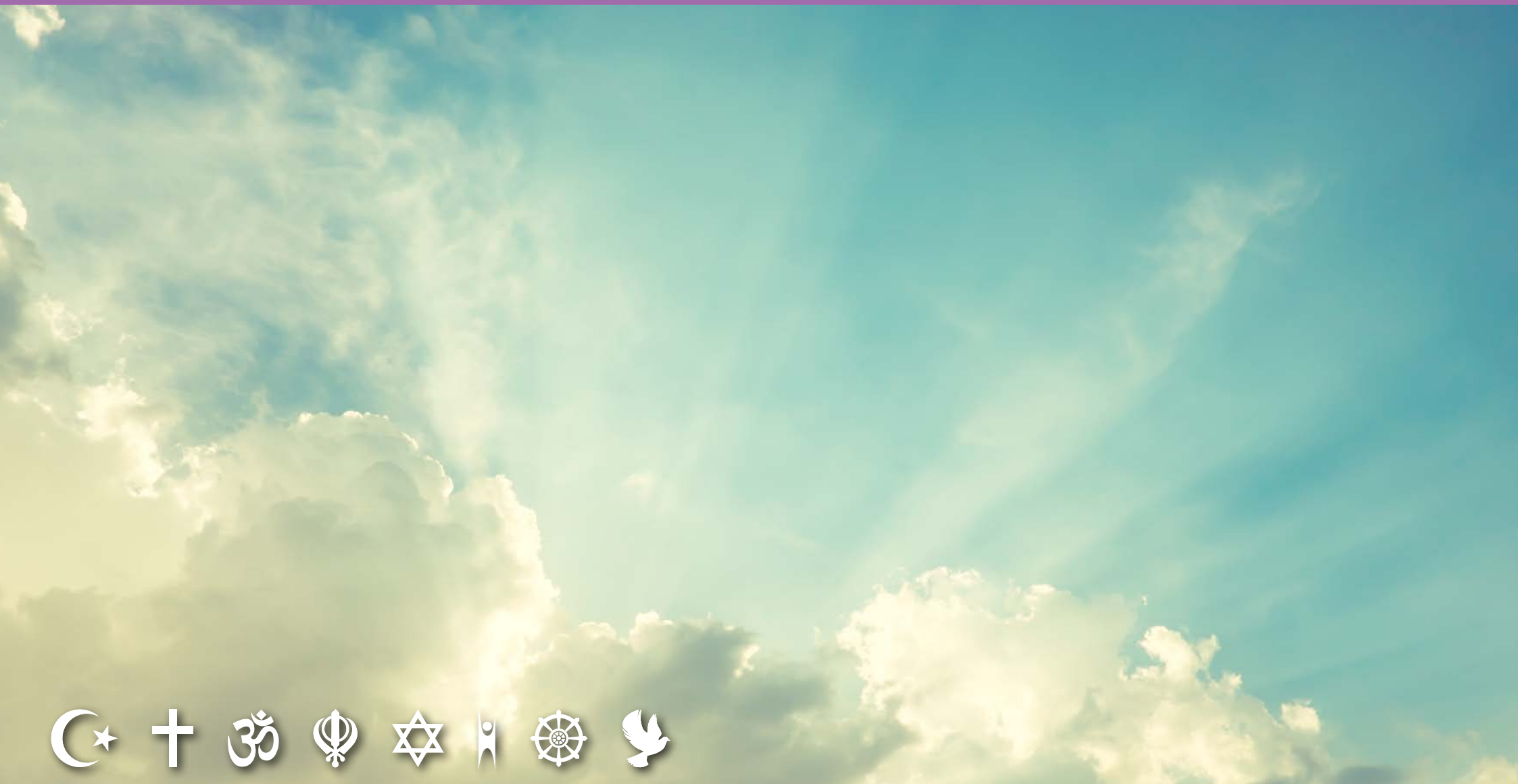


SACRE



Northumberland
County Council

Newsletter for the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education for Northumberland



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Please look out for a forthcoming survey about RE and Collective Worship in Northumberland schools!

For various reasons, RE and collective worship are destined to feature more prominently on the educational agenda than has been the case for some time, with Ofsted among the stakeholders who have indicated that their inspection teams will pay more attention to both in the months and years ahead. It is partly for this reason, but also to assist the Northumberland SACRE in its monitoring role in relation to RE and collective worship, that this term we have decided to undertake a survey to get a feel for what is going on in the County's schools. But rest assured: all the data we assemble will be rendered anonymous and presented in such a way as to ensure no school or teacher can be identified. This is because we seek to secure a snapshot about RE and collective worship in the County as a whole and not in individual schools.

The outcomes will be used to support the development of RE and collective worship, and those who deliver both!

The survey will arrive in school electronically at some point this term and, provided this can be arranged, we would like the member or members of staff who assume prime responsibility for RE and collective worship to fill it in (although we appreciate that in some small schools responsibility for this will devolve to the headteacher or deputy). The questionnaire will not take much longer than half an hour to fill in. Most questions relate to RE. Some questions can be answered by ticking a box or providing a one-word answer, but there are a few that invite a more lengthy and/or reflective response. If schools would prefer a face-to-face meeting to discuss the questions, this can be arranged through Dave Cookson, Commissioner for Secondary Education and Sixth Forms.

Obviously, the more schools that complete the survey, the more reliable the results we get - and the more accurate the picture we secure about the provision of RE and collective worship in Northumberland.

As you appreciate, legislation shapes precisely how schools must provide RE and collective worship, and the survey will furnish the SACRE and the local authority with hard evidence about the extent to which such legislative responsibilities are met.

We urge you to assist in this important data-gathering exercise, a data-gathering exercise which we think is so important that a summary report will be written and sent to all schools. The report will be circulated during the Spring 2019 term.

The SACRE hopes that the vast majority of schools in the County, whether community schools or otherwise, will engage with this worthwhile exercise so we can all learn important lessons about RE and collective worship across the County.



Ofsted's RE Subject Lead visits Northumberland in November...

... and this amazing half-day opportunity should not be missed by anyone in any school in the County with an interest in Religious Education.

At Choppington Welfare Centre on Friday 16th November, Mark Evans, one of two HMLs with shared responsibility for RE nationally, will describe what constitutes best RE practice based on what Ofsted inspection teams have observed up and down the country in recent years. After Mark has completed his talk, there will be an opportunity to ask a few questions before we break for refreshments. After the break, delegates will assemble in smaller groups, ideally organised by phase, and engage in informal discussion about what has been learned during the talk and how practice in individual schools reflects best RE practice as defined by Ofsted. Discussions will be facilitated by a SACRE member, a local authority officer or someone specially selected from among the delegates themselves.

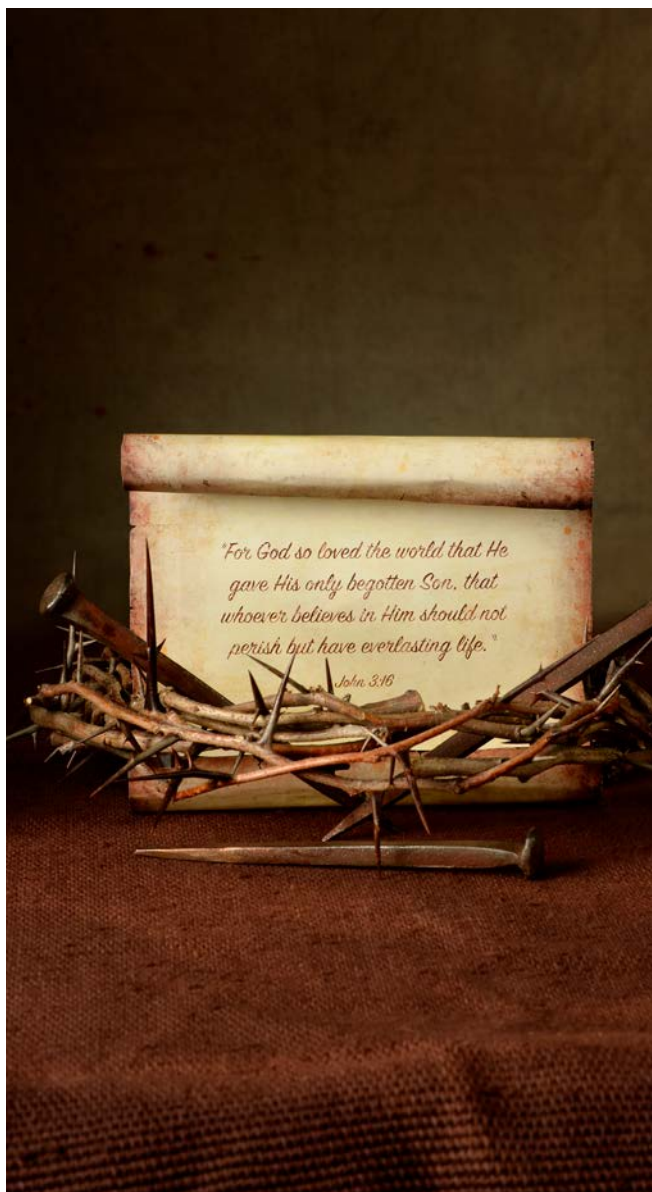
The precise timings have yet to be agreed, so at this stage simply pencil in that this important half-day event is taking place on 16th November, with the morning more likely than the afternoon.

Look out for letters, fliers and/or emails alerting schools about this important CPD opportunity, and such communications will indicate how teachers (and governors, if they wish) can book a place to attend. If in the meantime you or other colleagues (and a governor, if he/she so wishes) would like to reserve a place immediately, write to Phil André at phil.andre@ntlworld.com providing the name or names of the people who want to attend and he will advise County Hall on their behalf.



Stop press: Margaret Gibson, RE Advisor, Durham CE Diocese, has also kindly agreed to contribute to the CPD event. She will be ably supported by one of her colleagues.

“Cross Purposes – across the world”: our Easter 2018 trail



Our fifth Easter Trail focussed on the Passion of Christ, hosted this year within the beautiful mediaeval church of St. Mary Magdalene in Whalton village. A series of interactive and experiential stations were set up in the ancient church describing the Easter Story in some depth, leading us to ponder the mystery of God’s love that Jesus modelled for us during his earthly ministry. We also looked at some of the tensions across the world as Christianity spread into different cultures, shown by a set of wooden crosses made for the purpose.

The church was open daily for three weeks for visitors to come and experience the trail. Music was played and explanatory booklets were available for those who wished to explore the story in greater depth.

We worked with over 300 children from the six schools of Whalton, Longhorsley, Belsay, Cambo, The Priory School, Hexham and All Saints, Morpeth.

Each school came to us for their school day and were split into small groups, guided around the church and provided with some ‘Godly Play’ and a wide range of related art, craft and musical activities in the village hall.

With over forty volunteers and teaching staff, and with much careful planning, we engaged the children in their learning, weaving in the schools’ core values and some important teaching on the Passion and Salvation from their curriculum.

Last year we staged a Trail called ‘Walking with the Northern Saints’, a ‘Resurrection Trail’ in 2016, and ‘Passion Trails’ in 2014 and 2015. We started with some material from ‘Experience Easter’ and it has grown hugely since then.

Participation in the Easter Trail over the last five years has not only stimulated further contact with the schools involved, but also drawn in both visitors and new volunteers, thereby raising the profile of the churches in these rural villages and their engagement with the wider community. These trails have become an important part of our Mission and Ministry in these rural parts.

Judith Sadler, the CE Diocesan Children and Youth Development Officer, writes: ‘A very valuable example of good RE because it facilitates immersion in the story. The beauty of it was that the Christian story was being shared in a way that, in some respects, transcended different faith perspectives and provided the opportunity and privilege of the Church being invited to work with children in schools, and it further convinces me that this work is vitally important for the spiritual wellbeing of children of any faith or none.’

Forwarded to the SACRE by Jane Armstrong, Secretary, Cambo PCC. Jane: many thanks!

Enhanced RE Provision at Bothal Primary School

Throughout the 2017-18 academic year, Bothal Primary School in Ashington has sought to provide its pupils with relevant, topical and cutting-edge RE provision. Through excellent collaboration with local experts, this journey has involved an overhaul of the existing provision, 'Discovery RE', by intertwining annual religious festivals in a broad range of religions, all the while ensuring key objectives of the local Northumberland syllabus are adhered to.

The school has established links with experts in the field to enhance their provision. Phil Andre, the LA's RE 'expert', has been instrumental in his collaboration with the school in co-delivering staff training so that all staff could see the links between RE and other subjects, and gaining buy-in from children with engaging activities. His boundless enthusiasm really rubbed off on the staff. Phil also helped the RE Co-ordinator to ensure that Islam was taught to every year group, something the school has been keen to do because of current realities nationally and globally. Karenza Passmore of the RE Resource Centre in North Tyneside has also been a great help in identifying key areas of provision for children, by cross-referencing existing planning and ensuring it covered key objectives of the local syllabus.

The RE/PSHE Co-ordinator, John Rayner, regularly disseminates information about topical current issues and religious festivals to staff, who act positively to this and use these areas to go 'off piste' in their planning when necessary to ensure their children are up-to-date with contemporary events.

In addition, many guests from different faiths have visited the school throughout the year. In October, a group of Humanists visited the school to deliver workshops where children used their Geography skills to locate places on a map where important Humanist quotes or ideas originated from. Our Year 4 and 2



pupils visited the United Hebrew Orthodox Synagogue in Newcastle to bring to life their learning of Judaism, and thoroughly enjoyed the child-friendly kippahs on display. Deanna van der Velde was another valuable contact made by the school. Cloud Singh, a local Sikh, delivered a typically profound assembly, getting children engaged by the religion.

During the Diwali festival, Year 6 children made rangoli patterns using the school's excellent Art Room facilities. This helped bring their learning to life. Year 5 had an Eid-ul-Fitr party, making lanterns and truly celebrating the event.

Although the journey is not yet complete, great strides have been taken by the school in their innovative approach to RE planning. What the journey has demonstrated is that collaboration, creativity and enthusiasm are absolutely key in ensuring our children receive the very best RE. All of the contacts were made at the SACRE Conference in November 2017, underlining the importance of networking and collaboration further. We look forward to seeing where this exciting journey takes us next year.

John Rayner
RE Co-ordinator,
Bothal Primary School

Whittingham CE Primary School has a most unusual away-day!

Not long before the end of the Summer term, Year 6 pupils at Whittingham CE Primary travelled to Newcastle to attend a Leavers' Service at St. Nicholas CE Cathedral. This was the first time pupils had attended a Leavers' Service as members of a primary as opposed to a first school. It was a wonderful occasion, partly because the Year 6 pupils arrived in Newcastle with our spectacular school banner, but also because the Leavers' Service was attended by about five hundred people. Yes, five hundred people, most of whom were children and adults associated in some shape or form with CE schools in the region. The excellent turnout made 2018's Leavers' Service the largest such service to date.

Days like this always present pupils and teachers with interesting situations. We travelled to the event using public transport, which gave the pupils a chance to learn how to read a bus timetable. Pupils also asked the bus driver for a return ticket and paid for it, mindful they had to check they had the right change!

Whittingham CE Primary has a close working relationship with Wingrove Primary in Newcastle and in June Reception children visited Wingrove Primary to take part in an Eid-ul-Fitr party! Hmmm: the food was excellent!



Belinda Athey
Headteacher,
Whittingham CE Primary School

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Finding out about Oswald, a different kind of leader (Brinkburn Lifepath 2018)

What makes a great leader? Over the Summer, we've seen a vast range of leadership styles in action during the Football World Cup, and much discussion about our current political leaders. This year, the Brinkburn Lifepath School Project focused on the life and values of one significant leader in our history, Oswald, King of Northumbria in the 7th century. How did he make such an impact on a region plagued by war, poverty and political in-fighting?

For those who don't know, the Brinkburn Lifepath School Project is supported by local Northumbrian churches, presenting primary school pupils and staff from across the region with a Christian-themed cross-curricular day relating to our local faith history. Focusing on the life of a particular local saint, we provide a busy day featuring an active mix of drama, storytelling and arts and crafts designed to tick as many school curriculum boxes as possible in the magnificent setting of Brinkburn Priory, courtesy of English Heritage. A core team plans and organises the event, but it wouldn't work without the steady flow of local volunteers, who, dressed as Augustinian monks, generously give their time to gently conduct groups of pupils and staff through a busy day of creative workshops.

This year, 568 pupils with attendant staff and volunteers came to experience Horrible Histories-style battles, Celtic calligraphy, dramatic storytelling, felt-making, Bible aerobics, gardening and tile-making, and reflected on the key influences on Oswald, especially the Christian faith he learned in painful exile and brought back to Northumbria. By focusing on Oswald's understanding of leadership as a service to others,

“By focusing on Oswald's understanding of leadership as a service to others, itself a response to Jesus Christ as a servant king, we wondered what his life could say to us now”

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itself a response to Jesus Christ as a servant king, we wondered what his life could say to us now.

It was a busy week. One significant visitor noticed the high quality of discussions taking place. In a workshop about the Bible, a Year 4 pupil wondered aloud why there were so many books in 'the Bible library'. 'It's got all humanity in there,' replied another.

Through the day, we set pupils the task of following the old monastic rule of keeping silent at the sound of a bell. Four times, everyone around the site went quiet, stopping to pause, notice and reflect on what was happening around them. For a few short moments, children and adults stilled themselves, taking it all in.

Feedback from schools has been highly positive. 'It put across the Christian faith, without being preachy,' commented a member of staff. And what had the children learned? 'Good people can be made from bad people,' was one comment. 'That we need to respect what people like St. Oswald did,' was another.

Our Prayer Journey workshop posed a question, 'What are you thankful for?' One child wrote, 'Food. Friends.

Family. Love.' Another responded, 'I just want to thank God for life itself.' Later, yet another child wrote, 'I really enjoyed the Prayer Journey because it made me think.'

Brinkburn Lifepath began eight years ago, through the direct support of Scripture Union, Barnabas in Schools, Berwick Baptist Church, the Mustard Tree Trust and the financial support of other churches and individuals. It's a fascinating project in continuous development, and a model well worth replicating elsewhere. During one workshop, a child was heard thinking aloud to another: 'This should be really boring. But it's brilliant, isn't it?' Indeed.



Chris Hudson
SACRE member,
Church of England

Are the revised Religious Studies' (RS) GCSE specifications discouraging interest in the subject?

I am an RE/RS/philosophy and ethics teacher who has worked in Northumberland for a few years and, until very recently, loved every minute of the work I undertake. However, I have some worries about the latest RS GCSE specifications, and those responsible for the SACRE Newsletter have kindly encouraged me to share my thoughts with you, perhaps as a prelude to wider and more detailed discussion about RS at GCSE.

The RS GCSE specifications that existed before those now in place stressed the importance of studying topical ethical issues such as birth control, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, capital punishment, racial discrimination and animal rights, and what might be called ultimate questions such as good and evil and immortality. These issues or questions were ones that most students found relevant because of their age and/or interests, or were issues or questions inherently exciting to engage with – and, of course, they engaged with them by examining what different religions and secular world views had to say about each.

The latest GCSE specifications limit the opportunities to engage with such topical issues or ultimate questions, with the result that some teachers have told me that students' enthusiasm for the subject is not now what it used to be. True, some of the specifications allow for the study of how people live their lives, but this too often devolves into an examination of why, say, a Muslim should pray five times a day rather than under what circumstances it may be correct to engage in jihad, the latter being the sort of issue that used to lead to lively but informed discussion and debate.

Most specifications allow students to study only two religions, and the opportunities to compare and contrast the religions, this being what interests many students the most, are limited. Teachers with whom I talk would prefer to study at least three religions or secular world

views, and for more opportunities to exist for discussing similarity and difference. One of the most frequently quoted reasons for this is that, because we live in an increasingly plural society in which religion and belief count for so much, the more we learn about our neighbours' religions and beliefs, the more we create a harmonious society in which tolerance and respect overcome intolerance and disrespect.

The other issue often raised is that some specifications require a greater degree of scriptural analysis than in the past, and such analysis, although essential if students are thinking of committing to an expression of religion for a career, discourages the majority who find such analysis boring or irrelevant to their lives.

Teachers worry that the new specifications are undermining the enthusiasm students once had for RE at GCSE because the syllabi are less relevant to their lives and inherently less interesting to study. They worry that, while the old specifications encouraged students to critically evaluate their preconceived ideas and reach informed conclusions about seemingly complex matters, the new specifications risk reinforcing their preconceived ideas, some of which can be harmful to good community relations in an increasingly plural society. Put bluntly, some teachers believe that the opportunities that once existed to challenge prejudice, racism, religious intolerance and discrimination are less apparent now than in the past.



In some respects, the concerns of teachers can be summed up as follows. Given the increasingly complex world in which we live, and given that the UK is now such a diverse nation state in terms of religion, belief and ethnicity, are the current RS GCSE specifications relevant? Do they inspire interest in RE or undermine it? Do they reinforce the fundamental British values or in some respects confound them?

James Thompson
RE/RS Subject Lead,
The Duchess's Community High School

Forthcoming Festivals/Commemorations

21 August	Eid-ul-Adha	Muslim
1 September	Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh
9-11 September	Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
11 September	Al-Hijrah	Muslim
11 September	Ethiopian New Year	Rastafarian
12 September	Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu
18-19 September	Yom Kippur	Jewish
20 September	Ashura	Shia Muslim
21 September	International Day of Peace	
23-30 September	Sukkot	Jewish
September or October	Harvest	Christian
October	Black History Month	
1 October	International Day of Older Persons	
1-2 October	Simchat Torah	Jewish
9-18 October	Navaratri	Hindu
14-21 October	Interfaith Week of Prayer for World Peace	
15 October	Durga Puja	Hindu
20 October	Guru Granth Sahib Ji given the Eternal Guruship (Nanakshahi calendar)	Sikh
24 October	United Nations Day	
31 October	Halloween	
31 October	Samhain	Pagan
1 November	All Saints Day	Christian

5 November	Anniversary of Guy Fawkes' Gunpowder Plot	
7 November	Divali	Hindu
7 November	Divali/Bandi Chor Divas	Sikh
7 November	Divali	Jain
8 November	Annakuta	Hindu
9 November	Anniversary of the Birth of the Bab	Bahai
10 November	Anniversary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah	Bahai
11 November	Armistice Day	
11 November	Remembrance Sunday	
11-18 November	National Interfaith Week	
12-16 November	Anti-Bullying Week	
16 November	International Day for Tolerance	
21 November	The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday	Sunni Muslim
23 November	Birthday of Guru Nanak	Sikh (lunar calendar)
24 November	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur	Sikh (Nanakshahi calendar)
26 November	The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday	Shia Muslim
30 November	St. Andrew's Day	
2 December	Advent Sunday	Christian
2-10 December	Hanukah	Jewish
10 December	Human Rights Day	
21 December	Yule/Winter Solstice	Pagan/Druid
25 December	Christmas Day	Christian
31 December	Hogmanay	

P.S. Anyone wishing to identify the dates for additional festivals and/or commemorations from late August to the end of December should access the many lists available on the internet. Some of the best such lists (in terms of inclusiveness and accuracy) derive from the BBC and RE:Online. The Shap Working Party on World Religion also produces a very good list, but the list must be purchased whether in hard or electronic form.

The SACRE members

Committee A: Other Faiths

Mrs. J. Cousin: Roman Catholic Church
Reverend E. H. Marley, OBE: United Reformed Church (URC)
Represented by the URC: Baptist Church
Represented by the URC: Methodist Church
(SE Northumberland Ecumenical Area)
Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara: Hinduism
Mariam Khan: Islam
Harpal Singh: Sikhism
Mrs. D. Van der Velde: Judaism

Committee B: Church of England

Mrs. E. Bainbridge
Mr. C. Hudson
Mr. P. Rusby
Reverend J. Scott

Committee C: Teaching Associations/Unions

Mr. M. Davidson (secondary/high school teacher)
Mr. A. Duffield (middle school teacher)
Miss F. Gannon (secondary/high school teacher)
Mr. T. Nicholls (secondary/high school teacher)
Mrs. H. Shaw (special school teacher, retired)

Committee D: Local Authority

Councillor B. Crosby
Councillor W. Daley
Councillor B. Pidcock, MBE
Councillor T. Thorne

Co-opted Representatives

Mr. S. Dearlove: North-East Humanists
Maddy Wardingham (special school teacher)

Observer (representing the academies and free schools)

Steve Gibson of Northumberland CE Academy

Local Authority Officers in Attendance

Phil André, Part-time RE Consultant
David Cookson, Commissioner for Secondary Education and Sixth Forms
Andrea Todd, Clerk to the SACRE, Democratic Services

