



Engaging with Religion and Worldviews

**A Revised Religious Education
Syllabus for Plymouth Schools
with Supporting Statements,
Guidance and New Emphases
from September 2014**

“The true integrity of religion is that which truly awakens us.” Prof. John Hull

Foreword

I am delighted to write this Foreword to our Religious Education syllabus. This is a revised version, with additional emphases, which continue and develop the excellent work from the previous syllabus, "Every Child Matters in RE". It also takes account of two recent and significant national reports at the end of 2013, on Religious Education.

My thanks go to all Devon, Plymouth and Torbay SACRE representatives, who contributed through the Agreed Syllabus Conference, chaired by Jeremy Roberts, from Devon SACRE.

Although there is much common ground in this document, across the three SACREs, I am pleased to note the intention here, to develop a distinct Plymouth approach by encouraging our children and young people to explore Plymouth's unique heritage and diversity whilst acknowledging the importance of their own spiritual development. Religious Education remains a vital part of a broad and balanced curriculum; academically rigorous and also helping prepare our young people for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. The local authority and Plymouth SACRE are committed to supporting this important work.

Judith Harwood
Assistant Director for Education, Learning & Families
Plymouth City Council

Background

In late 2013 and early 2014 representatives from Devon, Plymouth and Torbay SACREs met together as an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC), to agree a new syllabus for their respective schools. A small Working Party was convened and this Revised RE Syllabus document is the result of those deliberations.

Although much of the first section is held in common it was felt that the individual SACREs may wish to bring their own additional and particular Guidance and Emphases here and to subsequent sections. This is our Plymouth syllabus.

Introduction

This document is influenced by two recent and major reports on RE:

“Realising the Potential” Ofsted - October 2013 and
“A Review of Religious Education in England” The Religious Education Council (REC) October 2013.

This important document by the REC, although containing non statutory guidance, in effect, creates a revised national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) It states...

“The NCFRE does not claim to be an exhaustive or final description of the place, value and scope of RE in 2013, and it is not an official document...The extensive consultation about draft versions of this framework means the document provides a widely supported platform for RE which can encourage a coherent range of RE syllabuses.” P12

In his Foreword to the NCFRE document, Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education wrote that:

“...All children need to acquire core knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape their history and culture but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.

RE’s place in the curriculum will be strong if its role and importance are communicated effectively and widely understood...”

“RE should primarily be concerned with helping pupils make sense of the world through religion and belief.”

Ofsted Report 2013

Religious Education: A legal requirement

RE is a statutory subject of the school curriculum of maintained schools. Academies and free schools are contractually required through the terms of their funding to make provision for the teaching of RE to all pupils on the school roll.

The law requires that local authority RE Agreed Syllabuses and RE syllabuses used in academies that are not designated with a religious character 'must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. This means that from the ages of 5 to 19 pupils in schools learn about diverse religions and world views including Christianity and the other principal religions. (In this agreed syllabus the principal religions are defined as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.) All schools need to recognize the diversity of the UK and the importance of learning about its religions and world views, including those with a significant local presence.

Purpose of study

Religious education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education in schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. Pupils should gain and deploy the skills needed to understand, interpret and evaluate texts, sources of wisdom and authority and other evidence. They learn to articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ.

(RE Review 2013)

Time allocation

It is recommended that Religious Education should be given 5% of curriculum time. Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools are subject to a statement of entitlement to which they are required to adhere.

Engaging with Religion and Worldviews

The six areas of Enquiry or Strands

These remain as before but are expressed in a slightly different form in the NCFRE, as follows:

Beliefs, teachings, sources of wisdom and authority

Ways of living

Ways of expressing meaning

Questions of identity, diversity and belonging

Questions of meaning purpose and truth

Questions of values and commitment

Foundation Stage

The foundation stage describes the phase of a child's education from the age of 3 to the end of reception at the age of 5 years.

Religious Education is statutory for all registered pupils on the school roll
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During the foundation stage, children begin to explore the world of religion in terms of special people, books, times, places and objects, visiting places of worship and through celebration. Children listen to and talk about stories. They are introduced to specialist words and use their senses in exploring religious beliefs, practices and forms of expression. They reflect upon their own feelings and experiences. They use their imagination and curiosity to develop their appreciation and wonder of the world in which they live.

Key stage 1

At Key Stage 1 pupils learn about different beliefs about God and the world around them. They encounter and respond to a range of stories, artefacts and other religious materials. They learn to recognise that beliefs are expressed in a variety of ways, and begin to use specialist vocabulary. They begin to understand the importance and value of religion for believers, especially other children and their families. Pupils ask relevant questions and develop a sense of wonder about the world, using

their imaginations. They talk about what is important to themselves and others, valuing themselves, reflecting on their own feelings and experiences and developing a sense of belonging.

At Key Stage 1 pupils should study Christianity and Judaism, in particular, with examples drawn from other religions and consider non-religious worldviews, as appropriate.

Key stage 2

At Key Stage 2 children investigate and consider the impact of religion and belief locally, nationally and globally. They make connections between different aspects of religion and belief and consider different forms of religious expression. They consider the beliefs, teachings, practices and ways of life central to religion. They learn about sacred texts and other sources of wisdom and consider their meanings. They begin to recognise diversity in religion, learning about similarities and differences both within and between religions and the importance of dialogue between them. They extend the range and use of specialist vocabulary. They recognise the challenges involved in distinguishing between ideas of right and wrong, and valuing what is good and true. They communicate their ideas clearly, recognising other people's viewpoints. They consider their own beliefs and values and those of others in the light of their learning in religious education.

At Key Stage 2 children study, in a more systematic way, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam and other non-religious worldviews such as Humanism. But references, illustrations and examples can also be drawn from Buddhism and Sikhism, as appropriate.

Key stage 3

At Key Stage 3 pupils build on prior learning in RE, applying their learning to the key themes being studied. They deepen their understanding of important beliefs, concepts and issues of truth and authority in religion. They apply their understanding of religious and philosophical beliefs, teachings and practices to a range of ultimate questions and moral issues. They enquire into and explain some personal, philosophical, theological and cultural reasons for similarities and differences in religious beliefs and values, both within and between religions. They consider how the media portray religion in the modern world.

They develop their evaluative skills, showing reasoned and balanced viewpoints, when considering their own and others' responses to religious and spiritual issues. They reflect on the impact of religion and belief in the world, considering both the importance of inter-faith dialogue and also the tensions that exist within and between religions. They interpret religious texts and other sources of wisdom, recognising both the power and limitations of language and other forms of communication in expressing ideas and beliefs.

At Key Stage 3, students extend and deepen their understanding of Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism, whilst also re-visiting and focussing on the deeper aspects of the other world religions, as appropriate, in their local, national and global contexts. A more concentrated study of non-religious worldviews is particularly relevant at this Key stage.

Religious Education 14-19

Pupils have an entitlement to accredited courses and sufficient time should be available to meet the recommended learning hours requirement of courses provided.

Unlike other national curriculum areas, Religious Education remains a statutory requirement for all students at this stage

New Emphases in Religious Education Guidelines for September 2014

Although RE remains a legal, statutory requirement we must also justify RE's inclusion in the curriculum based on sound education reasons.

RE is central to the TWO main aims of the National Curriculum:

"Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which;

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and
- Prepares them, at school, for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life"

National Curriculum in England: Framework document Sept. 2013 p.4 quoted in the "RE Review"

Our revised syllabus - **Engaging with Religion and Worldviews** emphasises a more integrated approach which acknowledges that "learning about" and "learning from" religion, should not be regarded as two, entirely separate approaches. They are interrelated and help explore religion and worldviews from different perspectives, both essential to an integrated, well rounded study.

RE involves rigorous academic study, which should deepen as pupils move through the key stages.

We are keen to emphasise the need, locally and in the world today, for pupils to become religiously literate. In the recent Ofsted Report (2013) it describes this process as involving;

- Informed responses to ultimate questions
- Understanding the beliefs, practices, values and ways of life of religious and non-religious worldviews
- Understanding the nature of religious language
- Understanding the diversity of religion and belief in the contemporary world
- Understanding the impact that religion and belief can have on individuals and society

RE should also promote and encourage a deepening appreciation of the “spiritual” and its value in providing young people with the opportunity to identify and cultivate “inner resources” and a growing sense of an “inner life”; indispensable tools for the journey through life.

We would like to encourage teachers to be able to “stand in the right place” within themselves, where there is no contradiction or tension between “learning about” and “learning from” and where both are given sufficient time and space to explore.

For the time being, and until the issue is resolved nationally, we plan to retain the current 8 level scale, as a way of “measuring progress” and ensuring development. This is helpful for both pupils and teachers.

We cannot “duck” the sensitive and controversial issues either! Any serious study of religion and worldviews will raise big questions that challenge us all. Teachers do not have all the answers but they should be prepared to explore the issues and questions and create, through their skills and sensitivities, the right climate and ethos in the classroom where pupils can feel valued and respected and free to explore and share their ideas. A central task for the teacher is to facilitate RE conversation and enquiry.

Our previous Schemes of Work, bound in the “Ready to Go” Handbooks, will not be replaced and they will continue to provide the foundation for our future development, along the lines of an Enquiry model. They do, however, require updating and refreshing! The Schemes provide templates with an overall coherence and balance which should be retained.

Based on these programmes, we wish to encourage teachers to develop their own approaches, using their skills and expertise, to create activities that stimulate, excite and challenge the pupils in their schools and promote good Enquiry models. The schemes are not “tablets of stone” but guidelines.

RE should make a significant contribution to pupils’ Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC) and provide a lead for the whole school in taking this important work further. SMSC remains a key indicator, for Ofsted, in judging the “overall effectiveness of the school”.

In particular, we want to emphasise the importance of our unique, local Plymouth story through focused learning and enquiry on; Heritage, Diversity and Spirituality. Teachers should seek more local links and opportunities for visits, visitors and the telling of stories about local people, faith communities, churches and other places of worship and meeting.

With the recent success of Plymouth’s bid, to Heritage Lottery, to establish a History Centre on the museum/library site there will be some amazing opportunities and links for the future!

This development, of a significant local enquiry model in RE, will also provide children and young people with a real sense of belonging and identity with Plymouth as “my city”.

In short, what is our task in RE?

By maintaining the scope, balance and structure of our previous syllabus, “Every Child Matters in RE,” established over the past six years, we now want to build on this solid foundation and integrate the guidance and new emphases, outlined above. We encourage all our teachers to focus their time and energy on creating active and innovative approaches to RE, at all levels.

With the support of schools, teachers, SACRE, faith communities, groups and individuals, we seek to create, and continue to develop, a Religious Education syllabus that every school will want to provide and every pupil will want to study.

Plymouth SACRE with

Jonathan Marshall - RE Adviser – Plymouth – June 2014

“Our shared humanity ultimately matters more than our religious differences.” Lord Sacks