

Excellence and distinctiveness

Guidance on RE in Church of England
schools

October 2005



EDUCATION DIVISION WITH
THE NATIONAL SOCIETY

Ever since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 Religious Education has suffered for lack of a nationally accepted standard. The subjects within the National Curriculum have seen gains in status and in national development funding that have been lacking for RE. The Church of England, along with many other organisations in the world of RE, has been pressing for action to redress this imbalance for many years.

In October 2003 Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education, held a consultation with a large number of faith leaders, including representatives of the Church of England, which yielded the clear result that they would work together with a group of teachers, academics, advisers, inspectors and consultants to produce a National Framework for RE. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority was commissioned to coordinate this task.

The resulting non-statutory Framework, which had the full support of the Church of England representatives, was published by QCA in October 2004. Although Charles Clarke moved to be Home Secretary in December 2004, we shall hold the government to their commitment to resource the Framework adequately with a continuing programme of financial and professional support. We look for the National Framework to become the kite-mark for quality RE.

The primary audience for the National Framework is the Local Authority Agreed Syllabus Conferences and those responsible for setting the RE curriculum in faith-based schools. The Board of Education has decided that the new Framework should underpin RE in all church schools. The best means of achieving this would be for all Church of England schools to adopt their locally agreed syllabus, provided it has been produced on the basis of the National Framework for RE. That is a matter on which Diocesan Boards of Education will advise their schools.

This Guidance for the Church of England in implementing the Framework is supplementary to the Framework and does not seek to replace it. It should be used in tandem with the Framework to ensure that RE in church schools is of the highest quality and reflects their distinctive Christian character. It is advisory to the dioceses. I hope it will be helpful as they consider a response to the Framework and their role in developing new agreed syllabuses.

The Church of England is well placed to support the implementation of the National Framework for RE. Each Agreed Syllabus Conference is made up of four committees, one of which represents the Church of England. All four committees have to be unanimous in their approval of a syllabus and therefore each one has an effective veto. We recommend that the members of the Church of England committee on a SACRE or ASC make it clear from the beginning that they will not support any proposed agreed syllabus that is not based on the new National Framework, and that, if necessary, they take this commitment to its logical conclusion.

I am grateful to the working group responsible for producing this Guidance and commend it to the dioceses of the Church of England.

+Kenneth Portsmouth

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