

# Religious education contributes to good community relations, claims parliamentary report

Posted: Thu, 20th Mar 2014

A parliamentary group has published a report saying that Religious Education in schools can help counter extremism and build better community relations.

The group's report, [RE and Good Community Relations](#) makes the case for better training for RE teachers and a higher profile for RE in the curriculum.

The group's chair, Stephen Lloyd MP, said RE teaching was "more important than ever before".

He said religions were "often portrayed inaccurately" in society at large, and teaching RE could break down the prejudice that could develop as a consequence.

However, the report itself notes that, as Ofsted is no longer required to inspect the duty to promote community cohesion, there is "insufficient evidence on which to evaluate progress".

The report also endorses the current arrangements for RE, which means schools' syllabuses are determined locally by committees, known as SACREs, comprised of local churches, faith groups, teachers, and local authority representatives. SACREs are not required to include any specifically non-religious representatives, and any there are – usually humanists – are denied the power to vote.

According to the report SACREs can provide models of "good community collaboration" and can "tailor the RE curriculum to meet the needs of their local communities".

The reports makes no mention of the fact that many faith schools are permitted to teach RE in accordance with the tenets of the particular faith of the school, and RE classes can be confessional in nature.

The report asks, but leaves unanswered, how learning about religions and worldviews can be made more interesting and relevant for pupils of no religion.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, said: "Particularly in a diverse society such as ours, it is important that young people learn about the beliefs and perspectives of those whose beliefs and values differ from their own, but the outdated model of 'religious education' is not fit for purpose and needs serious reform.

"It's clear that many of those advocating the strengthening of RE in its current form are motivated more by their desire to promulgate their own beliefs in schools than ensuring pupils receive the broad and balanced education they deserve.

"A new National Curriculum subject under a different name that covers a variety of religious, non-religious and secular philosophies and worldviews would equip pupils with valuable insight, and would provide a more inclusive and neutral environment for pupils to take a more objective

approach to the consideration of moral and ethical issues."

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