

## A report on the characteristics of schools in relation to provision and standards in Religious Studies at GCSE with a focus on ethnicity and free school meals.

NATRE made a Freedom of Information request to the Department for Education in May 2019 based on the data collected about the ethnicity of pupils in state funded secondary schools in England as part of the school census in 2017 and 2018. This data was combined with school level information about the rate of entry for GCSE RS and the performance of pupils at the end of year 11.

### Rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies by ethnicity

In 2017 there were 527,744 pupils recorded on school rolls at the end of key stage 4 in 2017 the cohort size was slightly smaller at 523,626 -see figure 1 below. The ethnic profile of these cohorts was as follows:

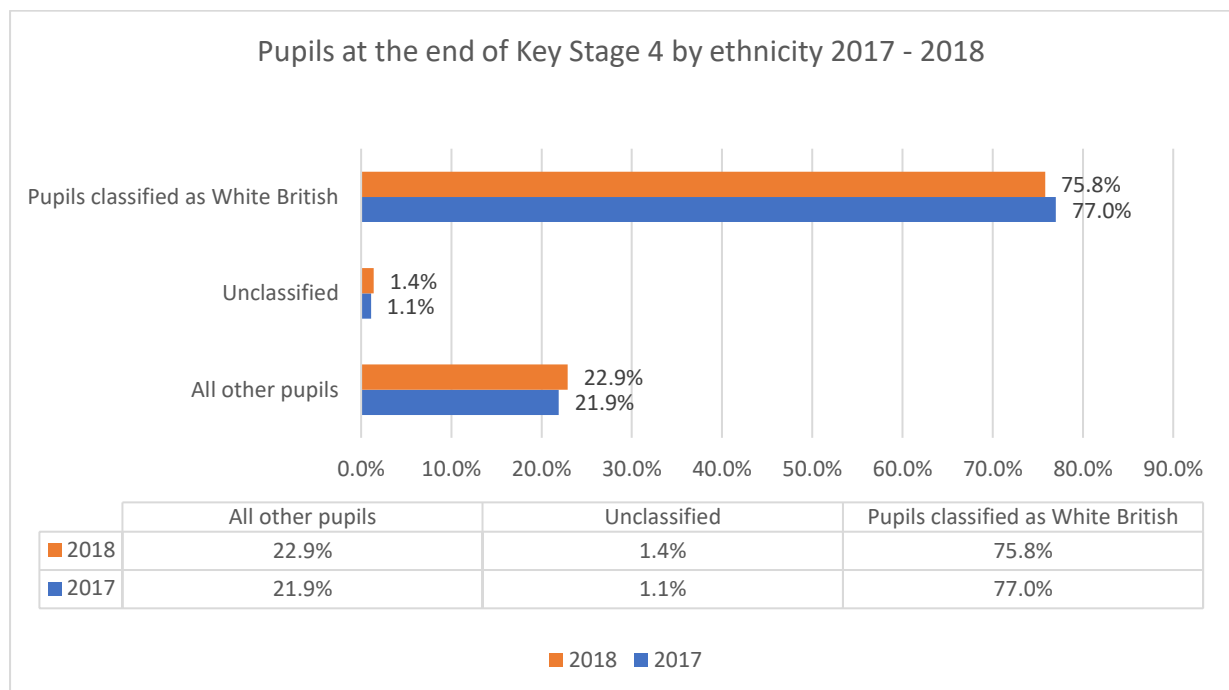


Figure 1

The ethnic profile of pupils entered for Religious Studies GCSE full course (Figure 2) differs markedly from the year 11 cohort (Figure 1). Whereas 46.5% of all pupils were entered for GCSE RS in 2017, 41.3% were entered in 2018; a fall of 11.2%. The rate of entry for those classified as White British fell by a slightly greater amount; 13.5%. On the other hand, the rate of entry for *pupils in the 'all other pupils' ethnic category*, fell by only 4.5%; less than half the other two rates.

Pupils described as 'unclassified. according to their ethnicity made up less than 1.5% of the cohort for each year.

The most striking finding recorded by this figure 2 is that **White British pupils were far less likely to be entered for GCSE RS Full Course than 'other pupils' in both years. The difference was 12.1 percentage points in 2017 and 15.5 in 2018.**

When the entries for GCSE Short Course (figure 3) are taken into consideration, the difference between pupils classified as “White British” and “other pupils” is repeated. Whereas 53.4% of all pupils were entered for any GCSE RS in 2017, 43.3% were entered in 2018; a fall of 18.9%. The rate of entry for those classified as White British again fell by a slightly greater amount 21.8%. On the other hand, the rate of entry for *pupils in the ‘all other pupils’ ethnic category*, fell by only 11%; which equates to almost half the rate for pupils classified as White British.

Similar to the full course entry rates, when both short and full course patterns are taken into consideration (Figure 3), White British pupils were far less likely to be entered for any RS GCSE than ‘other pupils’. The difference was 10.9 percentage points in 2017 but had risen to 15 by 2018.

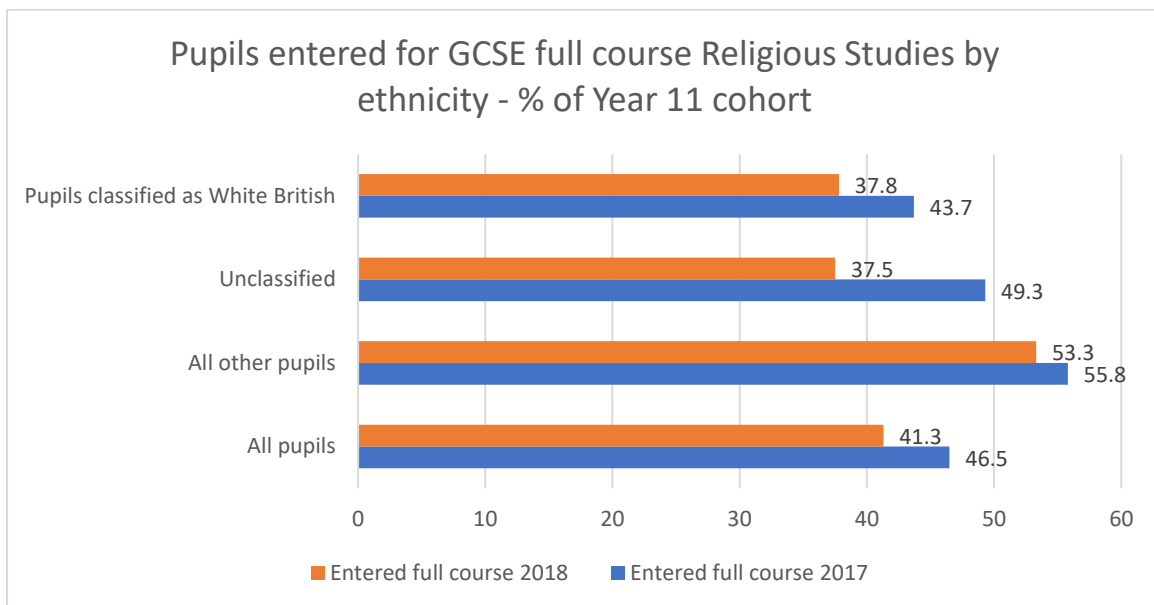


Figure 2

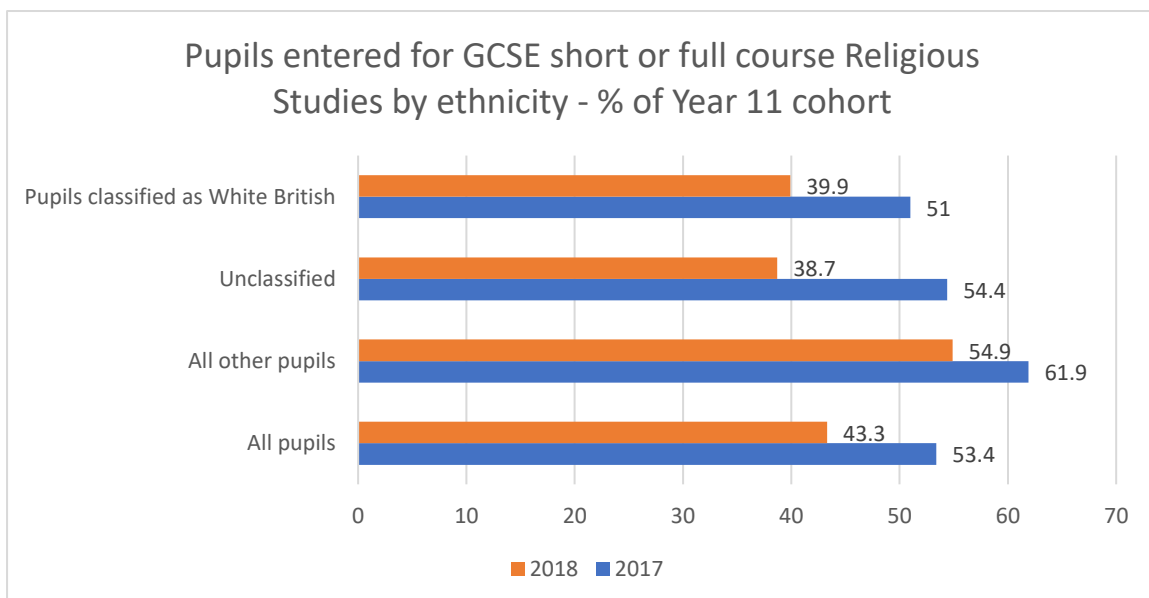


Figure 3

**How rates of entry for GCSE RS differ in schools with different levels of White British and ‘other’ ethnic groups.**

Figure 4 below demonstrates that schools that are less ethnically diverse, on average, enter fewer pupils for GCSE RS. In fact, schools where 80-100% of pupils are classified as White British, enter approaching half as many pupils for the subject at GCSE as those where pupils classified as White British represent between 0-20%.

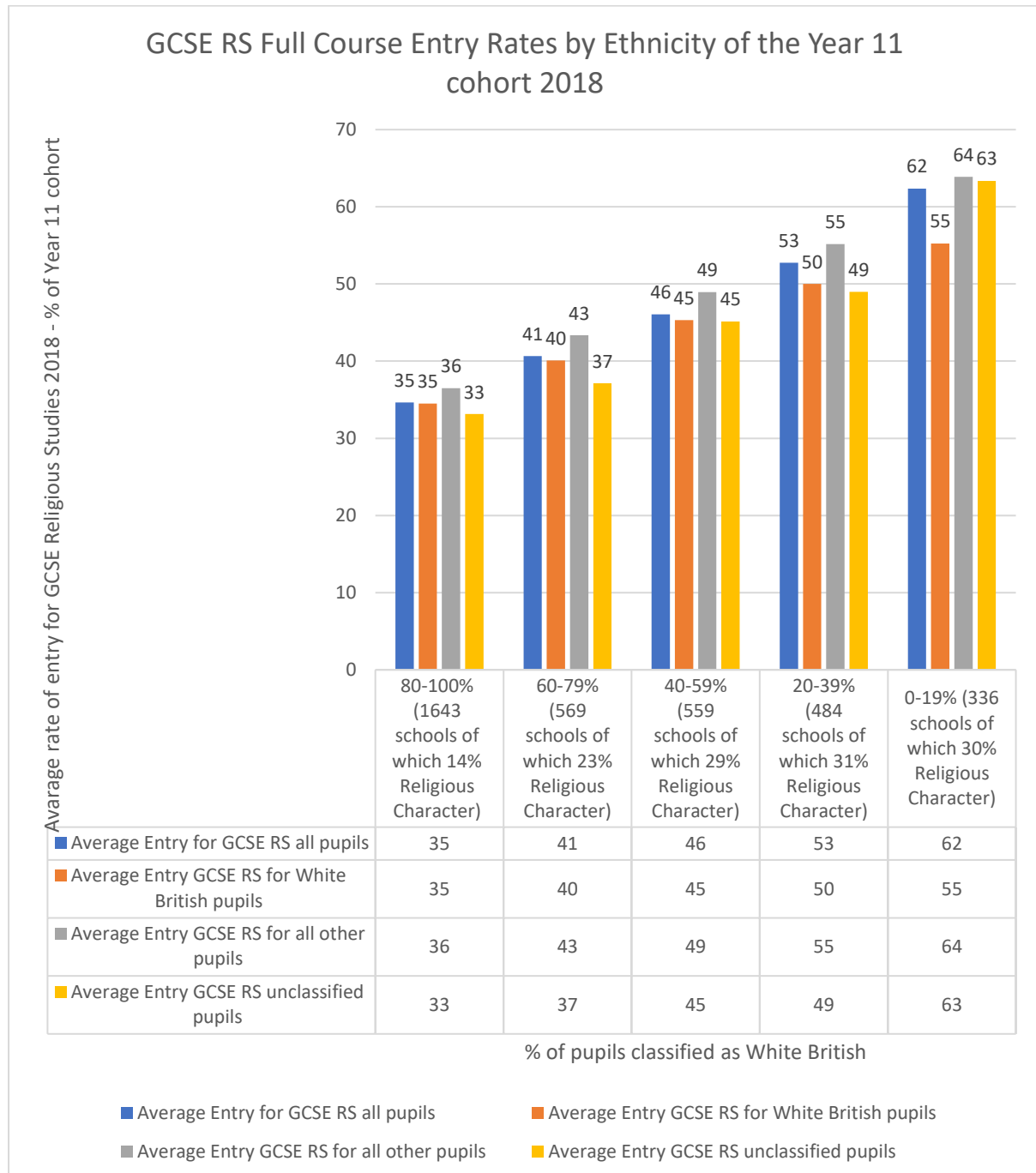


Figure 4

### How rates of entry for GCSE RS change in schools with different levels of entitlement to Free School Meals

In this chart, schools are ranked in order of the % of their pupils entitled to free school meals and divided into four quartiles. The first quartile (on the left of the chart) represents the schools in the lowest quarter of the ranked list in terms of pupils entitled to free school meals. The highest quartile (on the right of the chart), represents those in the top quarter in the ranked list. These schools have the highest proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals. There are 755 schools in each quartile.

The chart shows that in those schools where the most pupils are entitled to free school meals, the entry rates for GCSE RS are on average 25% lower than schools with the fewest pupils with this entitlement. This pattern needs further exploration to establish whether or not it is indicative of narrowing of the curriculum or another explanation. A report entitled, “Closing the gap” published earlier this year, found narrowing the curriculum disadvantages the disadvantaged. <https://www.gla-assessment.co.uk/closingthegap>

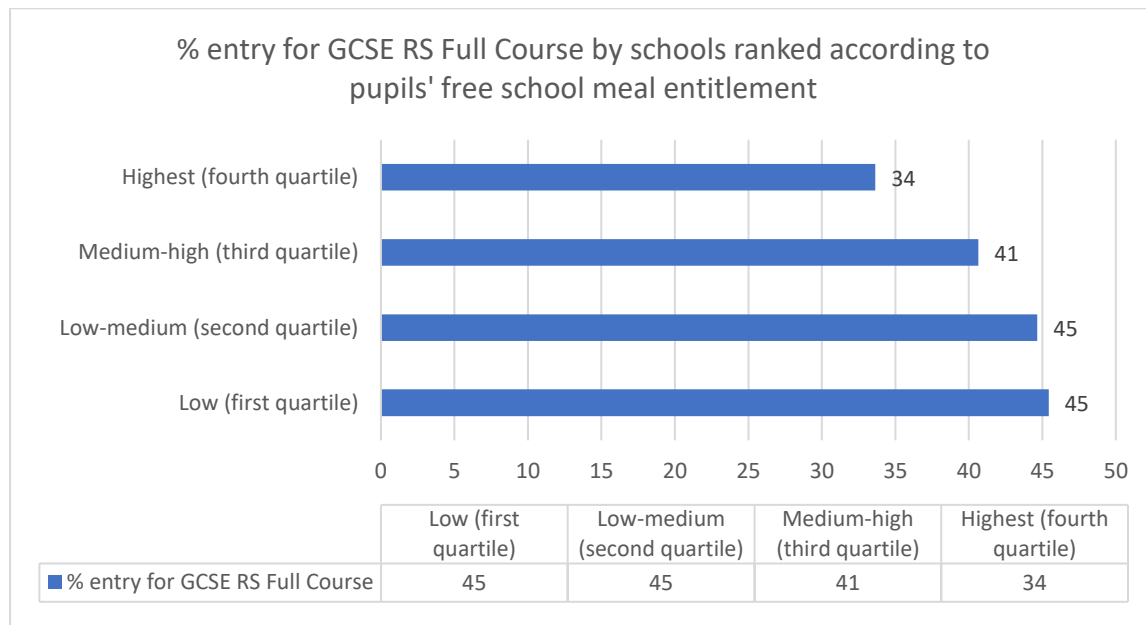


Figure 5

### Rates of performance at GCSE Religious Studies by ethnicity

The charts that follow demonstrate that pupils classified as White British perform slightly below (2.4%) the average for all pupils at GCSE Religious Studies in 2017 and 3.8% below in 2018. Those classified as ‘all other’ ethnic groups however, performed 6.8% above the average for all pupils in 2017 and 9.1% above in 2018. The difference in performance between those classified as “White British” pupils who are not White British was 9.4% in 2017 and 13.4% in 2018.

It is Government Policy to exclude RS from the English Baccalaureate and to disallow GCSE Short Course as a qualification that counts in performance tables. This has clearly had a significant impact on the number of pupils studying GCSE RS. (see Figure 7). As opportunities to enter or opt for religious studies have declined therefore, it is pupils not classified as White British who are most likely to be at a disadvantage. Schools are incentivised to enter pupils for EBacc subjects even when this might not be in the best interests of a pupil who might be better advised to study a non-EBacc subject, such as RS, Music or Design and Technology.

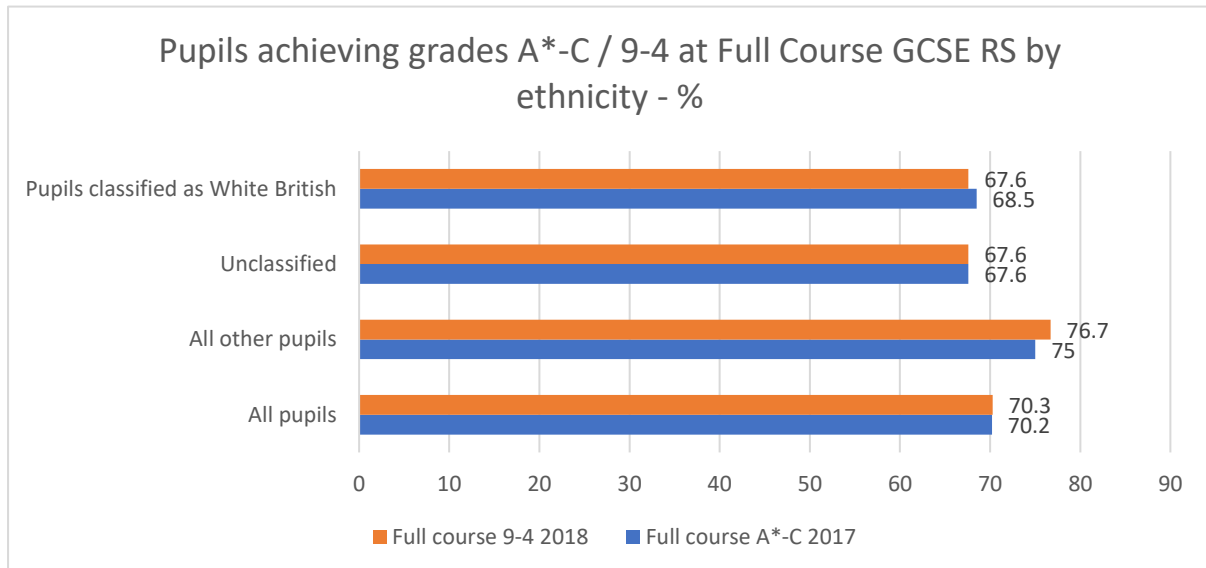


Figure 6

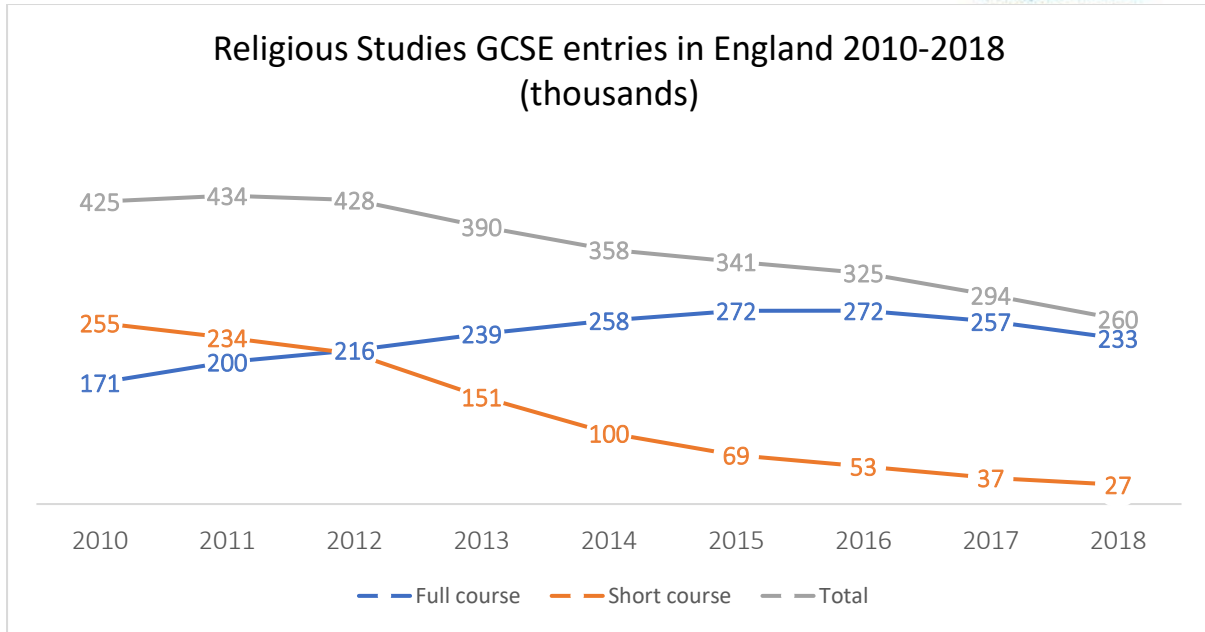


Figure 7