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Michael Gove: quality of religious education has dropped

A fresh drive to raise standards of religious education will be launched after Michael Gove admitted the subject had “suffered” as a result of Government reforms.



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The Education Secretary suggested a new strategy was needed to improve the quality of lessons amid fears over a decline in the number of children studying RE to a high standard.

Major faith groups including the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church will be involved in the project to “improve the quality and celebrate great religious education teaching”, he said.

The comments follow controversy over a Government decision to exclude RE from the English Baccalaureate – a league table measure that marks out pupils gaining good GCSEs in a string of academic subjects.

RE is a compulsory subject up to the age of 16.

But critics including the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, claimed its exclusion

from the EBacc led to the subject being “downgraded”.

One study showed a quarter of state secondary schools now failed to offer the subject at all to 14- to 16-year-olds and fewer subjects are delivered by fully-trained RE teachers.

Addressing a CofE seminar, Mr Gove said he believed that the compulsory nature of RE would be enough to safeguard the subject, irrespective of its exclusion from the EBacc.

But he added: “I think, if I’m being honest, over the last three years I’ve thought, ‘well that’s protection enough’, and therefore I’ve concentrated on other areas. Therefore, I think that RE has suffered as a result of my belief that the protection of it was sufficient and I don’t think that I’ve done enough.”

Mr Gove defended the make-up of the EBacc, saying any decision to include RE would have an impact on the number of pupils studying history and geography.

He also backed his reforms of teacher training, which have led to science and maths specialists receiving large bursaries that are not extended to other subjects.

Speaking to Anglican leaders, he described the reforms as “a set of accumulated actions, all which are defensible in their own right, [which] can, when viewed in the round, seem like thoughtlessness or indifference”.

Mr Gove added: “One of the things I’m very anxious to do is to try to work with, not just the Church here, but also the Roman Catholic Church and others, to see what we can do to improve the quality and celebrate great religious education teaching.”

He said DfE officials and faith groups would “work to exemplify what is the very best practice to encourage others to follow it”.

When asked if the move would act as “an open door to re-start discussions on how to revitalise RE”, the Education Secretary replied that it would.

The Telegraph - Graeme Paton