

Michael Gove personally killing RE, say enthusiasts for RE

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The chairman of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, John Keast, has accused the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, of dismantling religious education in schools. In a letter published in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* on Thursday of last week, he comments that after his decision to leave religious education out of both the English Baccalaureate and the school-curriculum review, Mr Gove's decisions have now put two-thirds of university-training courses for RE teachers at risk.

"Having underlined the significance of the religious dimension in underpinning personal and communal values, David Cameron is in the ironic position of having an Education Secretary who appears to be dismantling the very school subject committed to teaching about these issues," he wrote. The letter calls on Mr Gove "to reverse the downward spiral in RE".

Mr Keast, formerly the top government expert on religious education, drew attention to the Council's concerns about the future of RE in his response to the draft report of the national curriculum review group, published before Christmas.

The report itself warns of the "unintended consequences" for subjects outside the national curriculum. If its proposals go ahead unaltered, RE will have to compete for curriculum time with subjects such as citizenship and the "catch-all" Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education, which includes sex and relationships education.

In his initial response on behalf of the RE Council Mr Keast suggests that RE is "very much an 'also-ran' in the work being done on the nature and purpose of the school curriculum. ... If it is not included in what follows there is immense danger of further marginalisation."

He warns that the disappearance of RE material from the National Curriculum website, the collapse of many local arrangements for RE, and the cuts in RE teacher-training places together give the impression of a deliberate campaign against RE by the Secretary of State.

The response claims "[Mr Gove] is in danger of going down in history as the Conservative Secretary of State who presided over the decline of RE in this country while his Prime Minister extolled the importance of faith in the life of our society and communities".

The RE Council wrote earlier this month to the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, asking to be involved in the next stage of the curriculum review.

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, said: "Mr Gove is to be congratulated in resisting pressure to put more school time and resources into RE. Religious Education already has a privileged and untouchable place in schools – the only subject that must be taught by law in every state school in the land – and more than enough time is spent on it already. With limited resources, we must concentrate them where they will be most effective.

"The current provision for local determination of the RE syllabus means provision is patchy in terms of breadth and balance, leaving many pupils short-changed. Rather than be open-house to

religious evangelists, RE needs radical reform to ensure religion and belief are taught with absolute objectivity."

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