theme. Detailed study allows pupils to learn sufficient content to avoid superficial misconceptions.

The CWAS comprises systematic and thematic units. Pupils need systematic study (e.g. Who is Jewish and what do they believe?) in order to bring knowledge to thematic units (e.g. What can we learn from sacred books?). Therefore, a RE curriculum should not just be based on thematic study.

However...

It can be problematic, for instance, when the entirety of the curriculum is composed of units of discrete religious or non-religious traditions (for example, 'Christianity' /'Judaism' /'Humanism' /'Hinduism' /'Sikhism'), without any opportunities for pupils to build towards seeing blurred boundaries and areas of overlap between them. This approach, intentionally or otherwise, ends up following a 'world religions' paradigm.

The world religions paradigm is the most recent way of teaching RE, as monolithic, homogenous units, almost like boxes of the 'isms'.

Leaders and teachers might respond to this by planning in-depth study of traditions, but also by including opportunities for pupils to learn that the idea of a discrete tradition sometimes breaks down. In this way, pupils can see the 'model' of an institutional worldview, as well as the reality of how different people actually live out religion or non-religion in their lives.

In summary, depth of study provides the foundation for pupils to go on to explore other themes and complexity in RE. For pupils to deal with this material ably, they need detailed and in-depth knowledge of specific traditions. Without this, pupils are unlikely to see patterns, relationships or discrepancies in activities that are the hallmarks of more sophisticated and proficient thinking. Depth of study also allows pupils to make sense of the fluid reality of a multi-religious, multi-secular world.

Sequencing Substantive Content

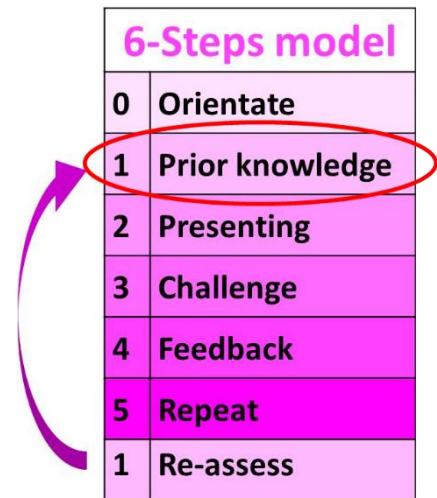
High-quality curriculums are coherently planned and well sequenced. To achieve this, leaders need to consider what prior content pupils need ahead of future

content. At both primary and secondary level, the curriculum needs to prepare pupils for forthcoming topics based on content that has preceded them. This is part of recognising that the curriculum maps out the journey of what it means to 'get better' at the subject. This aspect of curriculum in RE has been underdeveloped, although some recent projects have considered how curriculum content maps out developing expertise.

Anticipating what knowledge pupils will need to know in advance of studying each unit can help you with ensuring sequencing is effective. For instance, before approaching a unit of sacred texts it would be beneficial for pupils to know some key knowledge about the Bible, the Quran and another sacred text, such as the Guru Granth Sahib in the Sikhi tradition. Placing a unit of work on sacred books after systematic learning about Christianity, Islam and Sikhi would therefore be beneficial for learning.

Well-sequenced curriculums are also structured to help pupils integrate new knowledge into their existing knowledge and make enduring connections between content, ideas and concepts. When pupils encounter new content in RE, their prior knowledge has an impact on what they learn. Prior knowledge that pupils need in order to learn new content may include, for example, vocabulary, concepts, narratives and/or factual knowledge.

Subject leaders and teachers might use links **[between concepts]** as part of sequencing the curriculum effectively. For example, leaders can make links between stories about and experiences of different religious and cultural communities in the early years foundation stage with RE concepts in key stage 1.



Another part of effective curriculum sequencing is considering how to enable pupils to move towards ambitious end goals.

RE teaching and learning should enable pupils to...

A. Know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews.	B. Express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews.	C. Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews.
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End of key stage outcomes

RE should enable pupils to:

A1. Recall and name different beliefs and practices, including festivals, worship, rituals and ways of life, in order to find out about the meanings behind them.	B1. Ask and respond to questions about what individuals and communities do, and why, so that pupils can identify what difference belonging to a community might make.	C1. Explore questions about belonging, meaning and truth so that they can express their own ideas and opinions in response using words, music, art or poetry.
A2. Retell and suggest meanings to some religious and moral stories, exploring and discussing sacred writings and sources of wisdom and recognising the traditions from which they come.	B2. Observe and recount different ways of expressing identity and belonging, responding sensitively for themselves.	C2. Find out about and respond with ideas to examples of co-operation between people who are different.
A3. Recognise some different symbols and actions which express a community's way of life, appreciating some similarities between communities.	B3. Notice and respond sensitively to some similarities between different religions and worldviews.	C3. Find out about questions of right and wrong and begin to express their ideas and opinions in response.

Desired end points in the CWAS can be found on pages 32, 46 & 70 for each key stage.

Pupils may also develop broad expertise in 'ways of knowing' the substantive content.

You may wish to consider how pupils' disciplinary expertise within each of the three main disciplines- theology, philosophy and human & social sciences- develops as they progress through your RE curriculum. See the Balanced RE CPD on the Warwickshire SACRE website for more details about these skills and methodologies. If you are using Understanding Christianity, a programme which approaches the Bible through a theological lens, your pupils will already be progressing in their ability to engage with text, ideas of authorship, authority and interpretation. If you are not using this and would like to find out more visit:

<http://www.understandingchristianity.org.uk/> Community schools are currently eligible for a significant bursary towards training and materials and should contact Alison.Watson@coventrydbe.org for more details.

What matters is that earlier stages of the RE curriculum have prepared pupils with the necessary components, so they are ready for the next content.

Your early years and KS1 elements of the curriculum are therefore vital and should be considered carefully. See the Ofsted Research Report for specific examples.

It is clear that sequencing towards ambitious subject-specific goals requires pupils to build knowledge of significant links and connections between concepts. It is important for pupils to have knowledge not simply of isolated concepts, but of the relationships between them. Leaders and teachers might identify, for example, pertinent concepts that pupils could learn in a range of contexts and pattern them within the curriculum to enable pupils to make rich connections with them.

Again, consider how concepts connect in your RE curriculum e.g. incarnation, resurrection, freedom, authority, etc

Controversial Issues in RE

RE is considered a place within the curriculum where particularly controversial and sensitive issues can be discussed. How and when to introduce these issues illustrates just how vital curriculum sequencing can be.

At secondary level, some RE curriculums may include topics that relate to perceptions of religion and terror or the way in which the Holocaust (or Shoah) has shaped Jewish traditions. In weaker RE curriculums, these topics may be introduced without supplying sufficient background knowledge, sensitivity and expertise. Controversial or sensitive issues often have political, environmental, social, emotional and intellectual dimensions. This means that there may be many components that pupils require before studying controversial topics.

Though the topics discussed in RE will differ between primary and secondary schools, the importance of sequencing applies equally at both levels. At primary level, leaders can consider the appropriate point within the sequence of the curriculum to introduce social and religious concepts, such as 'death'. They may do this through considering what pupils will have learned previously in other subjects, such as science, about the way that death is a natural process and part of life. Also, leaders can consider how death has been explained in the early years foundation stage, such as through the death of a school pet.

Coventry Cathedral can provide support in managing difficult conversations and disagreeing well. See this useful document:

<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/wpsite/wp-downloads/Resources/Managing%20Difficult%20Conversations.pdf?boxtype=pdf&g=false&s=false&s2=false&r=wide>

High-quality RE curriculums will prepare pupils with the prior knowledge they need in order to think about and respond to controversial issues in an informed way. For example, for topics such as Christian responses to suffering, pupils may need prior knowledge of distinctive Christian concepts such as 'resurrection' and knowledge of the social and spiritual dimensions of concepts such as 'evil'. Pupils need to possess prior knowledge of concepts such as 'death' and related vocabulary such as 'choice', 'freedom', 'plan' and 'trust'. Some topics in the RE curriculum may also require knowledge from other subjects, such as English literature, history, geography and science. Subject leaders and teachers might order the curriculum so that pupils have developed knowledge of the content, concepts and related vocabulary needed to approach a controversial topic. Without this, pupils' engagement will be superficial.

Consider how learning in other subjects can both support and be supported by learning in RE. For example, are there religious ideas pupils need to understand in order to better access a text in literacy, or learning in science, such as evolution or the Big Bang Theory, which can be utilised when exploring theological and philosophical ideas about existence in RE. These considerations will impact the sequencing of knowledge in your RE curriculum.

If subject leaders and teachers only plan for pupils to learn about some traditions in relation to controversial topics, then pupils will build up substantive knowledge about

that tradition only in relation to the controversial. They will miss out on the wider context of that tradition's history and different forms of expression. For example, if pupils only learn about Jewish traditions within a topic of the Shoah or about Islamic traditions only within a sequence of lessons on 'religion and terror', then their knowledge of those traditions will be eclipsed by those topics. Subject leaders and teachers might plan broader representations of those religious traditions before teaching about controversial topics.

Be careful about the overall impressions you are giving pupils about religious traditions.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features:

- *'Collectively enough' substantive content and concepts in the RE curriculum to enable pupils to grasp the complexity of a multi-religious, multi-secular world. This substantive knowledge is a representation and reconstruction of religious and non-religious traditions and concepts.*
- *Representations of religious and non-religious traditions that are as accurate as possible. Leaders and teachers might use scholarship to construct representations so that pupils do not learn misconceptions.*
- *Depth of study in certain areas of the RE curriculum to provide pupils with detailed content that is connected with the concepts and ideas that they learn. Without this, more complex discussions about religion and non-religion will be superficial. Leaders and teachers can make intelligent selections for depth of study to indicate a range of religious and non-religious ways of living.*
- *Detailed knowledge of specific religious and non-religious traditions (such as their stories, narratives, texts and testimonies) in the RE curriculum to enable pupils to make useful connections between content.*
- *A well-sequenced RE curriculum that prepares pupils with the prior knowledge (including content, concepts and vocabulary) they need for subsequent topics. The importance of this is very clear in the case of controversial and sensitive topics. Leaders and teachers might identify the necessary background knowledge that pupils need to learn for a topic and make sure that the curriculum is ordered to accommodate this.*

This provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your existing RE curriculum.

Ways of Knowing, or Disciplinary Knowledge

'Ways of knowing' is about being scholarly in the way that substantive content and concepts are approached. It refers to the different ways that pupils learn how it is possible to explore that substantive knowledge. With only substantive ('what to know') knowledge, the RE curriculum would be incomplete because pupils also need to learn 'how to know' in RE. At primary and secondary level, leaders and teachers

might teach 'ways of knowing' by ensuring that pupils learn not only selected content, but also tools to explore that content.

Scholarly is the important term here. What happens in the RE classroom should reflect what happens in academic settings when religion and worldviews are studied.

'Ways of knowing' is an area of development that is currently emerging within RE. There seem to be 2 main forms of 'ways of knowing' that pupils can learn in the curriculum:

- *knowledge of well-established methods and processes and other tools of scholarship that are used to study and make sense of global and historical religion/non-religion*
- *knowledge of the types of conversation (or 'modes of enquiry' or 'scholarly discourses') that academic communities have about religion/non-religion*

These 2 forms have sometimes been referred to as 'disciplinary knowledge' in RE, which has been described as:

- *knowledge that acts on substantive knowledge, as well as the products generated by that action*
- *the collective total of the tools, norms, conventions and methods of particular fields of human knowledge*

Theology is about believing. It looks at where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other.

Philosophy is about thinking. It is about finding out how and whether things make sense. It deals with questions of morality and ethics. It takes seriously the nature of reality, knowledge and existence.

Human and Social Sciences are about living. It explores the diverse ways in which people practise their beliefs. It engages with the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies.



You will recognise these as Living (theology), Expressing (philosophy) and Living (human & social sciences) in the CWAS

The Importance of Scholarship in RE

One part of 'ways of knowing' is pupils learning about scholarship. To meet the professional standards of teachers, teachers must promote the value of scholarship. Leaders and teachers of RE can consider this when asking questions of the RE curriculums that they construct:

- *How is scholarship valued in the teaching of substantive content?*
- *What do we plan for pupils to learn about how the knowledge in the RE curriculum was constructed?*
- *What do we expect pupils to learn about how accurate, tentative or reliable representations of religious and non-religious traditions are?*
- *What do we expect pupils to learn about how to construct new knowledge, and evaluate existing knowledge, in trustworthy ways?*

Beyond substantive content, leaders and teachers may plan for pupils to learn:

- *how knowledge came about (for example, who constructed the knowledge or how it might have been formed from academic disciplines)*
- *the status of claims (for example, how accurate a generalisation about religion might be)*
- *the difference between conceptions and misconceptions (for example, whether the term 'believer' is an appropriate term for all adherents and practitioners of different traditions)*
- *the type of method that may have been used to derive that knowledge and the suitability of methods (for example, the strengths and limitations of interview methods for portions of curriculum content)*

See 'Balanced RE' CPD on the Warwickshire SACRE website for more information about the different 'ways of knowing' (multidisciplinary RE) and watch out for more CPD during 2021-2022.

The idea of a position of absolute neutrality when studying religion/non-religion is considered untenable portrayals of religious and non-religious traditions as well as concerned about expecting pupils to adopt teachers' own beliefs. Yet, pupils need to be educated to respond to content in informed, intelligent and reflective ways. In plural, non-confessional and multi-faith RE, a range of 'ways of knowing' about religion/non-religion would broaden, rather than limit, pupils' educational experience.

Tools, Methods and Processes for Ways of Knowing in RE

In high-quality RE, it is important for pupils to learn about the tools of scholarship and other well-established methods. If pupils are to build up representations of religious traditions that reflect the complexity and diversity of religion, then they require sufficient knowledge of the tools so that, when appropriate, they themselves are able to work towards that complexity and diversity.

In RE, pupils can learn a range of tools and methods. For example, pupils could explore a curriculum question such as 'how have different Hindus expressed dharma practice?' through an analysis of Vedic texts. However, they would get a different answer through, for example, a survey of the perspectives of Hindu residents of a geographical area. Within a curriculum, this example would require that pupils develop both knowledge of different tools and methods and knowledge of what these tools and methods reveal (or conceal) about aspects of dharma practice.

The example illustrates the way in which methods of study drawn from theology (looking at the Vedic texts) and human & social sciences (conducting surveys to expose lived practice) are two different methods drawn from two different disciplines to answer the key enquiry question that has been posed.

Leaders and teachers might plan, throughout the journey of the curriculum, for pupils to develop their expertise by learning how these different methods might be applied to varied and different substantive content. Of course, a school RE curriculum could never fully capture every method, tool or process that could be used concerning religion. Possible tools and methods that pupils could learn about include:

- *tools for interpreting texts*
- *tools for exploring customs, habits and ways of living (ethnography)*
- *archaeological procedures*
- *methods in historical reconstruction*
- *participant observation*
- *in-depth interviews*
- *analysis of relevant data*

Knowing and understanding the different methodologies associated with the three main ways of knowing in RE (or disciplines) will require

additional CPD. You can, however, make a start at grasping what these are by accessing the Balanced RE CPD on the Warwickshire SACRE website. See the Ofsted report itself for an example based on hermeneutics (interpretation of sacred texts).

The sheer amount of choices could be overwhelming for subject leaders and teachers. Yet high-quality RE helps pupils learn to choose the right tool for the job: it specifies what is/are the appropriate method(s) and tool(s) for a specific aspect of tradition that is in focus in the curriculum. To a large extent, the tools that pupils learn about depend on the selection and sequencing of the substantive content of the curriculum, as well as the type of question being asked of the content.

You may decide of which methods and processes your pupils need to learn how to use or you may use your substantive content to select which disciplinary methods and processes will be best explored within that unit of work.

When pupils learn a specific selection of tools, methods and practices, RE draws on well-established scholarly processes. Knowledge of the procedures for picking the 'right tool for the job' enables pupils to learn the procedures for acquiring new knowledge in reliable and warranted ways. Leaders and teachers might select, in age-appropriate ways, specific scholarly methods for pupils to learn in conjunction with substantive content.

'Ways of knowing' includes knowledge about how academics discuss religion. Pupils and teachers will also discuss religion and non-religion in the RE classroom. Teachers might therefore reflect on how they intend to frame their classroom discussions about religion.

Without this form of knowledge in RE, teachers may spread (rather than counteract) illiteracy about the content learned in RE. For example, ideas about 'proof' and 'truth' play very different roles in scientific conversations compared with religious ones. High-quality RE can play a clear role in developing pupils' literacy about types of knowledge in the world; poor-quality RE can cause confusion and misconceptions.¹ High-quality RE also helps pupils to distinguish knowledge in the RE curriculum from 'everyday' knowledge, opinions and ideas.

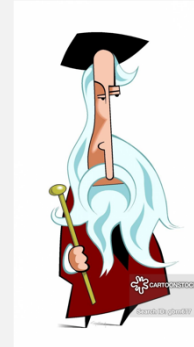
Use of language is very important here.

Some curriculum approaches formalise 'ways of knowing' into simplified disciplines, such as 'theology', 'philosophy' and 'human/social sciences'. In these cases, the curriculum content is framed as if it were considered by, for example, theologians, philosophers or human/social scientists. These can be taught in simplified ways in primary schools.

Help pupils to understand what theologians, philosophers & human and social scientists are, what they do and how they study religion

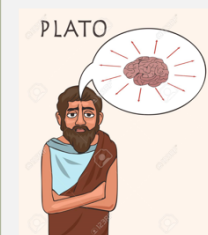
WE ARE THEOLOGIANs

- We analyse sacred texts and make links with practices and beliefs
- We look for evidence to back up our thinking
- We make judgements based on our reading
- We make interpretations and identify our hermeneutical (interpretive) lenses
- We ask questions about what we read and discuss its meaning
- We consider authorship and authority and the context in which sacred texts were written
- We reflect on what sacred texts mean to us personally and what they mean to others



WE ARE PHILOSOPHERS

- We explore different methods of knowing and different methods of reasoning
- We use the ideas and thoughts of others to generate discussion and formulate our own opinions
- We justify our opinions and ideas with evidence and examples
- We challenge the ideas and opinions of others, known to us and not known
- We ask innovative questions of our own and attempt to answer the questions of others
- We try to be persuasive in our spoken language and in our writing
- We think critically using reason and evidence
- We think about why we are here and issues of right and wrong, good and bad



WE ARE HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

- We question assumptions and religion
- We analyse how things change in society
- We consider the reasons for human behaviour and practices
- We consider what behaviour and practices tell us about belief and ways of seeing the world
- We study diversity and lived experiences of religion using interviews, case studies and observations
- We analyse and try to understand the worldviews of others, both personally and institutionally, alongside our own
- We encounter real people from different religious traditions and those of no faith
- We think about issues of belonging and identity and the interactions between these ideas



See the Ofsted Research Report on RE itself for an example of these three disciplines applied to a study of Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma)

'Ways of knowing' within the RE curriculum is currently an area of development and theorisation for teachers. Focusing on this type of knowledge might improve some aspects of RE.

For example, RE practitioners commonly use language of interpretation, analysis, explanation and/or the construction of arguments as part-and-parcel of learning. However, what exactly is meant by these procedures is unclear: the terms are very broad and can vary in their meaning. Using terms like 'analysis' or 'argumentation' imprecisely can generate problems because, when they are applied generically, they are not adjusted to the subject content. It is unclear what similarity there is between:

- *'analysis of a belief'*
- *'analysis of a religious text'*
- *'analysis of a philosophical argument'*

The over-simplified generic application of terms such as these may suggest a lack of precision in expectations about what pupils learn beyond substantive content. It may also suggest that teachers are unclear about how pupils should (or even could) respond to the substantive content.

Again, this is about language and unpicking tier 2 academic vocabulary with pupils as it is applied to the different ways of knowing/disciplines. Modelling and guided practice can support pupils in their understanding of

what they are specifically being asked to do and which discipline they are working within when they are asked to analyse, evaluate, etc.

It would be more useful and constructive for leaders and teachers to plan for pupils to learn 'ways of knowing' that are specific to the content. For example, they can learn how to know the extent to which particular beliefs are widespread, or suitable tools for interpreting religious texts, or the criteria for valid arguments in analytic philosophy.

High-quality curriculums in which pupils learn a range of 'ways of knowing' can help prevent over-simplifying or stereotyping religion. Recognising that there can be different 'ways of knowing' brings to light a variety of perspectives, positions and voices. This may also help overcome misconceptions that later ideas, practices and perspectives in some religious traditions are necessarily deviations from an original pure tradition.

Given that what is presented to pupils in the curriculum is a representation of religion and non-religion, there are scholarly questions to ask about 'who says' the representation is accurate, appropriate or suitable. Representatives and/or faith leaders of organised traditions (sometimes called institutional worldviews) offer unique perspectives. But the voices of other individual adherents and practitioners (sometimes called personal worldviews) also offer unique perspectives on that tradition.

Both types of voices can broaden the representation. Beyond the substantive content, learning about 'ways of knowing' enables pupils to think about, to question and to discern whose perspective is being heard through the representations of traditions, and why.

This inclusion of ways of knowing, alongside a worldviews approach to teaching RE, offers a multivocal perspective and recovers some of the lost voices around religion e.g. women, LGBTQ individuals, children. It is also inherently decolonising the curriculum as traditionally authority to speak on many issues of religion has been from a perspective of (often white) male authority, representing an organised/institutional worldview.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- *A curriculum design that includes 'ways of knowing' as a form of knowledge that pupils build through the RE curriculum. This helps pupils learn about the construction of substantive knowledge, its accuracy, its reliability and how provisional that knowledge is. Pupils are therefore prepared to think in critical and scholarly ways about the representations of religion and non-religion that they learn through the curriculum and encounter in the world beyond.*
- *A sequenced RE curriculum that includes scholarly methods and tools that pupils learn.*

- *Subject leaders and teachers who make good decisions about which 'ways of knowing' pupils need to learn and who match the 'ways of knowing' to the substantive content.*
- *Curriculum impact that includes pupils recognising the type of specialist discourse they are engaging in when asking questions, using methods and making claims about different content in the RE curriculum. This might have been achieved, for example, because pupils have learned how disciplinary discourses construct knowledge about religion/non-religion or how groups or families of methods explore religious and non-religious traditions.*

This provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your existing RE curriculum.

Personal Knowledge in RE

'Personal knowledge' has been described by various educators as 'knower-knowledge', 'personal worldview', 'reflexivity' and 'positionality'.

A brief explanation of these terms:

Positionality: *Describes how your identity influences, and potentially biases, your understanding of and outlook on the world.*

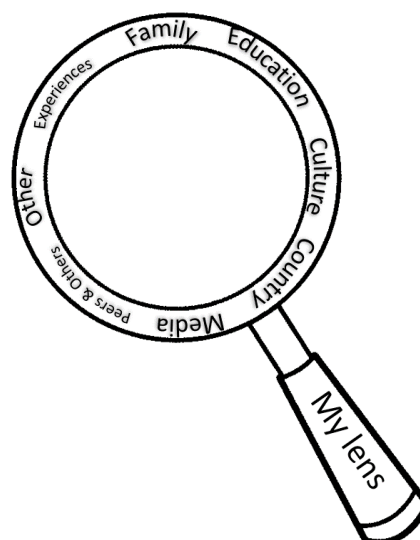
Reflexivity: *The process of becoming self-aware, considering your own thoughts and actions in light of different contexts.*

Reflectivity: *Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it*

When pupils study RE content, they do so 'from a position'. This position is their 'viewpoint' or perspective on the world, which is influenced by, for example, their values, prior experiences and own sense of identity. Through the curriculum at primary and secondary level, pupils build 'personal knowledge', which includes an awareness of the assumptions that they bring to discussions concerning religious and non-religious traditions. The focus on both knowledge of religious traditions and also what that knowledge contributes to the pupils' self-understanding is well established in RE. This form of knowledge is similar to academic reflections in higher education.

This links back to the importance of helping pupils to explore their own worldview and what contributes and shapes this idiosyncratic lens through which they see the world.

For younger pupils, you may physically want to make a magnifying glass template you ask them to use when looking at RE content by way of an illustration of this point.



This section on 'personal knowledge' reflects curriculum developments in plural (non-confessional) RE, as outlined in section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996. It assumes that pupils bring to the RE classroom a 'position', as mentioned above. It also assumes that pupils are free to express their own religious or non-religious identities, and these may or may not change because of their RE subject education (and indeed there is no obligation for them to change). This section does not discuss approaches to RE that may induct pupils into specific religious faith traditions through the curriculum.

This makes clear what you are doing in offering space in the curriculum for reflection and personal knowledge.

Subject leaders and teachers need to consider carefully what content within the RE curriculum is most useful for pupils to develop 'personal knowledge'. In high-quality RE curriculums, subject leaders are precise in how they select content because some content contains richer potential for this. Ideally, pupils will build 'personal knowledge' through rich substantive content that links the 'life world' of religious and non-religious traditions to the developing 'life world' of pupils. This is important for subject leaders and curriculum designers to identify because some pupils may not see the immediate value of that content. As 'personal knowledge' requires content for pupils to reflect on, the sequencing of 'personal knowledge' depends on the sequencing of substantive knowledge in the curriculum.

Again, this reiterates the importance of time for personal reflection in the RE curriculum. This is an opportunity for pupils to consider 'So what? What do I think/believe? Has that changed at all through interaction with new knowledge about religion and worldviews?'

At primary and secondary level, the most suitable substantive content for pupils to develop personal knowledge will have the capacity to illuminate and to inform pupils' own self-knowledge. For example, content relating to meaning and purpose, human nature, justice in society, values, community and self-fulfilment would have potential. Therefore, subject leaders need to be highly selective in identifying

substantive content for reflection that relates to pupils' developing identities. What they select from the sequence of substantive knowledge should contain plenty of detail about the function of the content and concepts within specific religious traditions.

For teachers working in church schools, this may provide a direct link between RE and courageous advocacy, as the illuminating nature of knowledge prompts towards action.

Learning about concepts such as 'forgiveness' in Christian traditions or 'sewa' ('selfless service') in Sikh traditions, together with rich detail about how they form parts of Christian and Sikh ways of life, provides opportunities for pupils to see how these concepts may relate to their own position. There is plenty of content that will help build pupils' 'personal knowledge' through looking at particular religious traditions.

This is especially relevant for our local context, where peace, forgiveness and reconciliation are a key part of Coventry's story and knowledge gained in RE may impact upon behaviour, relationships, restorative practices etc. Please see page 2 in the CWAS which details what pupils at each key stage should know with regards to this core aspect of our local context linked to the study of religion and worldviews.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- *An RE curriculum that does not induct pupils into any religious tradition (in settings where the EIF applies to RE).*
- *A curriculum that builds pupils' awareness of their own assumptions and values about the content that they study ('personal knowledge').*
- *Precise, detailed and fruitful content (substantive content and concepts) that subject leaders and curriculum designers have selected to build pupils' 'personal knowledge'. Not all substantive content is equally appropriate to select as the basis for developing pupils' 'personal knowledge'.*
- *Subject leaders and teachers who adeptly identify specific content for the development of 'personal knowledge' because they recognise that some pupils may not otherwise see the immediate value of that content.*

This provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your existing RE curriculum.

Planning for Progression in RE

Ofsted's definition of progression is that pupils 'know more and remember more' of the planned curriculum. For RE, this involves thinking through, in subject-specific

terms, not only the nature of the knowledge that pupils study, but also the connections between the different forms of knowledge.

So, within the context of the three forms of knowledge, you would be monitoring that in your RE curriculum pupils know and remember more substantive content, they know about and remember how to use more disciplinary methods, tools and processes as a variety of ways of knowing, and their personal knowledge has developed and increased over time and pupils themselves are aware of this happening.

Ways of knowing and the development of personal knowledge are essentially dependent on the substantive content selected to be part of the RE curriculum. The CWAS suggests what this content is and units incorporate ways of knowing, but these can be made more obvious for pupils and can be adapted/added to as you shape your RE curriculum.

At both primary and secondary level, problems within the curriculum can emerge when teachers attempt to build 'personal knowledge' separately from content knowledge. Curriculum-related activities that seek to develop pupils' 'personal knowledge' but that are disconnected from content knowledge (for example, classroom discussions that prompt opinions about general topics without proper reflection) can distort and detract from high-quality RE.

Personal knowledge development should be incorporated into the curriculum in relation to substantive content, not separately.

Prior Knowledge in RE

There are 2 dimensions of 'pupils' prior knowledge' that RE teachers need to be aware of as distinct, for different reasons:

- *Sometimes, 'what pupils already know' refers more broadly to pupils' own background concepts and ideas about religion. This might include pupils' own personal experiences. The composition of pupils in RE classrooms may differ vastly according to, for example, the local demographic of schools. RE teachers will need to respond to the particularities of the classroom.*
- *In terms of the curriculum, 'what pupils already know' refers to the prior knowledge that pupils acquire and build through the journey of the RE curriculum. In high-quality RE, just as teachers will be aware of pupils' experiences and assumptions, they will also be aware of the knowledge that pupils have or have not built up through the curriculum. This is particularly important to inform teachers' planning of learning activities*

Ambitious Desired End Points/Curriculum Goals

*One feature of a cumulatively sufficient RE curriculum is the end goal. When constructing RE curriculums, subject leaders need some concept of an endpoint, of what they are building 'towards'. In high-quality RE curriculums at primary and secondary level, these are **subject-specific end goals that are ambitious in scope**.*

*There are curriculum end goals that are useful for a range of aims of RE. For example, one curriculum end goal is that pupils build accurate knowledge about the complexity **and diversity of global religious and non-religious traditions**. Another might be that pupils' knowledge builds towards theories about religion/non-religion developed by communities of experts.*

In addition to the end of key stage outcomes in the CWAS, it is desirable for you to have identified what your own ambitious end points are for your pupils with regards to RE.

Well-considered curriculum end goals also help subject leaders and curriculum designers to select RE curriculum content. For example, they can choose illustrative content that leads to an end goal, which reduces the pressure of having to cover vast amounts of religious and non-religious traditions in their curriculums.

This provides a particularly helpful selection criteria for substantive content when you cannot possibly teach everything. What is taught should
a) allow pupils to meet the end of key stage outcomes from the CWAS and
b) allow them to fulfil the desired end points you have set for them as scholars of religion.

Content that is selected to be in the curriculum needs to be precise and purposeful – and ambitious curriculum end goals provide a basis for what is purposeful. Pupils' education in RE would generally be considered incomplete or impoverished if it did not build towards the global and the complex (that traditions are internally plural and interact with individuals in different ways around the world). Often, pupils bring simplified views about religion, religious traditions and global issues into the RE classroom. A cumulatively sufficient education in RE must include the global and the complex features of religion and non-religion because these reflect the lived nature of traditions, identity, belief and practice, as evidenced in contemporary research. Curriculum end goals that enable pupils to become knowledgeable about global religion and non-religion prepare them to engage in a multi-religious and multi-secular world.

There is an emphasis here on global understanding, not simply a readiness for life in modern Britain.

RE Competency

To develop competency in a subject, pupils require a deep foundation of knowledge, structured and organised within a conceptual framework. This is very important for RE subject leaders and curriculum designers who see RE as directly contributing to wider educational aims beyond the subject. These aims often relate to broader aspects of pupils' personal development, for example how to work alongside people from different cultural backgrounds ('intercultural competencies').

Considering how RE supports wider educational aims in your school is very important but specific aims of developing RE competencies should not be lost.

However, if teachers focus on these at the expense of building pupils' subject knowledge, then pupils will be attempting to develop competencies on insecure grounds.

High-quality RE curriculums equip pupils with subject components (for example, language, vocabulary and concepts). Subject composites are built over time (for example, awareness of their own assumptions and values, recognition of difference or acknowledgement of different modes of enquiry). Having command of components and composites such as these allows pupils to see patterns and relationships in new areas of learning, including beyond RE itself.

High-quality RE curriculums will already provide many of the components that enable pupils to develop interpersonal competencies.

This is important for 2 reasons.

First, some educators have grave concerns that RE has been eroded because it is used as the sole place to focus on whole-school moral and social priorities. Senior leaders should recognise that if they invest in a high-quality RE curriculum, well taught by subject specialists, then they will not have to make reactive changes to it in order to incorporate (what should otherwise be) the latest whole-school initiatives.

High quality RE can make a significant contribution to overall academic success as pupils develop skills and competencies useful for success in other subjects, and for life.

Second, subject leaders should prioritise the quality of knowledge that pupils learn in RE. They need to be aware that teachers may unintentionally distort the knowledge that they teach when intending to promote social acceptance in the classroom. This can happen to such an extent that pupils consider RE to be a form of citizenship or PSHE education. Teachers can sometimes present overly positive portrayals of religion, which may be linked to the desire for pupils to interact positively with members of religious traditions. Though these claims about religion may be taught for well-meaning reasons, they are unwarranted and unscholarly.

Subject leaders should ensure that pupils are not hindered from acting and engaging meaningfully in the world as a global citizen because of misconceptions they learned through a poor-quality RE curriculum.

Again, the importance for a balanced presentation of religion and room for controversy is emphasised here. There are some Do and Don't documents for each of the main religious traditions and Humanism on the Warwickshire SACRE website which can help to support teacher confidence.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- A curriculum that focuses pupils' learning on ambitious subject-specific end goals, rather than covers excessive amounts of content superficially.
- Curriculum impact that is achieved by pupils building up accurate knowledge about the complexity and diversity of global religion and non-religion. This provides pupils with many of the ingredients for cultural and civic competencies that are important to many RE teachers.
- Clear curriculum content that subject leaders and curriculum designers have planned to illustrate 'ways of knowing' and to develop pupils' 'personal knowledge'.
- A clear connection between the 'ways of knowing' that pupils learn, the 'personal knowledge' that pupils develop through the curriculum and the substantive content and concepts on which both depend.
- Subject leaders of RE who are aware of the ways that the RE curriculum can be susceptible to distortion and have ensured that it does not become distorted.

This provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your existing RE curriculum.

RE Pedagogy

High-quality teaching in RE at primary and secondary level enables pupils to remember the intended curriculum in the long term. Pedagogies chosen in the RE classroom (curriculum implementation) need to enable pupils to build the forms of knowledge distinctive to RE. Teachers need to make subject-sensitive, 'fit-for-purpose' decisions about what is suitable depending on the subject matter. In particular, teaching focuses on crucial content that helps pupils to learn the specific topic they are studying and also builds a firm foundation that subsequent teaching builds on. High-quality curriculum implementation in RE comprises classroom methods that are well suited to the full scope of the RE curriculum.

There is an expectation that high-quality RE begins in primary school and continues in secondary school. There are issues for transition and continuation of provision cross-phase here. A model of excellence would be for secondary schools to be working with their feeder primary schools to monitor, evaluate and develop excellent, continuous RE provision.

What is pedagogy?

Within the literature on RE 'pedagogy' can have a range of meanings, some of which are all-encompassing:

- *some RE literature considers pedagogy to be a 'model' of teaching and learning, which includes subject aims, curriculum content and teaching methodology that draws on generic educational principles*
- *others consider pedagogy to mean the specific classroom procedures, methods and strategies that link to how pupils learn the content taught*

*Pedagogy in the former ('models') sense, while educationally important, is much broader than the use of 'pedagogy' to mean **implementing** the curriculum, which is how it is used in the EIF.*

Therefore, pedagogy is the teaching methods and means through which knowledge is imparted in the RE curriculum. Appendix C of the Ofsted Research Report on RE documents this.

There is a document about RE Pedagogies on the Warwickshire SACRE website.

Criteria for selecting suitable teaching methods for RE

At primary and secondary level, leaders and teachers decide how to teach specific content and topics in RE. These decisions about procedures, methods and strategies are part of curriculum implementation. Implementing the curriculum effectively involves considering the teaching methods that will enable pupils to know and remember the curriculum in the long term. If teachers do not consider this, the impact of the curriculum will be weak.

Pertinent research into the cognitive science of learning and memory provides insights into the kinds of procedures, methods and strategies that would support pupils to remember the RE curriculum. Although this is a useful starting point, teachers must still judge how to apply them to RE in order to ensure that the classroom approaches are suitable.

Pedagogies you might consider for use in RE:

- **Retrieval practice**
- **Dual coding**
- **Art & images for exploration & interpretation**
- **Use of artefacts**
- **Debate and discussion models**
- **Vocabulary instruction**
- **P4C approaches**
- **Visits and visitors**
- **Enquiry-driven learning**
- **Questioning**

There are several CPD sessions available on the Warwickshire SACRE website that explore pedagogies:

- **RE Curriculum**
- **Philosophy & Ethics in RE**
- **Teaching Religious Vocabulary**

When primary and secondary teachers select appropriate teaching methods and activities in RE, they need to be clear about the object of what they want pupils to learn (the curriculum object). When they are clear on this and use it as a basis for decisions about how to teach, they can support pupils to build up rich and diverse stores of knowledge.

So, decide what needs teaching and then how best to do it, drawing upon ways of knowing (disciplines) as you see their relevance.

Schema in long-term memory are interconnected 'webs of knowledge'. Their extensiveness can vary depending on the range of knowledge that is encoded in pupils' memory. Memory of concepts and ideas is often developed through experiencing repeated similar episodes. This repetition builds up the meanings of complex ideas and abstractions. In RE, for instance, pupils may build up a subject-specific concept of 'afterlife' through encountering it in different contexts, for example by learning about related rituals and beliefs in religious and non-religious traditions. This means that teaching should be clear on what pupils need to learn and should focus on providing pupils with periodic and recurrent opportunities to encounter these concepts.

Consider things like interweaving, retrieval practice and Rosenshines Principles of Instruction. An RE-focused explanation of the latter is

available in the resources from the RE Curriculum CPD on the Warwickshire SACRE website.

Once teachers are clear about the object of what they want pupils to learn in RE, they can choose appropriate classroom methods and activities. Methods and activities are appropriate when they reinforce pupils' learning of the object. If teachers choose classroom methods based on other criteria (for example, on whether the activity is perceived to be engaging), then they are less likely to support pupils' learning of the curriculum in the long term. So, the suitability of a classroom activity depends on whether it will introduce and then reinforce pupils' memory of the curriculum object effectively.

Relevance to substantive content and ability to reinforce learning are key factors for selecting pedagogy which trump notions of engagement.

The Importance of Encounter

Leaders and teachers of RE often provide opportunities for pupils to encounter faith practitioners, to meet them and to listen to their experiences. These can be valuable experiences for pupils because they are genuine and organic and enable the pupils to learn about differences in the ways that religious and non-religious people live. However, sometimes teachers can be unclear about the curriculum object when pupils meet faith practitioners. The curriculum object may be any number of things, such as:

- *to learn about the experiences of faith practitioners (that is, testimonies that could be used as case studies)*
- *to learn how knowledge about religion might be gained through interviews (that is, aspects of disciplinary 'ways of knowing')*
- *for pupils to recognise their own assumptions as they listen to an individual from a faith community (that is, 'personal knowledge')*
- *to apply previously learned generalisations about religion that can be 'tested' through an encounter with 'lived' faith practitioners (that is, using the internal dynamics and internal plurality of religious traditions to illustrate that religious traditions are not simply one thing)*

Given this range of possibilities, it is important for leaders and teachers to be clear about what precisely they expect pupils to learn from the encounter and, importantly, how that links to curriculum goals. Otherwise, meeting faith practitioners may be enjoyable for pupils but is unlikely to lead to curriculum impact.

When RE teachers are clear on the curriculum object, they are able to focus their subject expertise on the classroom processes of, for example:

- *presenting content*
- *responding to pupils' questions*
- *structuring discussions*

- *using examples and analogies for elaboration and emphasis*

SACRE have a list of SACRE-suggested visits and visitors for you to use when inviting adherents into classrooms or when making visits (available on the Warwickshire SACREs). Some new guidance on planning for visits and visitors to enhance curriculum goals will be released shortly.

Matching Teaching Activities to Prior Learning

Pupils' rich and diverse schemata lay the groundwork for their future learning. Pupils will draw on these webs of knowledge when they learn subsequent knowledge or carry out complex operations.

In terms of classroom practice in primary and secondary schools, this suggests that pupils' readiness for certain tasks will depend on whether they have the requisite knowledge to be able to succeed at the task.

When teachers use textual sources and longer reading extracts (such as sacred literature, religious narratives or scholarship), they need to consider whether these are accessible to pupils. Pupils will require sufficient vocabulary knowledge to make sense of the text. Teachers may act on this, for instance, by teaching pupils subject-specific vocabulary before they encounter it in content.

Teaching Religious Vocabulary CPD is available on the Warwickshire SACRE website.

Professor Robert Bowie et al's Texts and Teachers report is excellent: [teachers-and-texts-findings-report.pdf \(canterbury.ac.uk\)](#), **As is the practice guide: [teachers-and-texts-the-practice-guide.pdf \(canterbury.ac.uk\)](#). SACRE are planning CPD on hermeneutics and sacred texts in 2021-2022**

When teachers plan activities for pupils to make links between content, they need to consider whether all pupils in the class have enough prior knowledge to make the links they intend. An activity around making links may be, for example, a key stage 2 classroom investigation about why a particular individual lives the way that they do. Without sufficient prior knowledge about the topic, it is unlikely that all pupils would be able to make the links between content that more proficient or expert thinkers might.

Leaders and teachers may take into account pupils' prior knowledge when planning trips and educational visits. Educating pupils about sacred spaces is one way for them to learn about historical and cultural aspects of religion, as well as 'real life' religion through meeting members of traditions. The value of visits to sacred places is enhanced when pupils have the necessary prior knowledge to make sense of the experience.

Progression documents for each tradition can be really supportive in helping teachers identify what prior knowledge is likely to be, alongside assessments, low stakes testing, questioning etc.

Recall and Knowledge Retrieval in RE

Research from cognitive science highlights that the practice of retrieving knowledge at intervals over time helps pupils to remember knowledge in the curriculum in the long term. Within a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum, there is an emphasis on crucial knowledge, such as particular concepts, vocabulary and other components of knowledge, and on teaching activities that focus on retrieving that knowledge. This enables pupils to retain crucial knowledge over time.

There are many ways in which RE teaching at primary and secondary level may draw on these insights. Again, it requires subject sensitivity to consider what type of knowledge needs to be recalled within classroom activities, as well as the form that the recall takes. Teachers can make fit-for-purpose decisions about what needs to be retrieved from earlier RE content when they think about the journey of the curriculum. The way in which it needs to be retrieved will depend on subject-specific considerations. For example, low-stakes multiple-choice quizzing may be appropriate for getting pupils to recall certain types of content such as vocabulary or concepts. However, this would be a rather blunt tool for recalling stories, where it is important to hold various elements of the story together. In these instances, forms of narration would be much more appropriate ways to recall.

In other instances, activities themselves enable recall. Some examples of these could be:

- *pupils drawing on earlier substantive content to design questions for an interview with faith practitioners*
- *pupils having to recall earlier content in order to draw comparisons and to see the status of one piece of knowledge in relation to another*
- *intentionally using relevant examples and case studies from earlier in the curriculum when constructing philosophical arguments*
- *when teaching tools of sacred text scholarship, teachers drawing on earlier categories of 'author', 'original context' and 'initial audience' to help pupils analyse subsequent texts*

In ways such as these, teachers construct classroom activities that draw on, and reinforce, earlier parts of the RE curriculum. Classroom activities are optimal when they are specific to the subject knowledge that pupils are learning.

Research from cognitive science also highlights the importance of ensuring that some knowledge is learned to the point of 'automaticity'. Automaticity concerns how

easily, quickly and automatically pupils can recall knowledge. This is especially crucial when pupils are learning new content and/or carrying out more complex tasks. These insights draw on theories of cognitive load, which consider the limitations of mental efforts in operations and tasks. Theories of cognitive load were outlined in our previous research. In particular, retention of knowledge and development of schemata will be poor if working memory is overloaded.

Considering which aspects of the RE curriculum are particularly useful for pupils to learn to automaticity is a key part of removing unnecessary barriers for pupils to learn in RE. But this is also important to consider when teaching the curriculum. Just as leaders and teachers might consider whether elaborate or complex tasks can actually distract pupils from learning the curriculum object, so too might they consider whether classroom activities actually generate barriers for some pupils. For instance, some pupils with particular, cognitive-related SEND may struggle if left to determine on their own which knowledge is pertinent and which is not. With some well-intentioned but elaborate classroom activities, these pupils may be left unsure which knowledge to focus on. In high-quality RE, the classroom activities remove unnecessary barriers for pupils.

Consider incorporating retrieval practice into RE lessons.

RETRIEVAL PRACTICE IN RE

- Regular retrieval practice in RE can really help transfer knowledge into the long term memory of pupils.
- Low stakes testing such as multiple choice quizzes, simple retrieval activities and revision tasks can help.
- Consider beginning RE lessons with a retrieval starter similar to the mental starter in a Maths lesson.

Retrieval Relay Race!

Instructions: In the first box write as much as you can remember about our topic. In the second box one of your peers must write what they can recall about our topic but they cannot repeat any of the information from your first box! The third box needs to be completed by someone else but again this must include new information and the same for the final box.

The Retrieval Practice series of books by Kate Jones are very helpful for considering this and many suggestions are relevant to the teaching of RE.

Beginning each lesson with 4 questions (see bottom right image above) about knowledge covered in last lesson, last unit, last term, last year, can support knowledge retrieval and retention in RE. Progression documents can support teachers in knowing the kind of knowledge they should be quizzing pupils on.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- Leaders and teachers who consider, when they select classroom activities, how the activities will enable pupils to remember the RE curriculum in the long term.
- Teachers whose judgement about classroom activities is informed by insights from cognitive science about learning, as well as subject-specific insights about the nature of the RE content to be learned. These 2 insights are more important than generic concerns about whether activities are superficially 'engaging'.
- Leaders and teachers of RE who ensure that, in choosing an appropriate classroom activity, they are clear about what pupils are supposed to learn from it (the curriculum object).
- Teachers who recognise that the success of classroom strategies, methods and procedures depends, to an extent, on whether pupils have sufficient prior RE knowledge (from the curriculum) to succeed at the activity.
- Teaching activities that will continue to draw on, and to remind pupils of, parts of the RE curriculum that pupils have already covered. This enables pupils to learn the RE curriculum in the long term.

This provides a useful checklist for you when auditing your existing RE curriculum.

Assessment in RE

High-quality assessment in RE uses assessment sufficiently, but not excessively. At primary and secondary level, leaders and teachers make fit-for-purpose decisions about applying different types of assessment, which makes it manageable. This requires them to be crystal clear about what is being assessed and why in RE. When assessment is used to determine the pupils' progress in RE, it is important for the assessment to consider whether pupils have learned the curriculum, since the curriculum sets out the journey of what it means 'to get better' at RE.

Please see the RE and Assessment CPD on Warwickshire SACRE website for more information regarding assessment in RE.

There is no clear picture from literature about the nature and function of assessment in RE, let alone a straightforward conception of what constitutes high-quality assessment. This is partly due to uncertainty about what exactly is being assessed in RE. It has been claimed that this sort of confusion about the subject's identity has been 'at the start of a long chain', culminating in, among many things, 'unreliable assessment'.

As a starting point, it is useful to draw on literature that categorises RE assessment into 2 kinds: the 'knowing kind' and the 'personal qualities, beliefs and values kind'. In this report, we focus on the first kind of assessment because this is appropriate for checking the forms of knowledge that pupils build through the RE curriculum This

may be useful for RE leaders and teachers because, previously, very little thought was given to assessment when planning the RE curriculum.

Assessment can be used for different purposes in the curriculum. It can be used formatively (assessment for learning) as part of adaptive teaching which, for example, responds to pupils' misconceptions in RE. Formative assessment is granular. For the pupil, it provides feedback, 'in the moment', to improve. For example, teachers' questioning can reveal pupils' misconceptions about particular aspects of dharma practice. Formative assessment provides a very clear feedback loop for teachers, such that they can adapt their teaching responsively as they implement the curriculum.

However, problems occur when formative assessment (for example, a low-stakes quiz) is used for other kinds of purposes (for example, accountability). The misuse of this kind of formative assessment to generate data for accountability purposes does not provide valid or reliable information about progress. Worse, it also adds unnecessarily to teachers' workload.

Assessment can also be used for summative purposes (assessment of learning), such as when teachers use an end-of-topic assessment to sample pupils' knowledge from a domain of RE content. Often in RE, summative assessment uses composite tasks to assess learning. These require pupils to draw on a range of subject knowledge (including different types of knowledge) to construct a more complex output, like extended writing in RE. Summative assessment in RE often ties into whole-school monitoring of pupils' progress and accountability procedures.

When the curriculum is treated as the progression model, summative assessments attempt to determine how much of the curriculum pupils know and remember. This can be done by sampling from the knowledge that teachers expect pupils to retain through the curriculum journey. As part of this, it is important that instances of summative assessment take place at sufficiently long intervals, to allow time for the RE curriculum to be taught and learned. Given the limited curriculum time allocated to RE, standardised intervals for summative assessments may mean that the curriculum domain being assessed may be far smaller in RE than in other subjects. Leaders can consider whether there is enough time allocated to RE to teach and assess the curriculum.

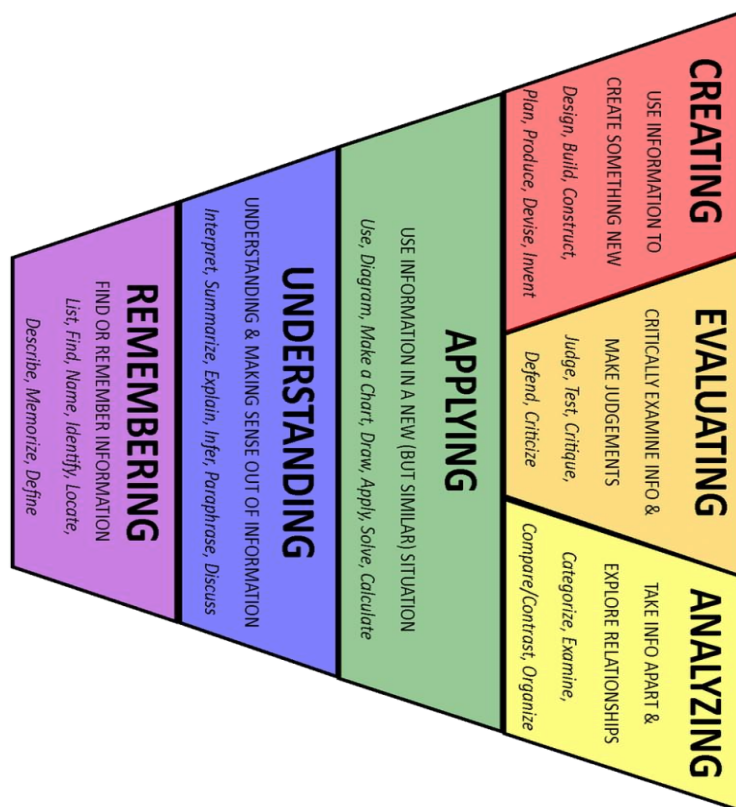
Marty Myatt's approach to assessment as 'high challenge, low threat' is relevant to the RE curriculum. Use of regular multiple choice and open answer questioning in quiz form can support progression and retention of knowledge. The use of knowledge organisers alongside quizzing can allow pupils to mark their own tests/quizzes, therefore seeing the gaps in their knowledge and where they need to increase their efforts to master knowledge.

At primary and secondary level, the RE curriculum maps out the journey of what it means to 'get better at RE'. This is what is meant by the phrase 'the curriculum is the progression model'.

When leaders and teachers want to know whether pupils have made progress in RE, they are asking a summative question: have pupils learned and remembered the RE curriculum? But it is often the case, both in assessment design and in school practice, that curriculum and assessment are considered as separate entities. Often, this happens when there is a lack of clarity about the object of assessment in RE.

Effective assessment treats the curriculum as the progression model, so leaders and teachers need to ensure that assessment expectations are related to the RE curriculum. When expectations are not related to the curriculum, assessment can be hollow and can meaninglessly add to teachers' workload.

A hierarchy of command words linked to steps of progress (such as 'describe', 'explain' and 'evaluate') creates a second unnecessary and unreliable progression model, removed from the journey of the RE curriculum. These additional progression models are unhelpful because they do not consider progression through the forms of knowledge that pupils build within the RE curriculum. Similarly, applying age-related expectations may appear to be a clear way to compare pupils, but often these expectations do not closely reflect the RE curriculum that pupils are learning.



Blooms should never be used as a hierarchical model for progress. But slip it on its side and all pupils can be supported through appropriate

scaffolding to develop a range of skills within RE lessons, so that even lower ability pupils are analysing, evaluating and creating.

Assessing Progression and Retention of Knowledge Across the Whole RE Curriculum

Sometimes, summative assessment practices in RE consider the curriculum as the progression model in 'structural' terms but fail to do so in 'substantial' terms. These are some examples to illustrate this:

- *if leaders and teachers recognise that pupils in Year 4 need to learn and remember RE from the start of key stage 2, then they consider the curriculum as the progression model in structural terms. However, if they do not check in Year 4 whether pupils have learned and remembered that knowledge, and subsequently report to parents solely based on their perceived impression of pupils' learning, then this assessment practice fails to treat the curriculum as the progression model in 'substantial terms'*
- *if a summative assessment in Year 6, such as an extended piece of writing, is expected to draw on previous learning, then the assessment practice considers the curriculum as the progression model in 'structural' terms. However, if the assessment task is poorly designed and does not enable pupils to demonstrate what they have learned from earlier in the curriculum, then it fails to consider the curriculum as the progression model in 'substantial terms'*

Assessment in RE should take account of all the knowledge that should have been accumulated by learners through the curriculum viewed as a progression model. Teaching something isn't the same as it being learnt, completing a task isn't the same as established learning. Assessment tasks should be open and without ceilings and require past knowledge to be drawn through.

Construction of an Argument (KS3-5)

Composite assessment tasks are fit for their purpose when they are based on curriculum-related expectations. A common composite assessment task in RE (especially at key stages 3, 4 and 5) is the construction of an argument. Research into a sample of 35 locally agreed syllabuses showed a reference to argumentation approximately once in every 4 pages. An analysis of this sample indicated that there were aspects of RE argumentation that were well established:

- *'social practice etiquette' of RE argumentation (general expectations around pupils' expression and attentiveness)*
- *generic aspects of argumentation (expectations that an argument should contain claims, rebuttal and qualifiers)*

However, the analysis also indicated a lack of clarity over the substance of what is appropriate evidence, warrant and backing within an argument.

Without clearly framing a summative assessment task by explaining what precisely constitutes evidence, warrant or backing for a particular type of question, the argument that pupils go on to construct will not reveal effectively what they have learned. It may reveal something of the substantive content pupils have learned but would fail to assess what pupils have learned about 'ways of knowing' (how 'epistemically informed' pupils are).

Leaders and teachers can construct suitable composite tasks as effective summative assessments when they are clear about:

- *the domain of RE knowledge that pupils are drawing on*
- *the type of subject-specific question that is being asked*
- *what is appropriate evidence and warrant for the question posed*

Argument construction tasks should therefore incorporate substantive knowledge with ways of knowing (disciplinary knowledge)

GCSE Questions

Leaders and teachers of RE also need to be aware of the limitations of, and problems with, applying exam-style questions (such as GCSE religious studies exam questions) in non-qualification assessment settings. This also applies to misusing GCSE assessments to identify curriculum progression at key stage 3.

The Ofsted inspection framework talks about the importance of breadth in the KS3 curriculum and warns against the narrowing of the KS3 curriculum in order to begin GCSE programmes of study a year earlier.

There are of course general problems when the assessment of pupils in non-qualification RE contexts (for example key stages 2 and 3 or non-examined key stage 4) draws on GCSE exam-style questions. This is inappropriate, not only because pupils will not have had the opportunity to learn the domain of the GCSE programme of study, but also because it (incorrectly) implies that generic exam skills are sufficient to assess the impact of the RE curriculum.

Exam mark schemes assess in narrow ways on subjects studied at depth, not suitable for the breadth of the KS3 curriculum or a disciplinary approach within the curriculum.

Fundamentally, the types of questions asked in GCSE exams may not be useful in assessing the full range of knowledge taught in non-exam RE contexts. Some research highlights the implicit knowledge structures that are preferred by questions in English religious studies exams. Here, longer questions often assume the portrayal of religion as a viewpoint from which other positions are to be opposed.

Also, GCSE-style questions can promote the use of textual sources as 'proof texts' to justify particular expressions of living or beliefs. This would be an insufficient assessment tool within a curriculum that intends for pupils to learn how sacred texts, religious literature and other sources of wisdom can be interpreted within diverse traditions.

Again, see Professor Robert Bowie et al's Texts and Teachers resources on how to plan for excellent learning opportunities with texts.

The way GCSE assessment tasks are used in non-exam contexts raises questions about teacher education and also about pupils' learning:

- *Do teachers recognise problems with binary thinking about religion?*
- *Do pupils recognise that there are non-oppositional ways of thinking about and relating to religion?*

i.e. It doesn't always have to be about establishing an argument and pitting views and beliefs against each other.

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- *Different types of assessments are used appropriately:*
 - *Formative assessments can help teachers identify which pupils have misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge, and what those specific misconceptions or gaps are. This can inform teachers about common issues, so they can review or adapt the curriculum as necessary. Formative assessments are less useful in making judgements about how much of the whole curriculum has been learned and remembered.*
 - *Where summative assessments are used for accountability purposes, leaders can ensure that they are sufficiently spaced apart to enable pupils to learn the expanding domain of the curriculum.*
 - *The purpose of the test should guide the type of assessment, the format of the task and when the assessment is needed.*
 - *RE assessment needs to relate to the curriculum, which sets out what it means to 'get better' at RE.*
 - *Leaders and teachers can consider whether existing assessment models in RE do in practice treat the curriculum as the progression model.*
 - *Leaders and teachers can design RE assessments that are fit for purpose, in that they are precisely attuned to the knowledge in the RE curriculum that they intend for pupils to learn.*
- *Leaders who ensure that assessments are not excessively onerous for teachers.*

- *Professional development opportunities for leaders and teachers to reflect on how different assessment questions and tasks in RE can frame teachers' and pupils' expectations about engaging with religious and non-religious traditions.*

Prioritising RE in the School Curriculum

All schools that are state-funded, including free schools and academies, are legally required to provide RE as part of their curriculum. All schools are required to teach RE to all pupils at all key stages (including sixth form), except for those withdrawn. The way in which school leaders structure and plan ways to fulfil these obligations in school is one indication of the quality of education in RE.

How the RE curriculum is classified may be another indication of the extent to which a school prioritises RE. Fancourt, drawing on educational work by Bernstein, considers where RE is strongly classified (typically treated as a discrete subject) or weakly classified (where RE might be part of a more thematic curriculum. Although it is possible for pupils to know more and to remember more of the RE curriculum in both classifications of RE, problems can emerge when RE is too weakly classified. Sometimes, this can lead to its erosion in the curriculum. Some examples of RE being too weakly classified might be:

- *at primary, a key stage 2 topic approach that provides pupils with a rich historical and geographical knowledge, but has relatively little RE content*
- *at secondary, delivering RE through tutor times, assemblies or in conjunction with PSHE education, or in rotation with other subjects, where the format of delivering RE limits the curriculum that pupils can learn*

RE should be a scholarly subject studied in its own right as an academic subject. It should not be relegated to 'topic work' or subsumed into PSHE or citizenship. Doing these things limits the ambition and scope of the subject significantly.

In these instances, what limits the quality of RE is its lack of scope: there simply is not enough time allocated by school leaders for teachers to deliver a curriculum of ambitious scope. Subject organisations and associations have found that in several schools the subject is so weakly framed that RE is undetectable or completely absent from the curriculum. For example, subject associations reported that 28% of secondary schools gave no dedicated curriculum time to RE.

Having subject-specialist RE teachers can also contribute to high-quality RE. School and subject leaders have to make decisions about how specialist staff are distributed across a timetabled curriculum. Following this decision process, pupils in RE classes are often the ones deprived of a main or specialist teacher. A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on RE in 2013 found that, of 300 primary schools responding to a call for evidence, 44% allocated the main class teacher to teaching RE. The remainder were taught by either a planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) cover teacher or by a teaching assistant.

When RE is left for TAs to do when teachers are absent due to CPD or illness, or for supply teachers or cover teachers to teach, the sense of a progression curriculum is often lost. The person teaching it does not know how what they are teaching builds on prior learning or where what they are teaching lays an important conceptual foundation for later learning. Teaching in this context is often lacking in intention and without a conscious effort to weave together the 3 types of knowledge.

At secondary, a subject organisation report in 2017 found that whether RE lessons were taught by subject specialists varied considerably depending on the type of state-funded school:

- *in schools of a religious character, 77% of RE lessons were taught by a qualified subject specialist*
- *in schools where the locally agreed syllabus applied, this figure was lower, at 58%*
- *in academies, this figure was the lowest, at 47%*

If these proportions provide an accurate indication of the current level of specialist teaching in RE, school leaders should consider reviewing how they allocate teachers to RE lessons. If higher-level teaching assistants (for example, at primary) or teachers of other specialisms (for example, at secondary) are teaching RE, this raises questions about whether they have sufficient training or subject expertise to deliver high-quality RE. Leaders can consider appointing suitably qualified RE teachers as part of strategic planning. Notably, in 2018, the vacancy rate of RE teachers in state-funded secondary schools was 0.6% (below the national average of 1%).

Whoever is teaching RE needs specialist training to develop both subject knowledge and the appropriate pedagogies for teaching RE effectively. If non-specialist teachers are doing the majority of the teaching, they should have ample opportunity to seek guidance and direction from specialist RE teachers and ongoing CPD.

Teacher Expertise and Experience for Teaching RE

At primary and secondary level, pupils should be taught by teachers who have secure subject and curriculum knowledge, who foster pupils' interest in the subject and who are equipped to address pupils' misunderstandings. Findings over the past few years suggest that RE is not fulfilling this ambition. Although schools cannot always control factors relating to the standards of RE teachers recruited to teach RE, school leaders' actions can impact on the development and retention of RE teachers.

Teacher subject knowledge in RE was identified by SACRE as an issue in 2019 and a successful bid was made to Westhill Charity for some grant money to develop a RE subject enhancement programme. Before the Coronavirus Pandemic, this programme made a successful start, hosting

two events (one in the Sikh Gurdwara in Leamington and one in the Nuneaton Masjid) which were led by SACRE members and included a tour and a talk. Films intended to support CPD for teachers were then produced. The Sikh and Muslim films can be found at the bottom of the Warwickshire SACRE website in Section 9:

<https://schools.warwickshire.gov.uk/managing-schools/standing-advisory-council-religious-education-sacre/4?documentId=33&categoryId=6>

Further sessions will be hosted in other places of worship, beginning at the Birmingham Progressive Synagogue once gathering is allowed.

This dearth of post-A-level subject qualifications among RE teachers could be addressed through school leaders' actions and make a difference for current RE teaching staff. In-service subject-specific professional development is important for primary and secondary schools.

All previous CPD for RE leaders is available for use in leading whole-staff CPD and is found on the Warwickshire SACRE website.

Subject-Specific CPD for Teachers

There is no straightforward consensus on what constitutes high-quality subject-specific professional knowledge for teachers. Literature suggests that, broadly, it would be beneficial to develop RE teachers at both primary and secondary in 4 key subject-specific areas. These are useful for both RE teachers and leaders, given that it is not unusual that RE teachers are the only specialist teaching the subject. The areas are:

- *RE policy*
- *RE content knowledge*
- *RE pedagogical content knowledge*
- *Research in RE*

First, RE teachers require essential knowledge of policy about the subject. They need to be clear about the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus, where it applies. Given the legal requirements behind the RE curriculum, further development of this kind of knowledge would enable RE teachers to adapt their professional activity appropriately in different schools. Recent literature on subjects in the primary curriculum suggests that part of professional development for primary teachers should involve some knowledge of the history of RE, its current position and recent developments in RE.

Good sources of information for understanding RE policy are RE Online and NATRE/RE Today. The book 'Reforming RE' also offers a good snapshot into current thinking, as well as the Worldviews papers from the

RE Council: [Exploring Worldviews - REC Discussion Papers | The Religious Education Council of England and Wales %](#)

Second, RE teachers require content knowledge: knowledge of the subject that they are teaching. Broadly speaking, this knowledge is drawn from the academic study of religion(s). Some educators claim that teachers with degree-level religious studies qualifications are the most secure in their knowledge base for teaching RE. However, given that pupils also build knowledge of 'ways of knowing' in RE, subject content knowledge will inevitably include knowledge derived from theology, religious studies and cognate disciplines. It is obviously key that the knowledge that teachers possess is relevant and sufficient to teach the school RE curriculum, however vast this content knowledge could be. But it is important for teachers to continue developing:

- *Depth and breadth of knowledge about religion/non-religion*
- *'Orientative' knowledge about the status of the knowledge taught and the perspective from which that knowledge is taught*

The subject knowledge essays from RE Online are excellent and present a range of representations within an organised worldview:

<https://www.reonline.org.uk/knowledge/>

Third, RE teachers benefit from the ongoing development of pedagogical content knowledge: knowledge of how to teach a particular subject or topic. This requires them to draw on the most pertinent and up-to-date insights on how humans learn, alongside subject-specific principles and procedures of teaching, learning and assessing in RE. One aspect of this professional knowledge is learning about the impartiality of RE teachers.

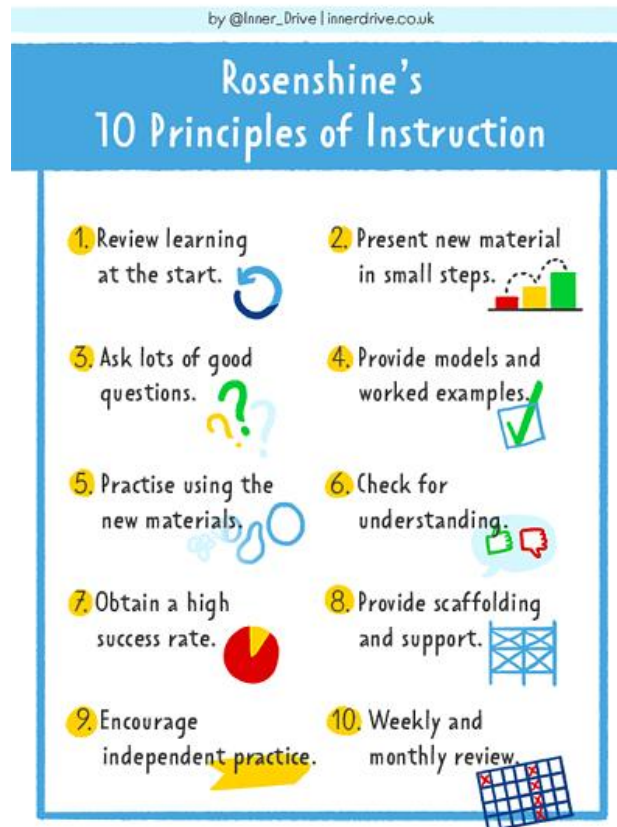
Current educational theory can be applied to teaching RE. The Chartered College's Impact magazine is a good place to explore pedagogical approaches, as is the termly RE Today magazine received as part of a NATRE subscription: <https://www.natre.org.uk/>

There is a resource on RE pedagogies available on the Warwickshire SACRE website, as well as a dedicated page from NATRE: <https://www.natre.org.uk/primary/teaching-re/methods-of-teaching-re-1/>

Fourth, the ongoing lack of consensus about the aims and purposes of RE, together with the implications for subject educational practice, means that RE teachers need to be supported to engage with educational theory and research findings.

RE Online's excellent research portal is a great place to engage with research related to RE: <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/> Likewise, online articles from the Chartered College, as well as those contained in their Impact magazine, are also a good source for applying educational research to RE: <https://chartered.college/our-downloads/>

Many schools engaged with Tom Sherrington's book *Rosenshine's Principles in Action* and the principles he shares can be applied to effective teaching of RE:



This article from Future Learn provides an overview:
<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/early-career-teachers/0/steps/164331>

Based on the above, high-quality RE may have the following features

- *Sufficient curriculum time allocated to RE in order for leaders to deliver an ambitious RE curriculum.*
- *Subject-specialist staffing, so that pupils are taught RE by teachers with appropriate subject professional knowledge.*
- *Access to high-quality in-service training for leaders and teachers of RE to develop their professional subject knowledge.*
- *Subject leadership that can identify high-quality sources of training (for example, through subject associations and organisations) to further their RE knowledge in policy, subject content, subject pedagogy and RE research.*

Limiting Factors for High Quality RE

Significant challenges that limit high quality in RE, include:

- *insufficient time to teach an ambitious RE curriculum*
- *school decisions that are not taken in the best interests of all pupils, such as decisions concerning the statutory teaching of RE, the opportunity to take a qualification in religious studies, or early examination entry*
- *a lack of consideration about what it means to 'be scholarly' in objective, critical and pluralistic RE*
- *a lack of clarity on what constitutes reliable knowledge about religion/non-religion, leading to teachers embedding unhelpful misconceptions*
- *teaching approaches that do not support pupils to remember the RE curriculum in the long term*
- *approaches to assessment that are poorly calibrated to the RE curriculum*
- *insufficient development of RE practitioners to address gaps in professional subject knowledge*

Look carefully through this list. Is there anything that is a limiting factor in your school. What can you do about this?

Coming up: Promoting Good RE in Your School CPD on Microsoft Teams Thursday 20th May 2021 4.00-5.30pm. Following the session, the presentation will be available in Section 8 on Warwickshire SACRE's website.

The Ofsted Research Report on RE has several appendices and a useful bibliography which you may find useful for further reading.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me:

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