

Written evidence submitted by RE Policy Unit to The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB47)

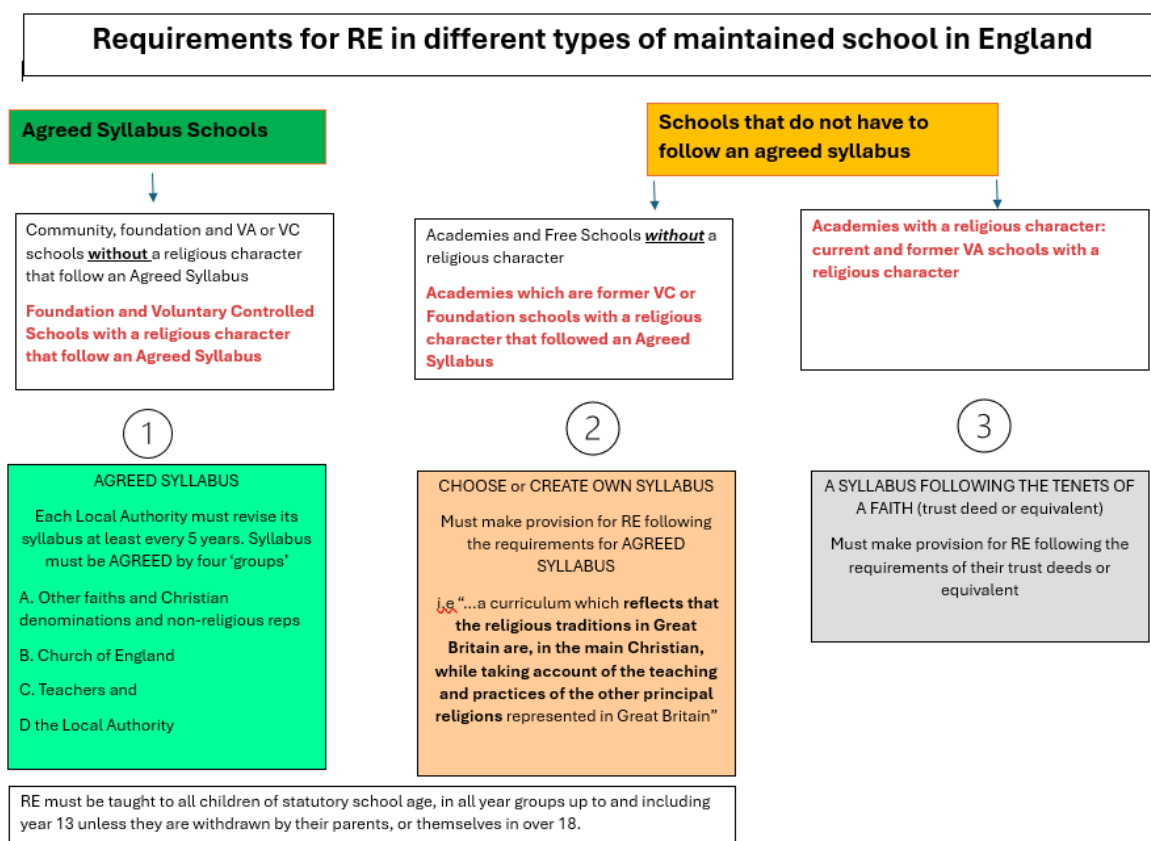
Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill – A submission from the RE Policy Unit¹

This submission focuses on the clauses in the Bill that require schools that are designated as academies to follow the National Curriculum (Section 41 page 35). It aims to draw the attention of the committee to the potential unintended consequences for the subject of Religious Education of this measure unless other steps are taken to secure that provision.

Background:

Religious Education is part of the Basic Curriculum and must be taught to all pupils on the school roll unless a pupil is withdrawn by their parents (or the student themselves if they are over 18 years of age). The basic curriculum in England consists of RE, Relationships and Sex Education plus the National Curriculum. There is no right of withdrawal from the subjects of the National Curriculum. See [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#).

The diagram below explains the different statutory requirements for RE



The problem

Academies are free to develop their own syllabi for Religious Education. Model funding agreements with the Department for Education include the very broad requirements set out in the orange box above but no detail about the breadth, depth or ambition of the provision. This leads to a postcode lottery for children. Some Academy Trusts take their responsibilities for RE very seriously and either adopt a Locally Agreed Syllabus or develop comprehensive and rigorous syllabi for their schools. Others pay lip service to the requirements and provide a watered-down version of RE, often combined with other

subjects like PSHE or Citizenship, with the result that pupils leave school with limited literacy in relation to religion and belief and are simply ill-prepared for life in modern Britain or the global workplace.

The evidence:

The most recent set of DfE school workforce data analysed by NATRE [here](#) shows that **one in six** schools reported that they provide zero hours of RE in year 11. A total of almost 46% of schools report offering less than 3% of available teaching time to Religious Education – fewer than 45 minutes. Almost 82% of these secondary schools are academies.

Other schools offer an option to study Religious Studies at GCSE but make no provision for those who do not choose to do so – which is a breach of the funding agreement. There are rarely any consequences to this breach: Ofsted does not systematically inspect compliance, and the complaints process does not work because, as a DfE investigation found in 2022, there are no specific requirements that can be deemed to have been met or not. There is clear evidence from the [NATRE Secondary Survey 2023](#), that if pupils do not study GCSE RS in key stage 4, then just over one in three schools, 34% do not offer any other provision to 14-16 year olds.

Ofsted evidence

The former HMCI for schools, Amanda Spielman commented on the lack of specified expectations for RE provision in her [2023 annual report](#):

“the government should provide clear expectations about RE provision in schools. Schools should follow these. Current non-statutory guidance for RE should be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach.”

This recommendation has not been actioned.

The following two quotations from [“Deep and Meaningful”](#), the 2024 Ofsted Subject report on Religious Education, develop this call for action as follows:

“Despite the importance of RE in preparing pupils to engage in a multi-religious and multi-secular world, these issues have not been addressed through primary legislation or statutory guidance. In many ways, the subject continues to wilt.”

“The government should also ensure that there is appropriate clarity about what is taught in RE, and when and where it is taught, for those schools where Ofsted inspects the subject. This would help schools and, particularly, leaders and teachers of RE”

Why is this relevant for this Bill?

If all Academies are required to follow the National Curriculum as set out in this bill, and further steps are not taken in relation to Religious Education, the status of the subject will unintentionally be weakened further. This would be the result of the subject being omitted again from the primary document that defines what schools should teach children. It is clear, from the above evidence, that the requirements in academy funding agreements are insufficient to secure provision for all children in all schools.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review being led by Professor Becky Francis, will consider the options available to address these challenges and hopefully recommend some solutions. This committee should be aware that, under current legislation and funding agreements, this Bill will not secure

provision for RE for all children in all schools. Additional action will be necessary or as the Ofsted report concludes, the subject will continue, in Ofsted's words, 'to wilt' at a time when it is vital for the education of children and young people.

ⁱ About RE Policy Unit

The RE Policy unit is a grant funded strategic partnership between NATRE and the RE Council

Religious Education Council of England and Wales

Established in 1973, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) brings together over 60 national organisations. These comprise academic and professional associations specialising in religious education, as well as individual religion and belief organisations representative of the range of communities found nationally. [The Religious Education Council of England and Wales](#)

National Association of Teachers of RE

NATRE is the subject teacher association for RE professionals in primary and secondary schools and higher education, providing a representative voice at national level and publications and courses to promote professional development. NATRE's Executive consists of a majority of serving teachers from primary and secondary schools who are elected for a three-year term of service. [NATRE](#)

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