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<i>Date</i>	31 January 2020	<i>E-mail</i>	david.hardcastle@hants.gov.uk

Dear Cllr Perry

Thank you for your letter expressing your concerns regarding the provision of Religious Education in schools at Key Stage 4.

My team recognises and shares the concern expressed by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), regarding the rapid reduction in the numbers of young people in Hampshire schools being entered for a Full Course Religious Studies (RS) GCSE examination. It is especially concerning that this reduction now brings the proportion of pupils being entered in Hampshire schools below the national figures. It is unfortunate that the changes that have been made to the KS4 school performance measures means that religious studies does not have the same status as either history or geography and I think this underpins the increase in numbers of pupils taking these latter two subjects and the decline in those taking RS. This is a matter that we have raised with Ministers and will continue to do so.

Clearly, we need to act urgently to ensure that there is high quality religious education (RE) being taught to all young people in our secondary schools at both KS3 and KS4, whether they are taking a GCSE or not. We recognise that RE is taught best where the headteacher and senior teams in schools fully appreciate and support the strong contribution RE makes to the broad balanced curriculum, in addition to contributing to the educational vision and values of the school.

Having said that, we need to recognise that approximately half the secondary schools in Hampshire are academies and this significantly limits the reach of the local authority in such matters, and in any school, it is the governing body that maintains curriculum oversight.

Director of Children's Services
Steve Crocker OBE

In your letter you make a number of helpful suggestions regarding how we could engage schools further in developing the teaching of RE.

1. In terms of providing an induction for new headteachers, I will ask that the County Inspector for RE, History and Philosophy is able to provide an input at the new headteachers' course that the local authority runs. The situation is slightly different for secondary schools. The number of new secondary school headteachers each year is small – typically three or four. This means it is uneconomic to run new headteacher courses for secondary headteachers in the way that we do for primary school headteachers. However, every new headteacher in a Hampshire maintained school receives an induction from the School Improvement Manager (SIM). I will ask the County Inspector to provide a written briefing paper that the SIM will share with secondary school headteachers as part of this induction.
2. Regular curriculum guidance is currently provided for schools through a termly update written/edited by each County Inspector. RE is no different in this matter to other subjects in the curriculum. We are keen to augment this by presenting at headteacher meetings. Primary headteachers meet in district networks every half term. These are “their” meetings and the agenda is set by their representatives, not the local authority. A number of County Inspectors have approached the chairs of these local meetings and as a result have been asked to provide an update to these meetings. I will ask the County Inspector for RE to do this. Secondary school headteacher meetings are of a different nature. Again, the agenda is set by headteachers. When we have important curriculum updates to give, we have convened meetings and provided the required information. We held one at the start of this academic year and the County Inspector for RE delivered a session on the role of RE in the curriculum at this.
3. I am going to ask the County Inspector to prepare a new non-examination course for KS4. It will be intended that this is taught alongside a GCSE course that is taught to option groups. We would not want to discourage schools from offering Full Course GCSE to all its students. The intention is to make sure that all students at KS4 can access their entitlement to high quality religious education at this important stage of adolescence. This course will be published and made available to all LA schools without charge. We plan for it to be sold to Academies locally and nationally, through the County RE Curriculum Centre. We intend this course to be well researched and of national significance. It will be available at the same time as the reviewed and revised locally agreed syllabus is launched in the autumn of 2021.
4. In addition to this, I think it is important to recognise the role that schools' governing bodies play in their oversight of the curriculum. Given the statutory nature of the RE curriculum, it is important that governors understand their responsibilities in this area, particularly so given the sometimes crowded nature of the secondary school curriculum. I am therefore going to ask the County Inspector to run a series of governor training events, with a particular focus on KS3 and K4.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right and ending in a small dot.

Steve Crocker OBE
Director of Children's Services

Copy to:

Cllr Stallard, Executive Lead Member for Children's Services and Young People

Cllr Chadd, Executive Member for Education and Skills