# Sir David Bell's review: what does it mean for RE and schools?

NATRE
National Association of Teachers of Religious Education

The publication of Sir David Bell's independent review into antisemitism in schools and colleges in England on 21st October 2026 is significant for everyone working in education, including teachers of religious education. The government has accepted all 27 recommendations, which address how schools and colleges can better recognise, prevent and respond to antisemitism. The recommendations have implications, not only for RE, but also for the wider curriculum, teacher training, safeguarding, school leadership and the handling of controversial issues.

## What does the report say about RE?

Bell recognises the important contribution that high-quality RE can make to pupils' understanding of Judaism, Jewish life and Jewish culture. He writes, ***"Religious education (RE) can play a key role in building pupils' understanding of Judaism, Jewish life and Jewish culture." (p. 67)***

The report emphasises that Judaism should not simply be taught through festivals, artefacts or the Holocaust. Pupils need a secure understanding of Judaism as a diverse, living and contemporary tradition, encompassing its beliefs, practices, history, culture and communities. This aligns with Ofsted's RE Research Review (2021), which emphasises the importance of understanding the diversity and complexity of religious and non-religious traditions.

Bell raises concerns about the consistency of RE provision, identifying insufficient curriculum time, uneven teacher subject knowledge and limited access to specialist support as potential barriers to teaching Judaism with sufficient depth and accuracy.

## RE has an educational purpose in its own right

One of the most significant observations in Bell's review concerns the purpose of RE:

***"RE's first purpose is to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. Its relevance to tackling contemporary antisemitism is therefore indirect." (p. 68)***

This is an important reminder that RE is an academic subject with educational aims in its own right. Although it can make a valuable contribution to challenging prejudice, promoting respect and strengthening social cohesion, these outcomes should not displace its central purpose of developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious traditions.

Bell's comment that RE's contribution to tackling antisemitism is *indirect* should not be understood to diminish the potential of RE alongside other curriculum subjects to help tackle antisemitism.

As Bell himself acknowledges, an academically rigorous study of Judaism may include examining how historical and contemporary antisemitism has affected Jewish communities and their lived experiences. Learning about antisemitism can therefore be an integral part of understanding Judaism as a diverse, living tradition, rather than simply an additional social objective. Secure knowledge of Judaism, including the diversity of Jewish identities and contemporary Jewish life, can also help pupils recognise misconceptions and challenge stereotypes. In this way, RE can contribute to challenging antisemitism without making this its primary purpose.

### Recommendation 13 and the proposed National Curriculum for RE

**Bell recommends, "The Department for Education should ensure that Judaism is represented with appropriate depth and coherence within the proposed curriculum framework for religious education. The aims for the subject should reflect Judaism as a diverse and contemporary tradition, so that where antisemitism is addressed, it is grounded in a secure knowledge of Jewish life, belief, culture and community."**

This recommendation is particularly significant because it addresses the content and aims of the proposed national curriculum framework for RE. In its formal response to Sir David Bell's review, the Government confirms that the RE sector advisory group has reached consensus and submitted draft curriculum materials to the Department for Education. It intends to consult on these proposals as part of the wider national curriculum consultation, with the final content to be determined following consultation. Recommendation 13 therefore adds further weight to the importance of ensuring that Judaism is represented with sufficient depth and coherence in the emerging national framework.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review identified longstanding fragmentation and inconsistency in RE provision and recommended a staged approach to including RE in the National Curriculum. Bell's recommendation reinforces the potential value of the proposed National Curriculum for RE in establishing clearer expectations about the depth and coherence with which Judaism is taught. However, securing consistently high-quality RE will require more than curriculum reform alone. The concerns Bell reports about insufficient curriculum time, uneven teacher subject knowledge and limited access to specialist support reinforce the case made in the Commission for RE (2018)[1] for a wider National Plan for RE that addresses teacher recruitment and training, curriculum time, subject expertise and access to high-quality resources alongside the introduction of the NCRE.

### What about the wider implications for schools?

**Curriculum and teaching:** Bell calls for a coherent approach to understanding antisemitism across the curriculum, including through history, citizenship, media literacy and online safety. Learning about Jewish identity and contemporary Jewish life should not be confined to Holocaust education or RE.

**Teaching controversial issues**: Bell recognises the challenges teachers face when discussing sensitive issues, particularly events in Israel and Palestine. Recommendation 12 calls for a coherent approach to addressing antisemitism through citizenship, media literacy, online safety and pastoral provision. It also recommends that the DfE develops practical, quality-assured resources to help teachers address controversial issues confidently, challenge misinformation and facilitate balanced discussion.

The DfE's existing guidance[2] on political impartiality makes clear that schools should challenge racism and discrimination, and that teachers should not leave discriminatory views unchallenged in the interests of presenting a balanced range of opinions. Recommendation 17 (p.84) calls for strengthened DfE guidance on political impartiality, including practical examples of its application to contemporary and sensitive geopolitical issues.

In her written ministerial statement announcing the government response to Bell's review[3], the Secretary of State for Education confirmed that criticism of the policies or actions of the Israeli Government is not, in itself, antisemitic. However, antisemitic tropes, conspiracy theories, collective blame of Jewish people and hostility

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[1] https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/commission-on-religious-education-final-report

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools/political-impartiality-in-schools

[2] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-10-21/hcws400

towards Jews must be recognised and challenged. The Government also reaffirmed that schools must not promote partisan political views and that pupils should receive a balanced presentation of opposing viewpoints when political issues are raised.

**Professional development:** The review recommends improved training and support so that staff can recognise contemporary forms of antisemitism and respond confidently and appropriately.

**Safeguarding and school culture:** Schools and colleges are encouraged to strengthen arrangements for recognising, recording and responding to antisemitic incidents, ensuring that Jewish pupils and staff feel safe and supported.

**Holocaust education:** Recommendation 11 calls for a stronger national approach, including clearer expectations, an evidence-informed review of effectiveness and the marking of Holocaust Memorial Day in all schools and colleges.

**Learning beyond the classroom:** Recommendation 14 is also important for religious education as it encourages opportunities for pupils to engage with Jewish communities and contemporary Jewish life through cultural activities, enrichment and meaningful encounters.

These proposals underline the importance of a whole-school approach. RE has a distinctive contribution to make, but responsibility for preventing and responding to antisemitism belongs to the entire school community.

Although the Government has accepted all 27 of Bell's recommendations, further work will be needed to put them into practice. An implementation group has been established to coordinate delivery and monitor progress, and Sir David Bell has been asked to undertake an independent review of progress after one year.

**Sources**


- Sir David Bell, Independent Review into Antisemitism in Schools and Colleges in England, Department for Education, 21 October 2026, especially pp. 67–69 and Recommendations 11–14.
- NATRE and Religious Education Council, A step forward for RE: Government includes subject in September curriculum consultation, 3 July 2026.
    - Note: the proposed consultation is now expected in November.
- Department for Education, Government response to Sir David Bell's independent review, 21st October 2026.
- Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025), Building a World-Class Curriculum for All: Final Report, particularly pp. 108–110.
- Ofsted research review series: religious education (2021)