

Gillian Georgiou (Diocesan RE Adviser)

Reports for SACRE

(a) Commission on RE

The Commission on RE is a high-profile independent commission with a remit to make recommendations designed to improve the quality and rigour of Religious Education, and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. It is made up of fourteen commissioners from a wide variety of backgrounds, and includes teachers, lecturers, researchers, school inspectors, lawyers and journalists. The Chair of the Commission, the Very Rev Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, is formerly a Diocesan Director of Education and RE teacher. At the launch of the Commission, he commented that, "Religion is a powerful force for good in our world, and the perversion of it a powerful force for evil. If our society and our world are to benefit from the good and to avoid the evil, it is vital that children develop religious literacy and come to understand religious perceptions and motivations. They need to learn about their own religious or non-religious beliefs and practices and attitudes and learn to respect those of their fellow human beings. So Religious Education is an important, but often underrated, part of the school curriculum. I look forward to exploring with my fellow commissioners the changes that will allow RE to play its proper part in the formation of young people who will contribute to the sum of human happiness."

Through a series of wide-ranging and inclusive evidence-gathering sessions around England, the Commission will consider the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE in order to inform policy-makers about these areas. This includes considering the nature, purpose and scope of RE, the enabling factors that promote high-quality RE and the barriers that currently limit it. The Commission will take account of the legal and structural arrangements for RE, the quality of teaching and learning nationally, recruitment, initial teacher education and continuing professional development for RE, the age-range for which RE should be required, the current right to withdraw from RE and the range of school settings in which RE should be required. It will consider whether there should be a common entitlement in RE and, if so, what this entitlement should be.

Two major evidence-gathering sessions have already taken place in London and Birmingham. Both heard from a wide range of contributors, including teachers, pupils, advisers, consultants, and inspectors. Thus far, there is strong evidence to suggest that better support needs to be provided for both primary and secondary teachers at the initial teacher education stage. Contributors have also raised their concerns about the lack of accountability for schools and academies who fail to meet the current statutory obligations in relation to RE. Many contributors are in favour of getting rid of the right to withdraw from RE, noting that it is increasingly used to remove children from teaching about specific religions. However, some contributors

have cautioned that removing this right to withdraw could be in contravention of certain human rights legislation.

If you are interested in finding out more about the work of the Commission or you would like to make your own contribution, please visit their website: www.commissiononre.org.uk.

(b) Diocesan RE Adviser Report

The second half of this academic year has provided an opportunity to start a second block of training on the *Understanding Christianity* resource. We now have over 50% of church schools within the Diocese of Lincoln engaged with this training and will run a third block of training in September. We are beginning to be able to evidence the impact of the resource on pupils' (and staff) religious literacy and we are working closely with Tony Luby at Bishop Grosseteste University to produce a research paper on the initial implementation and impact of the resource.

Another key focus this academic year has been on ensuring that church schools are familiar with the expectations of the Church of England Education Office in relation to RE (cf. the *Statement of Entitlement*). In particular, that has involved ensuring that senior leadership teams – including governors – are aware of their responsibilities in relating to supporting and monitoring RE.

We have also been involved in carrying out some research into curriculum balance in RE (part of a wider national project) and we have begun to have conversations with RE subject leaders about their knowledge and understanding of curriculum design in relation to RE. It is clear that the curriculum delivered at both primary and secondary levels can be quite patchy and random, often without a clear sense of direction. This means that pupils can struggle to see what their learning is building towards, which has implications for their engagement in RE. RE subject leaders have valued the opportunity to reflect on and develop their RE curriculum so that the pathway of learning makes more sense. This is something that they feel will be particularly valuable when the new Lincolnshire locally agreed syllabus is launched and it might be useful to consider extending this sort of training and support into a wider range of schools and academies.