

Aims of the Syllabus

‘The principal aim of RE in church schools is to affirm, encourage and challenge pupils on their spiritual journey’

(Board of Education Minutes 19 March 1992, adapted 2003)

All sorts of other activities in a church school will contribute to this aim also, but RE will be a focus for the structured approach. This aim is applicable to and important for every pupil in a church school, whatever their faith or background – Christian, Muslim, Hindu or none – and everything the school offers in RE must have this aim in mind.

Every person is on a spiritual journey: discovering the things that matter; taking into themselves teachings and insights from other people and systems and finding what is of value for themselves; working out, sometimes painfully, how to live, how to treat other people, how to find meaning in their lives.

Some people find all their questions answered within the context of the great religions of the world; others reject religion and look for answers in human experience only. Most people fall somewhere in between, feeling a stronger sense of belief at some times than at others.

Part of the educational process is to introduce pupils to this area of life, to explore with them the mysteries and perplexities of existence and to share with them some of the paths that have been travelled before and are travelled now. An important task in RE therefore is to introduce pupils to the major religious traditions of the world – beliefs and teachings, practices and effects. For Church of England schools, the major part of this task will focus on Christianity, in recognition of the foundation of the school and its importance in the life of the community which supports the school and which it serves.

However, some of pupils’ time should also be spent beginning to see what other major faiths believe and practice. For some pupils in Church schools that will include a study of their own faith and the faith of their home. For others it will be learning about the faith of their neighbours, whether near or far. An important factor in being able to live at peace in a mixed society is understanding something of the lives of those who live with us, and learning about their faith is a crucial part of this.

The Board of Education minutes of 1992 therefore also state: **‘This (principal aim) will be effected first, through offering pupils a firm grounding in the principles and practices of Christianity, especially as represented by the Church of England...**

...In recognition of the society in which all children are growing up, pupils should also be offered the opportunity to explore the other faiths represented in Britain today.’

This syllabus offers detailed guidance on how the major features of Christianity might be encountered by pupils of different ages, and suggested teaching material for other major world faiths.

At all times, however, the teaching of material in this syllabus should be measured against the primary aim of contributing to each pupil’s own search for meaning. This may happen in a variety of ways, for example:

- extending pupils' thinking and awareness of themselves, their place in relation to others, the needs and desires of others, the wonder and complexity of the universe;
 - opening their eyes to the spiritual dimension of life; shifting their perspective from the prevailing secular materialism to allow for a religious interpretation of life;
 - helping them to begin to see the point of recognising and ordering their own values and priorities; significantly contributing to that process, in enabling pupils to articulate, develop and critique their own choices;
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- developing confidence and competence in dealing with moral issues, choices and dilemmas, paying attention to the development of empathy, skills of moral reasoning and commitment to the highest principles and aspirations.

There are similarly a variety of classroom strategies which can contribute to this aspect:

- identifying the personal point of reference for pupils, often as a starting point, or as the stimulus to deeper reflection, building bridges between the content and pupils' own concerns, or more general human experience;
- encouraging creative reflection, freely adopting processes familiar in English, Music, Art and Drama, to explore key areas and encourage personal expression of ideas and responses, spontaneous and refined;
- pushing discussion and reflection to the limits, on the grounds that why? is the most important question in RE - and possibly in education as a whole; demanding reasons, justifications, explanations from the earliest age, distinguishing between good and bad reasoning, good and bad reasons, opinion and propaganda;
- while remaining sensitive to what pupils can cope with at any time, appreciating the significance of family and community in this process;
- and always recognising the limits of reason.

No teacher or school or church can predetermine the outcome of the pupils' search. For some it will result in a reinforcing and deepening of the faith they come with; for some it may lead them to a commitment; for all we would wish it to result in an informed understanding of and respect for the religious dimension of life, and **'a conversion from a shallow and unreflective attitude to life ... (and) commitment to the religious quest, that search for meaning, purpose and value which is open to all.'** (*Durham Report on Religious Education, 1970, par.217*).