

## Greater clarity for Academies in relation to RE?

At the end of March 2018, minister for schools; Nick Gibb MP responded to a parliamentary question about RE. In the response he said the following: “Where academies are subject to the same statutory duties as maintained schools, the Secretary of State has powers to enforce compliance via the terms of the funding agreement.” NATRE subsequently wrote to the DfE in an attempt to clarify what sort of matter might result in a Secretary of State using these powers in relation to RE. We asked: 'Can you please provide us with some guidance about how you might judge a complaint about the failure of an academy to meet its funding agreement in relation to RE?'

The letter we received in response this week included the following six points:

1. In most non-religiously designated academy funding agreements, the requirement to provide religious education is in line with S.375(3) of the Education Act 1996 – religious education that **reflects the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are Christian, whilst taking into account the practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain;**
2. Academies **may choose to use an agreed syllabus** in full or part to meet their requirements to provide RE. They may also choose to develop their **own syllabus that meets the requirements in their funding agreement** (including S.375 above);
3. We would expect that all schools provide pupils with **a curriculum that is high quality and promotes progression** through the key stages, including in RE;
4. ... head teachers should ensure that “the subject is **well led and effectively managed**, and that standards and achievement in RE, and the quality of the provision, are subject to **regular and effective self-evaluation;**
5. If inspectors become aware that a school is not delivering the curriculum that it is expected to be offering, this will be reflected in the **assessment of the leadership and management** of the school, which in turn will inform the overall effectiveness of the school;
6. ...if the department is made aware of an academy that is not meeting the requirements for providing RE as outlined above, the **complaint would be passed onto the operational team** where the academy was located. The operational team would work with the policy team to understand the arrangements and specific situation in that school, and work with the school to resolve the matter.

The implication of these points is that when academies publish details of their curriculum for RE for each year group (as they are required to do following statutory guidance) the curriculum must be clear about:

- a) how it reflects the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (S.375(3) of the Education Act 1996)
- b) which specific syllabus is followed e.g. A local Agreed Syllabus or other Syllabus that includes sufficient clear information to allow teachers, parents and others to be clear about what content is to be taught in each year of each key stage? (Note: a previous complaint about a syllabus for RE has secured this working definition of a syllabus with support from DfE lawyers)
- c) how progression in knowledge, understanding and skills is secured in Religious Education as pupils move from one-year group to another