

Statement by Cllr Eleanor Jackson
Based on a budget of £15,000 - 9 February 2023

I am tempted to revert to my former incarnation as an RE teacher, and then a trainer of RE teachers and ministers (who often help schools with collective worship and RE), and ask you to put up your hands if you had good teaching and experienced meaningful spiritual awareness and development, or proper insights into other world faiths, ethics, and humanism. Our children have suffered a great deal because of covid 19 restrictions, and other turbulence. They worry about climate change and the environment. They want to know why evil happens like the invasion of Ukraine or suffering as we see in Turkey and Syria. The Holocaust is in some ways beyond our imagination, but this morning a charity set up to support the victims of anti-semitism reported 100 incidents a week actually came to them.... There is also the debate over the Shawcross report on the Respect programme, and what its priorities should be. My guess is that if you were handed a brief to go and teach a class about 'British values' and the importance of having a world view which did not condone any sort of violence on the basis of a person's creed, caste or race, you would struggle. Training teachers properly is vital. This enhanced budget will help us do that. 3 hours of a PGCE course is hopeless, compounded by a 29% shortfall in specialist teachers.

Teaching RE (though not RS) is required by law, along with collective worship, though parents have the right to withdraw their children from both. However, each council may tailor the Agreed Syllabus to local circumstances. For example, my children in Derby learnt a lot about Sikhism because there is a very large Sikh community there. What I would like to see here is the development of material on Black or African traditions. What our former resident, the Emperor Haile Selassie represented should be appreciated by all and not just for Rastafarian music. We need money to do this. We also need to ensure web materials are available, and that B&NES Sacre can contribute to the national debate, its members attend conferences, and so on.

To restore the £5,000 cut from our budget this year will require some creative thinking, but the Scrutiny Panel asked officers to do this. Meanwhile our RS GCE and A Level results have come in, school by school, and it is clear that we are part of a national downward trend of exam results because of under-resourcing. I am sure there is cross party consensus that we should aim to enable every child to get the best results they can and discover their full potential. I am very proud of a 30 something student I had in Derby of Jamaican heritage whose school condemned her to be a hairdresser – to cut a long story short, she proved gifted in philosophy, got a first and a very good teaching post. She also insisted she was high church Anglican, not Pentecostal, another triumph over racial stereotyping.

We need the enhanced experiences this budget will provide, even if you have to dip into your piggy bank for £5,000.

I am happy to answer questions on detail, which was approved by the SACRE executive on Monday. May I thank Cllr Pritchard for his support, too.