

Staffing RE: Secondary school case studies

Broughton High School, Preston

Joanne Harris, Head of Humanities:

Curriculum changes and increased popularity of GCSE RS over last few years has meant that RE staff can no longer cover all lessons

How did the Head/SLT think this could be overcome?

Y7 curriculum is delivered in Humanities – each class has one teacher for all three subjects (five hours per week). Two out of six teachers are RE specialists; the rest are members of the Humanities team. Humanities team members were given two days of offsite INSET for collaborative planning. This allowed time for RE non-specialists to be involved and supported.

Y8 & 9 RE is delivered as part of a carousel Humanities system (four hours a week for three weeks for each group). This is taught by RE specialists.

All GCSE RS is taught by RE specialists

In Y10 & 11 non-exam RE is delivered by a team that has been fairly consistent over the years and made up mostly of RE specialists and Humanities staff.

How does it work in practice and what are the strengths of this arrangement?

Y7 works well as there has been a lot of focus on collaboration between all three subject areas. The Y7 team has been consistent for the past four years and so staff are experienced and confident in subject knowledge and delivery.

As RS GCSE is an option at Broughton we felt it was a priority to have specialist delivery in years 8 & 9 and at GCSE. This has been successful – GCSE is now a popular option and results are good.

Non-exam RE at KS4 has more non-specialists than specialists – this is not ideal but has worked out OK. In recent years staffing has been fairly consistent and mostly covered from within the Humanities team. This stability has meant that teachers have become more confident over time and brought new ideas to the department. All resources are provided by the RE department and planning is shared. Good communication between the team is vital. An added bonus of having RE teachers from outside the department is that it allows other staff to understand what RE is about.

Any disadvantages?

Over recent years the number of non-specialist teachers has increased considerably due to increased time at KS3 and increased popularity at GCSE. We need to monitor the impact of this.

Demands on time – as Head of Humanities, I do not teach any KS4 non-exam classes and so it becomes easy to become out of touch. It is sometimes difficult to keep up to date with where everybody is up to and ensure that they are supported. It also means that I am planning and preparing resources which I am not delivering, so time to get feedback from staff and students is important.

Any other issues

Rooming – we have found it helpful if RE lessons taught by non-specialists are delivered in (or very near to) RE classrooms

Personality of teacher – it is important that non-specialists are the type of teacher who enjoys talking to students, lively discussions and can cope with controversial issues.

Haslingden High School

Ben Wood, Subject Leader for RS

Outline of the problem

Though we are a big department, we can never quite cover all classes in the department. Typically, there are 4-7 KS3 classes a year we cannot staff ourselves.

How did the Head/SLT think this could be overcome?

These classes have always been covered by staff who teach Humanities subjects, though we have moved more towards a select group of two teachers from the faculty to cover these classes if at all possible.

How does it work in practice and what are the strengths of this arrangement?

We only use our non-specialist staff at KS3 and try to make them as specialist as possible.

We try to ensure that one of them takes the Yr7 classes and the other the Yr 8 classes.

We make sure there is at least one senior member of the department teaching in each year group, so there is a named person with whom the non-specialist can liaise.

All our Humanities staff work from the same large office, so there is plenty of chat about how to teach particular lessons, sharing of resources, ideas etc.

When new units are planned for a particular year group (this year it's Yr7), I, as Subject Leader, make sure I am teaching that year group to lead the planning. This also allows us to meet as teachers and assist non-specialists in their individual class planning.

Alongside SoW, lesson plans and resources produced for a unit, we also produce lesson notes. These contain important pieces of subject knowledge that help the teacher understand the overall coherence of the unit as well as particular pieces of information important in certain lessons. They also contain hints and tips for each lesson - how to phrase certain questions, what to avoid doing - this is experienced RE teachers passing on tricks of the RE trade to those teachers who are competent and experienced but may lack the specialist skills required in teaching RE (it's a special subject after all!)

Any disadvantages?

Quality of feedback remains a bit of an issue and one that we haven't cracked yet. Hopefully when we have trained up these staff a bit we can concentrate more on assessment alongside planning.