

The Casey Review - a review into opportunity and integration

NASACRE

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The Casey Review was published in December 2016 as a result of a call by the then Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary, for a report into opportunity and integration in isolated and deprived communities. Whilst the Review, all 199 pages of it, presents the reader with many complex issues, analysis and recommendations, there are two chapters that will be of specific interest to SACREs. Firstly, Chapter 8: **Religion** and secondly the sections on curriculum in Chapter 7: **Inequality and harm**.

The portrayal of religion in the Casey Review

The Casey Review appears to be saying two things when it comes to religion: firstly, we're getting more secular; and secondly, we're getting more religious at the same time (see 1.15). The Review recognises that religion can be an immense force for good (see 8.1 – 8.3) whilst it remains a divisive issue in society (8.4). What Chapter 8 recognises is that, *'it is complex'*.

Why should this matter to SACREs? Firstly, there is recognition not only of religious diversity but also of change. One section (8.22 – 8.34) focuses on what are termed as regressive attitudes within some religions, focussing on some forms of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Another issue that the report seeks to tackle is that of religious leadership and the sort of leadership that religious leaders should give. What the Review seems to forget is that, *'it is complex'*. Hence, the sort of open leadership that esteems all the rights of a diverse society is unlikely to make much inroad into those areas of religious life that want to live in counter-cultural ways. Interestingly, there are no specific recommendations when it comes to 'religion'. What is also significant is that Chapter 8 is simply called **Religion**, not **Religion and Belief** giving the erroneous impression that non-religious beliefs are somehow universally good – or at least universally non-problematic.

The school and its curriculum

As with many such reviews, schools are seen as an answer to some of our problems.

Recommendation 4 reads: The promotion of British laws, history and values within the core curriculum in all schools would help build integration, tolerance, citizenship and resilience in our children. **More weight should be attached to a British values focus and syllabus in developing teaching skills and assessing schools' performance** (their bold).

The curriculum is seen as a place where pupils learn what it really is to be British. Religious Education is only mentioned once in the whole review (Annex A: A17 – a note on *Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life Report*). There is no recognition of the government's deregulation of the curriculum as part of the Academisation programme, and the impact that it is having on both RE and Citizenship education in many schools.

So what?

This report is for **the government to respond to**; there is no process for others to respond to the report as the Review has ended. The Department for Communities and Local Government will respond in the Spring.

How the government will respond to the Casey Review recommendations, time will tell. SACREs, though, can read the **Executive Summary or the detailed report**.

SACREs may wish to focus on the following questions:

1. To what extent does the picture of 'religion' in the Casey Review reflect the SACRE's local context? (Chapter 8)
2. Does the locally Agreed Syllabus reflect the real religious landscape of the local authority? (1.14 – 1.16; 3.8 – 3.11; 5.5 – 5.7; Chapter 8)
3. How are religions portrayed within the syllabus; are issues relating to the place of women or the bringing up of children across different religions, dealt with? (1.43; 5.22; 6.33; 6.53; Chapter 7 Summary bullet point 2; 7.4; 7.7 – 7.27; Chapter 8; 11.1)
4. Does RE in the local authority avoid the really difficult issues faced by society? (8.22 – 8.56)
5. How might RE reflect the fact that there is demographic split in religious identity, with many younger people being much more religiously interested than older people? (3.8 – 3.11; 3.41 – 3.42)

Conclusion

It's not all doom and gloom, but the report gives a real sense of a fractured society, one that only works well for some people, where religion is a force for good in many cases. SACREs already know what it is to be under the scrutiny of a Community Cohesion focus and it may be that, whilst the Casey Review does not mention RE or SACREs, both will become important in the government's response in Spring 2017.