



A rounded and positive religious education should be available to all and is about understanding what it is to be human, says the Revd Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer for the Church of England.

I believe that religious education is a core building block in the formation of any individual. Together with science, the arts and humanities, religious education allows us to see inside ourselves, question our purpose and understand the wider world.

Failure to give this subject dedicated teaching time and resourcing teachers to do this well is a fissure that must be filled. We fail to do this at our collective peril.

To know ourselves and how to live well with one another, we must learn about the way faith has shaped and continues to shape our world

Reports by NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) and the Commission on Religious Education published this week call for more to be done to place religious education in the spotlight in schools. I agree.

Our Church of England vision for education sets out four core strands that together make up what we think provides an education for human flourishing. The first of these is wisdom, knowledge and skills and a good education needs each element. It's having the knowledge and skills that help pupils to grow in wisdom and shape what a life lived well really means - and we believe that religious education is a core building block in that.

This is not about indoctrinating people. It is about understanding what it means to be human. What it means to have belief, to understand those who have no religious belief, and to gain insights into those of other faiths. Because people of all faiths and none are our neighbours, our teachers, nurses, doctors, trading partners, friends.

To know ourselves and how to live well with one another, we must learn about the way faith has shaped and continues to shape our world, just as we expect pupils to learn from science or geography how our rivers, mountains and cities are formed. We must learn about each other.

In a world shaped by faith and where 80% of the population is motivated by faith, a good religious education enables children to become literate about belief and faith, confidently debating and questioning each other, learning to navigate modern Britain and the wider world with dignity and respect for their neighbours.

Employers increasingly recognise the importance of faith and belief in the workplace, both in terms of how to respect and celebrate the diversity it brings to the workplace, but also the way greater religious literacy leads to more effective engagement in global terms.

If it's as important as we say it is, then such a rounded and positive religious education should be available to all and as much a part of the school curriculum as geography or history or the arts.

Let's allow our children the time to ask the really important questions, Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?

And, assuming that we can agree a national common statement of entitlement to RE, it shouldn't be something parents can withdraw their children from because they don't want them to learn about how faith shapes people who hold a different view. The way school curricula have developed that is increasingly hard to do anyway, because the proper study of language or literature or history should involve cross curricula links to other subjects like RE.

Education is all about learning from people who think differently, being able to develop our own ideas in the light of what other people say and think, to have our thinking challenged and to be ready to give a reason for the things we believe and value.

Let's allow our children the time to ask the really important questions, Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live? These are the tools we all need to make sense of ourselves and the world in which we live.

The Revd Nigel Genders.

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