

Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
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2 December 2010

RE: The Importance of Teaching

Dear Michael Gove

As Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, I am writing to you in order to explore some of the issues raised by the recent White Paper (The Importance of Teaching).

The belief that through education we can achieve a fairer society is one that we share and we would concur with many of the aspirations laid out in the programme of changes, for example the need to raise standards, promote subject knowledge, narrow the attainment gap, create a world class curriculum. As the representative voice of RE teachers in England we are heartened to read that the role of subject associations is recognised in their ability to bring teachers together between schools.

There are, however, a number of pressing issues that are brought to the fore in regard to the proposed changes.

The White Paper makes no overt reference to the need for young people to understand the complex inter-relationships of religion and belief in contemporary society. At a time when communities are becoming ever more diverse, there has never been a greater need for good Religious Education to help create a more religiously literate and cohesive society.

Neither is there any apparent recognition of the role schools need to play in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils, which is one of the central duties as set out in the National Curriculum (2000). We would stand in full agreement with the concern shown over this matter by the Religious Education Council, in their recent letter to you, where they refer to the White Paper's "silence" in respect of these issues.

We are concerned that damage may be done to the excellent progress that has been made in the teaching of RE at GCSE level over recent years and want to seek assurances that Religious Studies will be listed as one of the 'Humanities' subjects in the proposed English Baccalaureate.

We also feel compelled to raise the issue of the RE short course, which over the past 10 years has been a remarkable success story, seeing the number of candidates sitting the exam increasing ten-fold. Given that there is a statutory requirement for all schools to teach RE from 5-18, this exam specification has provided a valuable bench mark, allowing students to achieve a recognisable qualification through the development of detailed knowledge and understanding, skills of interpretation and analysis etc. It would be a retrograde step to remove this qualification.

Finally, I wrote to you recently, on behalf of NATRE, to offer our expertise and our readiness to participate in any discussions relating to curriculum review that the Department might be undertaking. That offer still stands.

Yours sincerely

Ed Pawson
Chair, NATRE

CC
Nick Gibb, Schools Minister
Shanti Rebello, Curriculum Team