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Religious Education and Collective Worship

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A report from the Office
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Chief Inspector of Schools

Contents

INTRODUCTION

This report describes and evaluates the response of schools to the requirements of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) for religious education (RE) and collective worship. "The special status of RE as part of the basic but not the National Curriculum is important. It ensures that RE has equal standing in relation to the core and other foundation subjects within a school's curriculum, but is not subject to *nationally prescribed* attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements." (Circular 3/89, Department of Education *and* Science).

The provision of RE is governed by sections 26 to 28 of the Education Act 1944, as amended by the ERA 1988, and there are minor administrative changes with respect to self-governing *or grant maintained* (GM) schools in the 1993 Education Act. Essentially the position is that county schools must provide RE in accordance with the local education authority (LEA) Agreed Syllabus. Such syllabuses are required by the 1988 Act to "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain". Agreed Syllabuses must be non-denominational and teaching in county schools must not be distinctive of any particular religious denomination. Likewise, a requirement is laid upon the headteacher and governing body to provide a daily act of collective worship which must not be distinctive of the traditions and practices of particular religious denominations. However, the ERA requires worship provided in county schools to be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".

Provision in *voluntary* controlled schools is normally in accordance with the precepts laid out above, though parents may request denominational teaching where that is specified in the trust deed. However, the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools may provide religious teaching and collective worship which are in accordance with the trust deed,

normally reflecting the beliefs and practices of a particular religious denomination. Provision in GM schools is usually in accordance with their status before they become grant maintained, except that under the 1993 Act it will be possible for GM schools to choose an Agreed Syllabus from any LEA and not just the one in which they are resident. OFSTED does not publish reports on the provision in voluntary aided and special agreement schools though HMI have in the past observed it by invitation.

The report is based upon evidence from full inspections in the school year 1992/93, by HM Inspectors (HMI) trialling the first draft of the published *Framework for Inspection,* and an additional number of visits made by HMI to schools either individually or in pairs, usually for no more than two days. A total of 323 RE lessons and 242 acts of worship were inspected in 130 primary schools. In 188 secondary schools, 394 lessons were seen at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Collective worship was reported on in 146 of the secondary schools. Fifty two schools with sixth forms were inspected. Most were mixed comprehensive schools. Full inspections of 10 special schools provided the basis for the judgements on provision of RE and collective worship in special education. The schools were not selected to provide a statistically representative sample. Nevertheless, schools of all types, locations and intakes were inspected.

In judging the quality of what they see in schools, HMI start from the requirements of the agreed syllabus being followed in the school and from their experience of what can be achieved through high-quality teaching. They expect RE to be more than an academic study. The study of religions should help pupils to understand the nature and source of belief and practice and how that belief and practice affect people's lives. There is a widespread public expectation that RE will be a vehicle for guiding the development of moral and social qualities. It follows that HMI expect schools to relate their teaching of RE to moral and social issues when appropriate.

MAIN FINDINGS

1 (i) Overall, the standards of attainment, quality of teaching and quality of learning were satisfactory or better in about 70 per cent of the lessons seen. An unusually small number of lessons was judged very good and it *was* difficult to find a school with consistently good practice. In many of the schools in which there were examples of good teaching, this was rarely part of a coherent teaching programme. As a result the overall attainment of pupils was often disappointing.

(ii) Many primary and secondary schools were not meeting the requirements of the legislation for the provision of RE teaching. Only in Key Stage 3 was provision close to statutory specifications.

(iii) The provision of collective worship was widespread in primary schools, and its contribution to school ethos was generally satisfactory or good. Many secondary schools were not adequately meeting either the spirit or the letter of legislation on collective worship.

(iv) Many agreed syllabuses had been revised in the last two years and there was some evidence of the new syllabuses having a positive impact on the nature and quality of work in both primary and secondary schools.

(v) Arrangements for INSET and staff development did not promote widespread good practice.

2 Visits to primary schools showed that:
• just under 70 per cent of the *lessons* identified by schools as RE teaching were judged satisfactory or better, with standards at Key Stage 1 higher than at Key Stage 2; (paragraph 5)

- in at least 20 per cent of *schools* the teaching of RE was negligible and in others no RE was taught to some of the classes; in total only 50 per cent of schools provided RE that was satisfactory or better overall; (paragraphs 5, 21)

- RE was rarely accorded the status within the primary curriculum prescribed in law, and progression and continuity were lacking; (paragraphs 5, 31, 32)

- a high proportion of teachers lacked the confidence, expertise, enthusiasm and interest to teach the subject effectively; many had volunteered because they valued the contribution of RE to the pupils' moral and social education; (paragraph 16)

- all the schools complied with the requirement to provide daily collective worship. Judged in terms of the quality of the opportunity they provided for social and moral development, standards in these acts of worship were satisfactory or better in 75 per cent of the schools; (paragraph 63)

- although provision was made conscientiously, few schools provided a sufficiently strong spiritual focus and few had a planned programme of worship themes; (paragraphs 64-66)
- a significant number of assemblies were not attended by all primary staff who, frequently with the agreement of the head, used the time for planning and meetings instead. This had particular implications for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and for the RE curriculum in schools where worship and follow-up activities provide the main vehicle for religious teaching; (paragraph 68)

- many pupils acquired an adequate knowledge of some aspects of Christianity but this was too often linked to simplified Bible stories and selected festivals, leaving significant gaps in the pupils' understanding of the broader elements of the Christian faith; (paragraphs 7, 11)

despite the declared objectives of many school policies and agreed syllabuses, and contrary to the widespread public perception that current RE teaching has abandoned Christianity, many pupils were not taught about world religions other than Christianity and few reached satisfactory standards in this aspect of the work; (paragraphs 9, 12, 31)

- a substantial amount of religious education was characterised by unsatisfactory management, co-ordination and planning-, insufficient time allocations; poor resources; and inadequate provision for in-service training which failed to raise the expertise and confidence of staff from a low baseline; (paragraphs 31, 32, 49, 50)
- assessment, recording and reporting procedures were at a very early stage of development and in many cases non-existent. (paragraphs 45-46)

3 Visits to secondary schools showed that:

- RE was offered to all pupils in Key Stage 3. Although work of very high quality was rare, teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 were satisfactory or better in 75 per cent of lessons. Standards of attainment were slightly less good than expected at this stage, largely because of great variations in the knowledge and understanding which the pupils brought from their primary schools; (paragraphs 18, 21, 26)

- the quality of work done in examination courses at GCSE and at A Level was often good; (paragraphs 19, 20, 29)

- the vast majority of secondary schools did not provide enough time to teach the agreed syllabus in Key Stage 4 and few provided a basic RE course for post-16 students; (paragraphs 22, 39, 41)

- few schools met the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship and few kept any record of the themes which were sometimes said to be used by tutors; (paragraph 71)

- new agreed syllabuses were having a positive influence on provision in schools in a few LEAs. However, few schools had come to terms with the suggestions for assessment, recording and reporting; (paragraphs 30, 37, 47)

- most RE teaching was confined to the basics of the Christian faith. Agreed Syllabuses require pupils to be taught about the major world faiths but coverage of other religions was frequently confined to sacred places and festivals taken out of context; (paragraphs 18, 24, 38)

- specialist teachers were generally effective and were responsible for the good work seen in examination courses. Much teaching of basic RE was in the hands of non-specialists and they were inadequately supported by current documentation in schools and the lack of appropriate INSET and support. (paragraphs 26, 27, 29, 36, 51, 52, 53)

4 Visits to special schools showed that:

- the provision of specific RE lessons was not universal and their quality was variable; (paragraph 74)

- the particular circumstance of special schools meant that they often sought a high level of integration between pastoral care, personal and social education (PSE) and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This integration was not often well articulated nor found in documents but it was evident in the quality of life and work within the schools; (paragraphs 77-79)

- agreed syllabuses gave insufficient specific guidance to special schools. (paragraph 77)

THE REPORT

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Standards of achievement

5. Just under 70 per cent of lessons which had a visible RE component were satisfactory or better, with standards at Key Stage 1 marginally higher than at Key Stage 2. This finding has to be set in the context that 20 per cent of the schools did not teach it and that in 50 per cent of the schools the RE curriculum was inadequate. In practice the subject was under-emphasised, and rarely made a distinctive contribution to the curriculum as a whole. Overall standards of achievement in RE were lower than in any of the subjects of the National Curriculum. That said, a number of schools were responding to the aims and objectives of the new LEA Agreed Syllabuses by planning for a broader and more explicit coverage of RE than was formerly the case.

6. The most significant feature was the considerable variation in standards within schools. Work of the highest quality was seldom achieved and consistently satisfactory or good standards across all the classes in a school were rare. Generally this situation reflected the lack of coherent teaching programmes, the varied competence, expertise and interest of class teachers, and the lack of adequate support and guidance given to them. While some individual lessons were satisfactory or good, the pupils were unable to build up sound knowledge and understanding of the subject because of the absence of coherent, continuous provision and the inconsistency of teaching within most schools.

7. Satisfactory standards were most frequently achieved in those aspects of RE concerned with the pupils' self-awareness, personal identity and relationships with others. Pupils were often encouraged to express their feelings and to consider the feelings and situations of others. Moral and social concerns of this nature formed the basis of much of the work at Key Stage 1. Most pupils also acquired some basic knowledge about

Christianity, its beliefs, practices and traditions, although there were considerable gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Throughout both key stages some pupils could retell Bible stories which they had heard or read, describe special occasions such as religious festivals, and recall significant events in the life of Jesus.

8. By the end of Key Stage 2 only a minority of the pupils displayed a good awareness of religious concepts and symbolism and confidently explored and articulated their ideas. In general, the narrow focus of many assignments, combined with the limited opportunities for pupils to extend their learning, restricted overall standards. Few pupils extended or deepened their knowledge of religion beyond surface features.

9. Standards of achievement were considerably affected by the nature of the curriculum offered. A strong emphasis was given to Christianity but the pupils gained little appreciation of its place as a living and varied world faith. The overemphasis in the teaching placed upon the telling of Bible stories and special occasions, did not help to develop an understanding of Christianity's contemporary relevance and practical application, particularly the implications of having a belief and how that belief affects behaviour. In addition the pupils were rarely introduced systematically to material from faiths other than Christianity, as required by the ERA. Pupils in Key Stage 2 should begin to understand some of the similarities and differences between religions. To achieve those objectives requires continuity of teaching, adequate time allocations and specific consideration of different world religions at an appropriate level; these features were rarely found.

Quality of learning

10. The quality of learning was satisfactory in approximately 70 per cent of the lessons inspected. In reception and at Key Stage 1 the pupils learned important values associated with caring about and helping others; often from themes such as

friendship, peace, honesty, trust and love. They learned to distinguish between right and wrong, and the need for rules and codes of conduct. Their personal experiences and growing awareness of these matters were often the basis for discussion and further learning. Moral and social learning were given high priority and on occasions related explicitly to religious material: for example, in one class the story of Jesus calming the storm was used to reinforce and develop ideas about faith, trust and love.

11. Christian celebrations, and stories from the Bible, mainly the New Testament, featured prominently in most schools and were usually presented in a form appropriate to the pupils' ages and abilities. In addition, the pupils learned general social and linguistic skills through discussion, listening to and writing stories, and recording information.

12. A broader range of learning was evident at Key Stage 2, which included religious symbolism, elements of church history and, to a lesser extent, the exploration of local churches. Increased attention was given to non-Christian religions, mainly Judaism and Islam, and there was learning, for example, about Greek and Roman gods in connection with history topics; however, such study formed only a minimal proportion of the time spent in RE. Pupils learned increasing amounts of information but could seldom locate this knowledge within a specific faith context. Often they lacked the vocabulary to help them understand the meaning of the material presented to them. Insufficient attention was given to making explicit the religious significance of what was studied. An exception to this was an exploration of the significance of responsibility in making choices, which arose from reading the stories of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness.

13. A small number of schools were successful in matching tasks to the developing abilities and interests of the pupils in both key stages and in planning for progression. Some of the most effective learning in these schools arose when pupils

examined the impact of religion on daily life, and in particular when considering moral and social questions. In situations such as learning from well-organised visits to places of worship and from the contributions made by visitors to the school, teachers made considerable demands on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. High levels of interest and motivation were strongly associated with teaching which provided clear explanation followed by opportunities for the pupils to reflect upon, question and discuss issues of faith, to compare and contrast, and to research ideas and themes using a wide range of books and artefacts.

14. More typical of the learning within most schools was a slow pace, exacerbated by the repetition of material. There were gaps *in* knowledge and understanding of religious belief and practice, resulting from incidental or inadequately planned teaching. Moreover, the contribution of religious education to spiritual *and* moral development was inadequately understood. Primary schools rarely capitalised on the religious experiences of pupils at home and in the local community. A small number of schools included representatives of various faiths among visiting speakers and their contributions were usually very effective. In general, limited opportunities were provided for the pupils to apply what they had learned. Too often responses were restricted to short pieces of writing, often copied, and simple illustrations. Many pupils lacked interest in RE and saw little of relevance in the subject.

Quality of teaching

15. The quality of teaching in schools was satisfactory or better in 70 per cent of lessons and, at Key Stage 1, closely matched the quality of learning. At Key Stage 2, however, the cumulative effect of an unco-ordinated programme of work adversely affected learning of explicit RE in the later primary years.

16. Many teachers were uncertain how to translate Agreed Syllabus guidelines into a scheme of work. Confusion about the appropriate depth of content made it difficult for schools to

formulate clear teaching and learning objectives. Planning usually identified content to be covered in the form of a list of activities; there was no reference to developing skills or understanding ideas. A high proportion of teachers lacked the confidence, expertise, enthusiasm and interest to teach the subject effectively. However, most teachers had developed sensitive relationships with their pupils which encouraged the latter to express their feelings openly and confidently when given the opportunity to do so. As a result, at both key stages, there was often satisfactory teaching of some moral and social principles even though these were not always closely linked to religious understanding.

17. There were examples of successful and well-directed teaching concerned primarily with the transmission of information but too often the work did not move beyond this to seek meaning and develop understanding. Teaching was normally to whole classes, and when the pupils were organised into groups they were usually engaged in the same activity. The failure to match tasks closely to pupils' ability meant that some work did not challenge some pupils, while others found it too difficult. The best teaching incorporated an interesting variety of tasks and allowed time for the pupils to discuss and ask questions about the subject-matter in order to understand the religious significance of the focus of study.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Standards of achievement

18. Standards were satisfactory or better in 68 per cent of lessons at Key Stage 3 but relatively few were good or very good. Pupils transfer from their primary schools with variable and sometimes negligible levels of knowledge and understanding in RE. Most gained a reasonable awareness of the Christian tradition during Key Stage 3, although many struggled with the more specialist language used in some lessons. They were less secure in their knowledge of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. Pupils recognised many of the technical terms associated with non-Christian religions, but they did not always accurately identify these with a particular religious tradition. Standards were noticeably higher when work was closely linked with aspects of pupils' experience or with study visits to local religious communities.

19. Basic RE provision for $_{all}$ pupils at Key Stage 4 seldom allowed them to build upon Key Stage 3 achievements. Seventy five per cent of schools made no discernible provision for explicit RE at this stage and in many the agenda was confined to ethical issues. That said, standards in about 85 per cent of GCSE classes inspected were satisfactory or better, although in several schools GCSE courses in religious studies were being discontinued as schools began to implement the National Curriculum requirements for the provision of geography and history. It is noticeable that far more girls than boys choose to take religious studies at GCSE[1].

[1] 1. In 1953, 15 per cent of the 15-year-old cohort in maintained secondary schools took a GCSE examination in religious studies. This total comprised 11.3 per cent of the boys in the cohort and 18.8 per cent of the girls in the cohort.

In the sixth form, few schools offered more than a token gesture towards basic RE for all students although, where it was seen, standards were never less than satisfactory. In the small number of Advanced and Advanced Supplementary level classes seen, standards were often good.

Quality of learning

20. At Key Stage 3, the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in 75 per cent of lessons. It improved markedly when pupils had a clear understanding of the purpose of the lesson and of what they were expected to achieve. Resources and tasks, however, were seldom varied to match the range of pupils' abilities and the pace of learning was too often determined by the pupils rather than by targets set by teachers.

21. HMI judged that the time allocated to RE was often inadequate to allow the teaching of the Agreed Syllabus. A real or perceived shortage of time was sometimes used to justify a narrow range of learning opportunities: pupils were presented with pre-selected information, often in booklets or worksheets, and were not expected to find out, discuss or present ideas for themselves. As a result, their breadth of knowledge was usually greater than their depth of understanding.

22. Most pupils displayed interest and were well-motivated; and if better teaching were provided, higher standards might result. A lack of pace was identified as a feature of several unsatisfactory lessons. Lapses in concentration occurred, notably when pupils were presented with undemanding tasks or were expected to sustain the same activity throughout double lessons of 70 minutes.

23. In Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 about one-third of lessons seen dealt explicitly with non-Christian contemporary faiths; sometimes teachers drew comparisons with aspects of Christianity. In a number of these lessons, there were pupils from minority ethnic and religious groups who made confident and significant

contributions. These personal experiences were always treated with respect and interest within classes and stimulated much intelligent enquiry. Occasionally opportunities *of* this sort *were* missed where *the* teacher was insecure, or where the teacher's own input to the lesson was excessive.

25. At Key Stage 4 and in sixth forms, basic RE, where it was provided, was usually confined to listening and talking rather than reading and writing. Content was usually appropriate and of interest to pupils, although on occasion it depended almost entirely on video recordings. Only in a few schools was learning in RE at these stages linked with certification, such as Records of Achievement or general studies. Learning in examination classes was usually sound. Coursework assignments were well-structured to encourage individual research, and pupils engaged in a good variety of activities including study visits, interviews and the study of firsthand sources and artefacts.

Quality of teaching

26. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching was considered satisfactory or better in just under three-quarters of the lessons. Good quality teaching was generally dependent on the availability of specialist trained staff-, RE was seldom undertaken successfully by non-specialist teachers. The most effective lessons involved a variety of methods and resources which were well-planned and organised to engage pupils actively in observation, discussion, listening, reading and writing. In those lessons, pupils were aware of the distinctive aims of RE and of the objectives for a particular session, which *were, in turn,* reflected in the assessment of pupils' work. Less effective teaching was frequently confined to a single worksheet, school-produced booklet, or commercial text, with uniform tasks and little interaction between the pupils. While the pupils sometimes gained valuable knowledge from such lessons, they were seldom able to develop their understanding and an excessive dependence upon the teacher prevented an exploration of the impact of religious belief on peoples' lives.

Most classes in Key Stage 3 were of mixed ability, yet little was done to provide resources and tasks for pupils at the extremes. Non-specialist teachers generally expected too little of the pupils and had insufficient expertise to raise the standards to an acceptable level. Where the teachers were insecure they tended to settle for telling pupils religious facts, instead of using information as a means to explore and discuss ideas or to present issues for themselves. Elsewhere a reasonable pace of work and homework was usually expected, though pupils' efforts sometimes flagged within longer lessons where the written work was uninteresting or routine. A few outstandingly good lessons were observed in Key Stage 3, where high expectation, linked with good planning and varied presentation within lessons conducted at a brisk pace, stimulated a good response from the pupils.

27. The pace of work was commended in about 10 per cent of lessons and several of those were given by enthusiastic specialist teachers attempting to combat what they perceived as inadequate time provided to cover Agreed Syllabus material.

At Key Stage 4 and in sixth forms, examination courses were normally taught by specialists, and the quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in over 85 per cent of these lessons. However, non-specialists frequently taught the courses designed to provide basic RE in Key Stage 4, and in sixth form general studies courses. There was seldom continuity or progression from RE in earlier stages and often the material covered was outside the control of the head of RE and did not reflect the Agreed Syllabus. Specialist teaching on examination courses was generally enthusiastic, often brisk and sometimes scholarly, and usually established high expectations. Examination syllabuses provided clear targets and assessment procedures to which teachers responded well.

CURRICULUM AND ORGANISATION

30. The 1988 ERA prompted Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) to review their Agreed Syllabuses. The initial response was slow but the requirements for inspection of schools in the 1992 Education (Schools) Act added to the demands from schools for better guidance, in response to which some Agreed Syllabuses have been rewritten. The new or revised syllabuses generally provide a better framework for RE which is likely to ensure broader and more balanced coverage and better continuity and progression than currently exist. At this relatively early stage of development however, few schools have fully implemented the Agreed Syllabus or adapted their own schemes of work; nevertheless some individual teachers have benefited from the ideas within an Agreed Syllabus. Teachers have barely had time to familiarise themselves with the attainment targets (ATs) and programmes of study (PoS) which characterise most of the new syllabuses, which in structure tend to follow National Curriculum models. The status and profile of RE have been enhanced through the Agreed Syllabus initiative, particularly where LEAs have been able to promote it through INSET and published guidance. However, not all Agreed Syllabuses are detailed or clear enough to be of practical assistance to teachers. Some LEAs have supplemented their syllabus with handbooks of suggestions and these were reported by schools to be helpful.

Primary

31. The RE curriculum was judged to be satisfactory or better in less than 50 per cent of schools. Where it was taught explicitly, RE was usually timetabled and taught separately, whether as part of a theme or as a discrete programme of lessons. Where school guidelines existed they were often dated and reflected earlier LEA syllabuses. They focused almost exclusively upon Christianity and did not give adequate support, particularly to the non-specialist teachers. In the absence of appropriate

guidance, teachers had constructed their own programmes, often linking the subject content to an over-arching class topic. Many of the associations made were tenuous and contributed little to the pupils' religious understanding. Many lessons were planned by teachers without reference to a coherent curriculum structure for RE.

32. Despite the hopeful signs arising from the use of the new Agreed Syllabuses, much planning was rudimentary. Planning comprised little more than a very brief listing of the content to be covered, with few indications of what was to be learned. There was very little whole-school planning and the provision made often failed to take into account the pupils' knowledge, understanding and varied backgrounds. Better planning was often associated with the introduction of a new Agreed Syllabus, especially if the latter identified attainment targets alongside detailed programmes of study. Ina minority of schools, planning was monitored by the headteacher with the intention of ensuring adequate coverage.

33. Time allocations varied: some schools made no provision for RE, others gave 10 per cent of total teaching time. In some cases these differences existed within the same school. Few schools could account for the time spent on RE. Only a minority regularly timetabled and taught RE in all classes, and some relied inappropriately on acts of collective worship to deliver the RE curriculum.

34. Liaison between schools to produce better continuity in RE was under-developed, although Agreed Syllabuses should in the longer term give schools a common basis for teaching the subject.

Secondary

35. Most secondary school prospectuses carried some notice of the provision and nature of RE and collective worship, and the legal possibility of withdrawal. Too often this information was incomplete or misleading. Sometimes it was simply wrong. Most

secondary schools had a scheme of work for RE, but in only one-third was it judged adequate for current *circumstances.* The *main* problems were: a lack of co-ordination between the scheme of work and the current Agreed Syllabus; lack of clarity and coherence; weakness in explicit content, especially at Key Stage 4 and beyond; and a lack of guidance on matching work to the needs of pupils of differing ability *and* to *policies for assessment.* These shortcomings in schemes of work are of particular concern where RE teaching is shared between a number of non-specialist teachers, and especially so when RE is provided within an integrated subject organisation.

36. In most RE lessons in secondary schools there was some continuity of content from year to year, and from teacher to teacher. Most lessons were planned with a reasonable degree of care but individual lessons often varied enormously in method and structure according to the *individual* teacher's knowledge and expertise; thus, the cumulative experience of pupils could be very different. Given the number of non-specialist teachers used to teach RE in many schools, it will not be easy to improve this situation. The most consistent planning and effective delivery came about when RE was *in* the *hands of one or* two specialist teachers, with well-resourced specialist teaching rooms in close proximity.

37, Recent Agreed Syllabuses were helping schools to improve schemes of work and to make them *more* accessible to non-specialists. Almost all the schools provided Key Stage 3 courses in RE to enable pupils to gain some understanding of Christianity through a study of biblical and other texts, including examples drawn from the lives and writings of contemporary Christians. About 56 per cent of schools provided discrete RE in Key Stage 3 while others provided RE as a part of a humanities curriculum or the timetabled provision for Personal and Social Education (PSE). A few voluntary aided schools provided 10 per cent of curriculum time for RE. Some schools limited their *provision* to as little as 2 per cent, and therefore made it difficult to fulfil their legal requirement, but only a handful were

specifically identified as not meeting the legal requirements in this Key Stage. The average provided in all the years was close to 4.5 per cent of curriculum time.

38. Approaches to teaching about the principal world religions other than Christianity were varied and sometimes confined to a single year —usually Year 9. Frequently such approaches were organised within units of study which focused on particular aspects of religion, for example sacred places and festivals. These units often included examples from five or six different religions, and pupils had difficulty in gaining a clear impression of the coherence and distinctiveness of each tradition. Work was more successful when examples were drawn from a limited number of religions, especially when those were represented in the locality or illustrated through visits, artefacts or meetings with members of a faith community.

39. Basic RE for all pupils within Key Stage 4 was only provided in about 25 per cent of schools and was allocated between 3 and 4 per cent of time. In the remaining 75 per cent the provision was inadequate to cover the material of the Agreed Syllabus. Such provision as was made in these schools tended to occupy a few short modules within a broader PSE or similar course. The content of such modules was frequently confined to social and moral issues; only in a minority of schools were these related to explicit religious considerations which might emerge, for example, through a study of "rites of passage".

40. Examination courses were taken by a small number of pupils (approximately 15 per cent of the cohort) and as the numbers recruited in individual schools were often quite small the ability range within the group was often great. This did not appear to cause major problems. Examination courses allowed students to extend their understanding of Christianity and sometimes of one or two other religions. These courses were usually allocated 10 per cent of curriculum time.

41. In most of the schools, sixth-form provision for RE was inadequate and very many made no provision at all. Some schools used visiting speakers to make valuable contributions to general studies courses and others provided an annual day conference. When appropriately challenged, sixth-form pupils showed interest and made good responses. Most A-Level groups were small and expensive to provide in terms of the time of specialist RE teachers, but the general quality of work done was good.

42. Very few parents exercised their right to withdraw children from RE. Small numbers were reported in relatively few schools and from a sample of 140 schools inspected, less than 1 per cent of pupils had been withdrawn.

43. The way in which pupils were grouped for RE lessons was usually determined by the needs of other subjects. Mostly pupils were taught in mixed-ability tutor groups but pupils were sometimes taught RE in sets determined by ability in, say, French or mathematics. The quality and range of work demanded by syllabuses were frequently constrained by limited time allocations, and continuity of pupils' learning was difficult to sustain when, as in some schools, the subject was timetabled only once a fortnight, or as part of a modular course.

44. Recently issued LEA Agreed Syllabuses have introduced attainment targets and statements of attainment for RE, and some address assessment procedures. As yet, few schools have fully adjusted to these new requirements and some have found them unrealistic. For example, one recent syllabus has 45 statements of attainment at Key Stage 3 and 50 at Key Stage 4. Such demands fall particularly hard on RE teachers who frequently teach a very high proportion of the total roll within a secondary school for only a small portion of time in each week.

Primary

45. Only in 32 per cent of primary schools was there a written assessment policy for RE. In the remainder, such assessment as there was relied mainly upon an informal appraisal of the pupils' spoken and written responses. Written work was usually assessed more for its English content than for the quality of RE. Teachers were generally aware of which pupils listened carefully to stories, of those who responded well to questions and of those who had some understanding of religious concepts, but there was little assessment or recording of individual performance or progress. The limited recording of work hindered continuity and progression. Some teachers maintained a general record of topics covered by the class as a whole which might or might not be passed on to the next teacher.

46. Annual reports allowed for comments by teachers, but in practice there was minimal reporting on a child's progress and development in religious understanding. Reports to parents mainly comprised comments about their children's general responses and attitudes to the subject.

Secondary

47. In general, new syllabuses were sharpening the attention paid to what pupils are expected to achieve and leading to improvements in the quality of marking. Much marking at Key Stage 3 was perfunctory although reasonably regular. At its best, regular marking with helpful comments, and discussion between teacher and individual pupils, led to higher standards of attainment. There was little assessment of basic RE within Key Stage 4 but assessment in examination courses was tighter. and usually included helpful comment on how work might be improved. In one A-Level group, carefully structured assessment sheets were attached to marked essays to maximise students' chances of improvement.

Primary

48. Most teachers were responsible for teaching the subject, where it was taught, to their own classes. In several schools local clergy assisted with some aspects of the RE programme. A small minority of teachers had a substantial qualification or recent training in RE. In a minority of schools the teacher co-ordinating RE occasionally worked alongside colleagues as a semi-specialist. Overall levels of staff confidence and expertise were fairly low. A small but significant number of teachers were reluctant to teach RE, although few exercised their right to opt out; instead they taught moral and social issues without providing the link to explicit religious belief and practice.

49. RE was badly managed in most primary schools; the subject has a weak position within curriculum and management structures, and has only recently begun to feature within school development plans (SDPs). The majority of schools had a member of staff with responsibility for RE, either on the main professional grade or with an incentive allowance; in the case of the latter the teacher invariably also co-ordinated other aspects of the curriculum. The effectiveness of RE co-ordinators varied from good to poor; their role included the purchase and organisation of resources, offering advice to colleagues and arranging and disseminating INSET; but their influence upon teaching and learning across the school was often minimal. In schools where RE had a strong and positive status it was usually because the headteacher either directly managed or strongly supported the subject. Where staff were reluctant to volunteer to teach the subject, headteachers usually assumed responsibility.

50. The amount of INSET for RE was limited. Schools with delegated budgets accorded low priority to INSET in RE. For those without delegated budgets, LEAs lacked the expertise to offer courses or in-school support for RE. Few school

development plans (SDPs) prioritised RE as an area for development in a context where National Curriculum and assessment demands in other subjects were perceived to be more important. Much of the recent LEA-provided INSET for RE has focused upon the implementation of the new Agreed Syllabuses and has been successful in raising awareness of the content of such syllabuses, but has not yet significantly influenced classroom practice. Dissemination following INSET was usually the responsibility of the co-ordinator who was often the only member of staff able to attend LEA courses.

Secondary

51. The supply and quality of secondary RE teachers were the factors most often identified as affecting standards of pupils' achievement. On supply, HMI records show that, in 1992/3, one trained specialist RE teacher was deployed for every 698 pupils, whereas the figure in 1991/92 was just over 600, and in 1990/91 575. This year's figures also indicate that schools in the south have a higher proportion of specialists (1:525) than in the north (1:873). The distribution of RE specialists also remains uneven between schools. One school of over 1,200 pupils had 5 specialists, while another with over 1,100 pupils had no full-time RE teacher. The proportion of RE taught by specialists ranged from 100 per cent in a very few schools to nil in others.

52. When schools have classes taking A-Level or GCSE examinations in RE, they are almost always taught by specialists. Most RE specialists then give priority to teaching as many classes as possible in Key Stage 3, where their presence and the guidance they can give to non-specialist colleagues is responsible for the generally healthy state of RE teaching in the key stage. Because they lacked detailed knowledge of religion, many non-specialist teachers, some of whom feel pressed into the task, concentrated on moral and social matters and this had a very strong influence on provision in Key Stage 4, where non-specialist teaching was in a majority. Some non-specialists

have personal religious commitments and valuable teaching expertise in other subjects, but their approach to RE did not always accord with the intentions of the Agreed Syllabus.

53. Few specialist teachers had received recent substantial INSET. Where appropriate backup had been provided in the wake of a new Agreed Syllabus there were encouraging signs of improvement in schools. However, in many areas, after new Agreed Syllabuses had been produced, LEAs had insufficient advisory personnel to provide follow-up support to the schools. Heads of schools to whom money had been devolved did not see RE as a priority and the absence of local providers to back locally devised syllabuses meant that training and support had a low profile. This position differs significantly from the response to the launch of National Curriculum statutory orders, where groups of specialist teachers have not only provided substantial support and encouragement to each other but have been well supported by external provision too.

ACCOMMODATION AND RESOURCES

Primary

54. Religious education is, in the main, the least well resourced subject in the primary curriculum. This reflects the lack of priority accorded to it by schools. Annual allocations of money for the subject in a school ranged from nil to 9150. In the vast majority of schools the allowance was inadequate, given the low baseline of RE resources in most of the schools inspected. The subject often received a fixed and minimal allowance irrespective of need. More generous allowances were made where RE was highlighted in the SDP and coated accordingly. One LEA was partially funding the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus within its schools.

55. Book provision was often limited to children's Bibles and dated sets of text books; few artefacts and pictures were available. When audited against the requirements of new Agreed Syllabuses the level of resources was insufficient to meet demands. Materials about faiths other than Christianity were virtually non-existent in several schools. The quality of work was often hampered by the poor level of teaching and learning materials. Several schools attempted to compensate through borrowing from LEA loan services. An increasing number of schools took part in educational visits to local places of worship, which enriched the pupils' learning. Little use was made of radio and television broadcasts even where themes were relevant to the school's declared intentions for the subject.

56. Many schools displayed the pupils' work which related to aspects of RE, but the standards were inconsistent and often failed to promote or support the teaching and learning. Accommodation was usually conducive to quiet reflection or discussion, particularly at Key Stage 1.

57. Teachers and pupils often. had easy access to a central library although provision there was limited. Some books were located within classrooms, but a large number of those were often more suitable as reference material for teachers than for pupils.

Secondary

58. In many RE lessons, the quality and range of textbooks and printed materials were barely adequate and only examination candidates were able to borrow books for use at home. Some school libraries gave good support, while others offered little to extend the pupils' learning in RE. A high proportion of lessons depended heavily on a single worksheet or school-produced booklet which offered little scope for personal research. Where they were available, religious artefacts and study visits served to extend pupils' interests and understanding. Video recordings were also used sensitively and selectively in some Key Stage 3 lessons but were sometimes over-used in general RE with older pupils. Relatively little use was made of the RE resource centres maintained by some LEAs and dioceses.

59. The variation between schools in the average capitation for RE was so wide as to be almost meaningless. The overall figure calculated by HMI at £1.16 per pupil shows an increase on last year's average just sufficient to cope with inflation. In many of the schools, allocations of money were made to a humanities faculty which often gave greater priority to geography and history in order to implement National Curriculum requirements in Key Stage 3, than to RE.

60. Accommodation was as often a significant disadvantage as it was a significant advantage. Just over 60 per cent of schools had a specialist room as a base for teaching RE but only about 25 per cent had more than one. Specialist RE rooms, at their best, were stimulating and portrayed the distinctive character of the subject in displays which also valued and celebrated the pupils' achievements. Such bases provided ready access to

equipment and resources and allowed furniture to be rearranged for formal or for small group work. When RE was taught in a large number of non-specialist rooms, teaching was less effective and good display was very rare. It was not unusual for RE to be delivered in more than 10 rooms within a secondary school.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

61. The law requires all county schools to provide a daily act of collective worship. Taken over a period of time, for example a school term, these acts of worship should be of a mainly Christian nature. Acts of worship are supposed to be meaningful to pupils and to contribute to school ethos. HMI assumed that "worship" required that there should be recognition of some supreme being and that "mainly Christian" meant that in the majority of occasions the material should be recognisably of a Christian character.

62. In most acts of worship, the emphasis was on social and moral matters. Sometimes, particularly in primary schools, there was a general recognition of God such that the activity could be described as worship. However, many fewer of the acts of worship could be described as identifiably Christian. Particularly, but not only, where there was a mixed catchment area, schools provided an umbrella of reverence and reflection which allowed pupils of different faiths to use the prayers, readings or hymns to join in worship on their own terms. Such meetings were seen to be clearly beneficial to the creation of a whole-school ethos.

Primary

63. All the primary schools complied with the statutory requirements for daily worship. Through these acts of worship the values held by the school as a community were demonstrated. Seventy five per cent of acts of collective worship were satisfactory or better in this regard; 20 per cent of those were judged to be good. There was a greater variation in standards where both key stages were assembled together for worship, a result of the difficulties associated with providing suitable material for such a wide age-range.

64. Acts of worship were generally organised on a class, key stage or Whole-school basis in rotation and held mainly during the morning session. Most primary schools devoted 15-20

minutes to daily worship. Most acts of worship had a format which included several of the following ingredients: introductory music to create a mood and to focus attention; hymn-singing; a talk or story; a closing prayer. However, the music and prayers did not consistently enhance worship. Television and radio religious broadcasts were not used very much and few schools had an adequate range of artefacts and visual aids at their disposal. Worship was usually led by senior staff and volunteer teachers. Many schools encouraged classes of pupils to conduct the act of worship from time to time.

65. The content of most acts of worship was appropriate to the ages and aptitudes of the children and with few exceptions the pupils were well-behaved, attentive and eager to take part. Active involvement of pupils strengthened the quality of the act of worship. On occasions the presentations lacked a clear focus and this caused the pupils some confusion and misunderstanding. In general, acts of worship provided the pupils with moral and ethical teaching consonant with Christianity. However, even in those schools where worship was the principal means of delivering RE teaching, specific links between morality and religious belief were not often clearly established.

66. The format of most worship broadly reflected Christian traditions. Little attention was given to non-Christian faiths in the schools inspected. Diwali and the Chinese New Year were the most frequently reported non-Christian festivals but they were given prominence in only a minority of schools. Few pupils were withdrawn from worship; the largest category were Jehovah's Witnesses. Within a minority of schools, pupils with special needs were inappropriately withdrawn from worship for additional tuition in other subjects.

67. Characteristics of the best acts of worship included: a good variety of stimuli including drama, music, literature, artefacts and pictures, which captured and sustained the attention of pupils of all ages; relevant content which promoted the spiritual growth and development of the pupils; questioning which elicited

thoughtful and extended responses; opportunities for quiet reflection as well as prayer-, and the involvement of the pupils in the planning and presentation of worship.

68. Primary heads generally took responsibility for planning and conducting the acts of worship and often used the occasion as a major vehicle for setting standards of behaviour and relationships in the school. Visiting speakers, including local clergy, were invited to most schools during the course of the year and often made an important contribution. Increasingly the teaching staff do not attend school acts of worship. Schools need to consider what such non-attendance signals to pupils and the limits which this may place upon following up themes from worship in the classroom. The disadvantages are considerable when worship is seen as a means of delivering RE. Attempts to teach RE through worship were seldom related to the LEA Agreed Syllabus or school guidelines and did not provide a suitable substitute for class-based RE.

69. The planning and recording of themes for worship were often weak. Few schools planned over a term or academic year; this made the development of themes and ideas difficult to achieve. Being unaware of the focus of worship in advance left teachers ill-prepared to follow up ideas within classes. Because of the lack of records, governors and heads were unable to monitor the range and balance of worship or to show that statutory compliance had been achieved. A few schools had adapted the guidelines for collective worship provided by the LEA and were able to ensure that some of the worship themes supported and extended class work.

70. Accommodation was rarely a problem for schools now that flexible grouping for collective worship is permissible, but most headteachers preferred to bring all the pupils together at least twice a week.

Secondary

71. Compared with primary schools, the provision of collective worship in secondary schools was very disappointing. Forty per cent of the schools inspected were identified as not complying with the legal requirements regarding collective worship and in the remainder there were tensions and difficulties. A detailed examination of the evidence from 96 full inspections revealed that no school complied fully with the letter of the law. The usual pattern consisted of a range of whole-school and year-group sessions supplemented by meetings of tutor groups. Sometimes this offered pupils only one large group "assembly" per week. This was sometimes a result of the inadequacy of the accommodation. It was rare for sessions organised in tutor groups to provide anything approximating to collective worship, though occasionally there was a planned "thought for the day" and sometimes a reading from a "worthy text". Few schools kept appropriate records of this activity. Of the 52 schools with sixth-forms, only those nine with Voluntary status provided a daily act of worship to include post-16 pupils. Voluntary aided and special agreement schools, where worship can be denominational, generally came closer than county schools to meeting the requirement.

72. Most examples of collective worship inspected were described as moral, making a positive contribution to the school ethos, and offering a good start to the day. They were largely dependent upon the spoken word, usually delivered by the senior management team. Pupils were required to be passive listeners, with few opportunities provided for their participation. The spiritual dimension in this provision was generally weak, and this applied not only to the nature of worship but also to the failure to use music, poetry or other means of communication.

73. Withdrawals from collective worship were greater than from RE teaching but still small. With one exception the withdrawals did not exceed 3 per cent of the school roll. However, in one school in the greater London area, governors had required

parents effectively to opt in by answering a questionnaire. This resulted in 800 of the 900 pupils withdrawing from collective worship.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

74. Current regulations for the provision of religious education and collective worship in special schools are contained in schedule 2 of the Education (approval of special schools) Regulations 1983, which replicate, so far as is practicable, the requirements placed on mainstream schools. A detailed look at the inspection reports of 10 special schools during 1992/3 revealed that schools had not adequately distinguished between the need to teach specific RE and the need to provide adequately for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The teaching of RE is in most cases weak but the schools are in many cases integrating religious principles within a well-developed programme designed to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

75. Staff in the sample of schools surveyed were keen to talk about RE and used the inspection visits to help clarify their thinking in what they saw as a complex and uncertain area. Headteachers were positive about RE, although somewhat unsure about its scope. They were keen to set RE in the context of their schools' aims and to link it directly to policies for the personal development of pupils. There is a need to distinguish clearly between the subject content of RE and the contribution which the subject makes to developing social capacities and/or personal competence in the pupils. Special schools need to think through the relationship between these dimensions and examine whether they merit a different response.

76. Pupils' specific needs and circumstances determine to a large extent the whole curriculum approach of special schools and RE is no exception. The following extract from notes on a visit to a school for pupils with a physical disability and/or delicate health illustrates:

"There is much which demands that the school should treat very seriously issues of personal identity, belief and spirituality. All connected with the school live close to, or

alongside, the possibility (sometimes imminent) of death and the questions this raises for individuals and their relationships with others. "Why me?" "Why does God allow this to happen?" Likewise, other issues are close to the surface, often because of heightened sensitivity to do with dating, marriage, children, caring for others, being cared for by others, personal values or self image. The school must respond to these questions, encourage pupils to think seriously and help them towards articulating their concerns and to be confident to do so."

77. Much RE in special schools was seen as implicit, essentially taking place within a social setting and largely related to others within the school and in the wider community. It was seen as a strong feature of a personal and social education (PSE) curriculum. Direct teaching about religion was often provided only sporadically and there was much evidence of poor teaching and a narrow approach, partly resulting from confusion over the nature and purpose of the subject and over its relationship to collective worship, and partly from the lack of attention given to the needs of special schools within Agreed Syllabuses. Inspection indicated that the quality of the implicit work - which brings together the spiritual and social development of pupils - was good and significantly better than school documentation indicated.

78. As in primary schools, many special schools establish a close link between their provision of collective worship and the teaching of RE. Although this sometimes led to inadequate coverage of teaching about religion, there were strong links with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development promoted throughout the schools and with policies for PSE and pastoral care and guidance. A co-ordinated programme of this kind is rarely seen in mainstream secondary schools. Significantly, those special schools with effective leadership and management achieved a balance between the curriculum and care which resulted in more coherent approaches both to the separate aspects of the programme and to the programme as a whole.

Insofar as the spiritual dimension can be explored through feelings and emotions, relationships, experiences of the environment and moral dilemmas, exploring commitment and mystery, special schools were making good progress. A fuller understanding of other peoples' spirituality can only arise from a study of the key beliefs of Christian and other principal world faiths and the responses made by believers.

ISSUES

80. The major issue is the widespread non-compliance with the ERA and the low status accorded to RE in school plans. At least 20 per cent of the primary schools made no provision for RE, 75 per cent of secondary schools provided inadequate time in Key Stage 4, and very little RE provision was found in school sixth forms. In schools of all kinds, priority given to the implementation of the National Curriculum and its assessment has tended to overshadow the requirements for RE. Even in those voluntary aided schools where RE and collective worship generally enjoy a higher status, and are of better quality, it was not unusual to find poor lessons taken by non-specialist teachers.

81. Inspection has shown that collective worship within primary schools makes a strong contribution to the ethos and quality of the school community. Almost all acts of collective worship seen had some merit, and there was strong evidence that pupils' social and moral development received good support from most of the activities observed. More attention needs to be given to the way in which spiritual development might be promoted. For this to happen, schools need to have a shared vocabulary which will help to advance their understanding of how spiritual development is promoted within the school. At secondary level the best practice observed continued the traditions established within the primary sector. Unfortunately, few secondary schools provided regular acts of collective worship. A few schools claimed to promote worship through tutor group time. but the evidence was that this was rarely attempted and only occasionally successful.

82. Many reasons are given by schools to explain why it is difficult to provide collective worship on a daily basis. Many of these - inappropriate and/or inadequate accommodation, unwilling staff, inexperienced staff, lack of will on the part of headteacher and, governors - have been confirmed in inspection. Whatever the, cause, it remains the case that if the findings of

this survey are replicated across all schools, few are providing the good-quality daily acts of mainly Christian collective worship required by recent legislation. It might be appropriate to consider how that requirement could be better implemented.

83. If the current legal status of RE is to be reflected in practice, consideration needs to be given to:

(i) the clarification of the aims of RE teaching; a great variety of expectations presently compete and there is need for a clear vision about the knowledge, skills and understanding that should inform the content of RE teaching at each key stage;

(ii) improved documentation which makes clear to all teachers, but especially to those who are not specialists, what they are expected to teach and how the elements fit together to provide continuity and progression. Some Agreed Syllabuses could be more helpful, especially for special schools. Even so, many more schools need to give greater attention to converting the Agreed Syllabus into detailed schemes of work;

(iii) the appointment of sufficient specialist staff to ensure proper coverage of the curriculum as determined by the Agreed Syllabus or school syllabus;

(iv) the provision of time in which the stated Agreed Syllabus material can be taught;

(v) the provision of accommodation, books and other resources of a quality and quantity sufficient to promote good learning and high attainment;

(vi) the provision of good-quality INSET and staff support. Most schools consider themselves fortunate to have one specialist teacher. The evidence of inspection suggests that such teachers are not getting adequate support either through the

provision of courses or by support offered within the school. RE is unique in that the nature of curriculum provision is specified locally by each SACRE in its Agreed Syllabus. Relatively few LEAs now have the capacity to provide courses or to organise follow-up work within schools, even when they have produced a good-quality Agreed Syllabus: yet few schools, left to themselves, consider RE a priority and recognise the extent of their need for help.

84. Better guidance to schools is needed about the teaching of religions other than Christianity. There is a widespread misconception among the public that current RE teaching has abandoned Christianity. The evidence of inspection over recent years is that this is untrue. Much RE teaching is confined to a rather dull exposition of basic Christian beliefs, with little attempt to examine Christianity as a major world faith or as a belief system affecting people's daily lives. Coverage of other world faiths is generally either confined to a small study of festivals or issues taken out of context, or is part of a thematic or conceptual study of religion, in which the pupils are left confused as to what believers believe and how those beliefs influence their lives as members of a faith community.

85. This neglect of major world faiths diminishes the contribution which RE teaching should make to pupils' broader cultural and social development. In almost half the schools inspected, the pupils received a rather narrow view of the world. Well-taught RE provides a framework for helping pupils to understand the nature and significance, for example, of the art, music, history or geography of other cultures. Few pupils were aware by the age of 16 of the subtle differences between religion, ethnicity and culture in determining peoples' attitudes, dress and codes of behaviour.

Consideration should be given to:

• establishing clear guidance within Agreed Syllabuses about the proportion of time within RE that should be devoted to the teaching of Christianity and to other' specified world

faiths; this guidance should ensure that the legal requirement to teach world faiths other than Christianity will result in a depth of study likely to provide an understanding of that faith, and a continuity of learning across the key stages. The study of too many religious beliefs at once should be avoided;

• clarifying the response of schools to pupils with a religious faith. It is important that each pupil should feel that his or her religious faith is respected by the school within a balanced approach to religious education.