

Teaching Christianity and other World Faiths

Teaching Christianity

Understanding Christianity forms a crucial part of pupils' religious education as represented in this syllabus.

The syllabus offers five core units in Christianity to be studied at each Key Stage. These units provide the framework for a systematic build up of knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and the opportunity to grapple with the claims and beliefs of Christians.

At Key Stage 1 the syllabus provides for an introduction to the key stories about Jesus, and a first look at what Christians do and how they live and celebrate.

Key Stage 2 adds more detail to that picture based on an encounter with the local church. For schools within the Manchester diocese that will mean their church, the one with which they already have, we hope, close and fruitful relationships. For many, possibly most pupils, this will be their first direct contact with a Christian community. For the parish it will be an opportunity for more people to become directly involved in the life of the school.

At Key Stages 3 and 4 the study widens to include other denominations and Christianity worldwide, enabling pupils to encounter the range and diversity of Christian experience, and to bring that knowledge to their own consideration of the issues and questions they are faced with in their own lives.

At all Key Stages this should be carried out within a framework which:

- values open encounter: listening and talking to real people, to see how they understand their faith, to understand what they do and believe and why;
- appreciates and draws on the richness and diversity of Christian experience, including non-European traditions and seeks to reflect that honestly and without bias;
- stems from and instils respect for different views and interpretations seeking to understand their history and driving force;
- does not offer ready made judgements and packages for pupils' consumption, but seeks to equip pupils with the means to evaluate religious and moral issues and to pursue those issues at depth.

In the classroom this syllabus demands the same high standards as other subjects and the same commitment to good practice. Particularly important would be use of a wide variety of learning experiences, including an appropriate mix of individual and collaborative activities; recognition and use of a rich resource base, including people; consistent monitoring of pupils' progress against criteria identified in the planning process. All of these are part and parcel of good teaching whatever the area of the curriculum.

This syllabus seeks to match a rigorous approach to the content to be studied with pupils' own needs and concerns and their capacity for empathy and creative discovery.

Teaching World Faiths

The Board of Education was unanimous in its view that church schools have an obligation to introduce pupils to the religious experience of the multitude of people in Britain and worldwide who belong to faiths other than Christianity.

In part this view is informed by a simple regard for helping pupils understand their fellow citizens, whether represented in the school or not, and in the hope that greater understanding will lead to a respectful and harmonious society.

However, RE is not a branch of sociology or cultural anthropology. This syllabus requires teaching of non-Christian faiths in a way that takes seriously both their basic religious premise and each faith's own understanding of itself. There will be a wide variety of views among governors and staff on this issue, and for some the notion of including any teaching about other faiths will be contrary to their notion of a church school. It is the view of this syllabus that the integrity of the church school is in no way challenged by recognising that there are a number of historic faiths besides Christianity that provide a framework of belief and commitment for their adherents and seeking to help pupils understand something about them.

The material is organised in relation to Key Stages, offering suitable material for devising teaching units. The introductory course suggests aspects that Key Stage 1 might work with.

The Core Primary Unit takes that work and extends it to provide suitable content for Key Stage 2 pupils to consider. The Core Secondary Unit outlines areas for work with Key Stage 3 pupils, with the Extension Unit developing fruitful areas for Key Stage 4 or sixth-form pupils. Pupils may in the course of their school life study only one or all four units from any one faith. The units have tried to take account of that in their construction.

Planning World Faiths

This syllabus offers suggested content for each faith. Each school will have to decide what of that they wish to teach and when.

There are a variety of ways of incorporating World Faiths into the RE curriculum.

A. Identified units

The simplest way, and that which most clearly retains the integrity of each faith, is to teach each separately and to identify clearly when each will be studied. The choices and length of unit would be specifically tailored to the needs of the school or the resources available, e.g.

KS1: only Christianity

KS2: Christianity

Y5: 2 x term unit on Islam

Y6: 1 x term unit on Judaism

or

KS1: Christianity

Y1: Introductory unit on Judaism

Y2: Introductory unit on Sikhism

KS2: Christianity

Y3 & 4: Core Primary course on Islam

Y5 & 6: Core Primary unit on

Hinduism

B. Continuous strand

A second way would be to put world faiths material alongside teaching about Christianity as a continuous strand. Using the Christian categories as a guide suitable material can be taught from one or two other faiths, e.g.

KS1 & 2: Christianity and Islam parallel

The Bible: The Holy Qur'an

Jesus Christ: The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) etc

or

KS2 Y3: Festivals:

Christmas and Easter

Eid ul Fitr

Passover

Y5: Worship

The Church

The mosque and Daily Prayers

The Synagogue and Shabbat

The Gurdwara

There are some pitfalls to this scheme:

- i) It makes all religions conform to the same conceptual framework, which may distort the relative importance of different aspects for some faiths;
- ii) To adopt a thematic approach (which this is) too early may give some pupils information insufficiently rooted in a context, which may therefore be easily confused;
- iii) A framework based on Christianity would in any case be unsuitable for Hinduism and Buddhism.

C. Combination

A mix of A and B carefully structured, might be right for some schools, e.g.

KS1 & 2: Christianity and Islam parallel

Y2: Introductory unit on Hinduism

Y4: Core Primary unit on Hinduism