

Why Ofsted's inspection of RE requires improvement

Introduction:

On May 1st, 2015, NATRE served Ofsted with a freedom of information request. The request was made because we were frustrated by ministerial claims that if schools were failing to make appropriate provision for RE, Ofsted would include this failing in inspection reports and require schools to make improvements.

The request was as follows:

(A) How many reports have made specific mention of a maintained school failing to meet its statutory duties in relation to RE?

(B) How many reports have made specific mention of an academy or free schools failing to meet its contractual obligations in relation to RE as defined in their funding agreements?

Predictably, the response by Ofsted reminded us of what we already knew; that, "... the focus of the current Section 5 inspection is on the overall effectiveness of a school, rather than compliance with specific curriculum requirements" but added:

"In response to your specific questions, we have undertaken a keyword search of the Section 5 reports published since September 2013. We can advise that, in relation to question a) no reports have made specific mention of a maintained school failing to meet its statutory duties in relation to RE and, for question b) one report has made specific mention of an academy or free school failing to meet its DfE funding agreement in relation to RE.

However, as a result of this keyword search, we can confirm that reports for two maintained schools and three academies highlight that RE is either not being taught, or not being taught across all key stages or year groups."

Needless to say, we were most interested to know about the content of these five reports. Why had these particular inspections made reference to RE and what did they say? A second freedom of information identified the reports of these schools and the references to RE are summarised in appendix A.

Why are these reports interesting?

1. Even though we are aware of scores of schools and academies around the country that are failing to make appropriate provision for RE¹, only these five reports make the sort of comments we would expect. In 2013-14 Ofsted carried out 6,469 inspections of schools, so if a similar number were inspected in 2014-15, this represents a tiny number of reports; less than 0.1%
2. The failure to meet statutory requirements is referenced in the report on school 1 and to meeting the funding agreement of an academy in report 4
3. Reference is made to the failure to provide RE in a particular year group(s), key stage(s) in school 1, 2, 4 and 5
4. Reference is made to the gathering of evidence through conversations with pupils in the report of school 3
5. Reference is made to the need to employ subject specialist teachers to help students achieve well in the report of school 5
6. All these reports are for schools graded as requiring improvement, inadequate or special measures. None are of schools judged to be good or outstanding even though we have evidence that similar comments could be made about them in relation to RE.
7. Three reports list action to improve provision in the "What does the school need to do to improve further?" section (1,4,5)

What do the reports show?

These reports show that it is entirely within the power of Ofsted inspections teams working to the framework for inspection, to properly inspect RE. Conversations with pupils, checking the curriculum, speaking with staff, looking at pupils' work are part of the normal pattern of activities.

NATRE calls on Ofsted to:

1. Follow the good example of the inspectors involved in the production of these five reports and ensure that in all schools inspected, pupils are receiving their proper entitlement to RE and if they are not, to require action in the 'What does the school need to do to improve further?' section.
2. Ask pupils (1) about the timetabling of RE lessons and (2) about religion and belief to assess whether they have knowledge and understanding to underpin respect and tolerance for people with different religions and beliefs
3. Continue the monitoring of school websites and identify schools that do not appear to be making provision for RE

¹ <http://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/natre-survey-2014/>

4. Ensure inspectors analyse the pattern and impact of non-specialist teachers of RE to identify whether this has a positive (as in report 2) or negative (as in report 5) effect on pupils' learning
5. Clarify the route by which 'a qualifying complaint' about the quality or lack of provision for RE can be made.
6. Reinstate subject survey visits and regular subject reports to supplement section 5 inspections.

Appendix A

School 1: Inspected in February 2015. An academy in the East of England. The academy was judged inadequate. These were the references to RE:

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Rapidly improve leadership and management, including governance, by:

making sure that the curriculum meets legal requirements for delivering religious education across Key Stage 4

Inspection judgements: The leadership and management are inadequate:

The curriculum meets most statutory requirements, with the exception of students' entitlement to religious education in Key Stage 4.

School 2: Inspected in October 2014. An academy in the South of England. The academy was judged as requiring improvement. These were the references to RE:

Inspection judgements: The leadership and management requires improvement:

The curriculum requires improvement because religious education is not taught in Years 10 to 13.

School 3: Inspected in February 2015. A school in the Midlands. The school was judged as inadequate. These were the references to RE:

Inspection judgements: The leadership and management are inadequate:

Pupils reported that they rarely access religious education lessons. *

School 4: Inspected in November 2014. An academy in the Midlands. The academy was judged as inadequate. These were the references to RE:

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Urgently improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, especially in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that:

- the curriculum more effectively supports the development of students' basic literacy and numeracy skills and meets the requirements for the teaching of religious education in Year 10

Inspection judgements: The leadership and management are inadequate:

The Year 10 range of subjects does not include the teaching of religious education. As a consequence, the academy is not complying with the Department for Education's funding agreement.

School 5: Inspected in June 2014: A school in the Midlands. The school was judged to require special measures. These were the references to RE:

Students do not receive their full entitlement to all subjects in the National Curriculum, or in religious education

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Improve leadership so that all students achieve well by:

- making sure that all students receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum and religious education, and that school leaders recruit subject specialist teachers to teach humanities subjects

Inspection judgements: The leadership and management are inadequate:

There are no lessons in religious studies at either Key Stage 3 or 4 and students do not have opportunity to learn about Christianity or other faiths, beliefs or cultures. There is no daily act of collective worship or opportunity for reflection elsewhere in the timetable. Plans are in place to address this for September 2014.

There are not currently enough specialist teachers of humanities in the school to teach all the humanities lessons on the timetable, and many lessons are taught by English teachers.