



York Diocese

Excellence and distinctiveness

Guidance on RE in Church of England schools

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THANK YOU for reading these guidance notes on Religious Education in Church of England schools.

The worldwide Church has always been involved in teaching and learning. The Church of England sees its involvement in schools as an important part of its mission today. Church of England schools aim to be inclusive and to foster sympathetic understanding of other faiths, while being able to add something special and distinctive. It is important that our RE shows that special quality, which speaks of good things that are at the heart of Anglicanism:

- A conviction that the good news of Jesus can be heard afresh in each generation
- A commitment to partnership with other Christian denominations
- An appreciation of the rich and varied heritage of the past
- Emphasis on people acting in accord with a free conscience, informed by a relationship with the God of love
- An approach to developments in science, religious thought and philosophy that is both open and critical
- A commitment to expressing faith through worship, action and pastoral care, in every part of the nation and in all social contexts

I hope that I shall have the opportunity to meet many of you and the young people with whom you work. Please be assured that you are often in my prayers, and in the prayers of people throughout the Diocese of York.

†Sentamu Ebor:

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Art work by Juliet Hill (front cover) and Laura Peace (cover of CD/back cover)
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1 Introduction

This Guidance on the teaching of Religious Education in Church of England schools is based on two key principles: firstly, that the RE in a church school should be of the highest standard, always striving for **excellence**; and secondly that it should reflect the school's **distinctive** Christian character.

The careful use of this Guidance should ensure that the RE in church schools reflects their distinctive Anglican foundation.

Over recent years both Ofsted and denominational inspections have shown that there is much good and improving practice in RE, especially in church schools. This progress will be maintained, if the provision of RE in church schools is a high priority for leadership teams and governing bodies. They should aim to ensure that RE is at the heart of the curriculum and recognised as such by the whole school community. The quality of teaching and learning in RE should be at least as good as in any other subject. All church schools should, in a sense, be 'specialist schools' for RE.

Key recommendations

- Governors in Voluntary Aided schools adopt the York Diocesan Guidelines for RE.
- Governors in Voluntary Controlled schools adopt the locally agreed syllabus for RE as required by law, taking account of the recommendations in this guidance to make the religious education distinctively Anglican.
- All Church of England schools in the Diocese of York should ensure that:
 - standards of teaching, learning and achievement in RE are at the highest level;
 - at least 5% of curriculum time is devoted to RE;
 - Christianity has a central role in the RE curriculum;
 - appropriate teaching about other faiths and world views is given;
 - all pupils take an accreditation in Religious Studies at the end of Key Stage 4;
 - all A level students have the opportunity to take a Religious Studies qualification.

2 RE in a distinctively Christian school

In a Church of England school, the educational process is rooted in the living faith of the school. The ethos of the school should influence planning and teaching in every curriculum area. Religious Education is not only an academic subject, but, lying at the very heart of the curriculum, has an important role in reflecting and conveying the distinctively Christian character of the school.

In developing this distinctive approach to RE as shaped by the National Framework, schools should consider what lies at the heart of the Christian faith. This can be expressed in relation to the Framework's two attainment targets, reflecting the twin aims of RE: **learning about religion** and **learning from religion**.

Learning about religion

We learn about:

- The God who reveals the truth about himself and humanity through creation, the giving of the law, his action in history and through the prophets;
- The God who reveals himself ultimately in Jesus his Son, living among us and dying and rising for us;
- The God who reveals himself in his Spirit working in the living faith of the Church experienced through scripture, tradition and reason, and expressed through service.

Learning from religion

We learn from:

- An empathetic response to the Christian faith and a critical engagement with it;
- Responding personally to the transforming power of Jesus Christ;
- Developing a vision for life that transcends materialism and recognises the reality of the spiritual realm;
- Understanding ourselves and others, celebrating our shared humanity and the breadth of human achievement;
- Examples of Christian living which give priority to the claims of justice, mercy, holiness and love.

RE does not exist in a vacuum; it comes as a challenge to the learner's existing values and practices. It involves and confronts the individual in a way no other subject can. As Rowan Williams has observed, RE should help pupils see why religion is a deep and serious matter. RE is key to fulfilling the purpose of a church school as described by the late Lord Runcie when he was Archbishop of Canterbury:

- to nourish those of the faith;
- to encourage those of other faiths;
- to challenge those who have no faith.

Maintaining the balance between these intentions will always require skill and tact and will need to reflect local circumstances.

Therefore RE in church schools should help pupils to:

- think theologically and explore the great questions of life and death, meaning and purpose;
- reflect critically on the truth claims of Christian belief;
- see how the truths of Christianity are relevant today and face the challenge of Jesus' teaching in a pluralist and post modern society;
- develop the skills to handle the Bible text;
- recognise that faith is not based on a balance of probabilities but on commitment to a particular way of understanding God and the world;
- understand how the Christian faith can be absorbed and lived out;
- respond in terms of beliefs, commitments, ways of living, ethical decisions and choices affecting their own and others' lives;
- develop a sense of themselves as significant, unique and precious;
- experience the breadth and variety of the Christian community;
- engage in respectful and thoughtful dialogue with other faiths and traditions;
- become active citizens, serving their neighbour;
- find a reason for hope in a troubled world;
- understand how religious faith can sustain them in difficult circumstances and in the face of opposition.

3 Teaching about world faiths and world views

As 'schools of faith' Church of England schools recognise the common search of all humanity for ultimate truth and relationship with the divine. The prevailing secular assumption that there is no reality beyond the physical world illustrates the divide between those with a religious faith and those for whom religion has little meaning. It is entirely appropriate and necessary in today's world, therefore, that respect for the great world faiths is fostered in RE within a church school. This respect must be based on an accurate and sympathetic understanding of the other faiths which is consistent with the school's loyalty to its Christian foundation.

A positive outcome of this approach is to provide learners with a greater understanding of the world and society in which they are growing up. Another outcome is that learners will be able to see the faith of others in relation to their own. Both of these outcomes contribute to building up harmonious relations within communities, promoting inclusion for all and combating the evils of racism. Parents not of the Christian faith who seek a place for their children at a church school often express the view that here faith itself is respected. In a church school there should be opportunities for their children to grow in the understanding of their own faith.

The non-statutory Framework has introduced the deliberate study of secular world views where appropriate. This is a welcome recognition that such positions are indeed matters of 'faith' rather than commonly accepted certainties. RE should equip pupils for the critical evaluation of such world views.

Therefore RE in church schools should also help pupils to:

- learn *about* other faiths, their beliefs, traditions and practices and *from* them through encounter and dialogue;
- recognise and respect those of all faiths in their search for God;
- recognise areas of common belief and practice between different faiths;
- enrich and expand their understanding of truth while remaining faithful to their own tradition;
- enrich their own faith through examples of holy living in other traditions;
- recognise the common human quest for justice, peace and love and the common goal of the survival of life on this planet.

The allocation of teaching time

Whilst Christianity occupies a major proportion of curriculum time, schools should ensure a coherent and integrated approach to the study of other faiths and traditions. We commend such an approach to both Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Schools.

4 The importance and purpose of RE

The statement of the importance of religious education in the QCA national framework provides a good basis for establishing the purpose of RE in Church of England schools.

National Framework (Oct 2004)	Comment
Religious education provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning of and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human.	RE is no longer just about the phenomena of religion, but addresses directly the essential reality and nature of God. The Christian understanding of God, revealed through the life and work of Jesus Christ, and as understood by the Church, is the heart of the matter.
It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views that offer answers to questions such as these. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development.	In church schools, pupils are entitled to know and understand Christianity as received and handed on by the Church of England. Pupils are also entitled to have an understanding of traditions other than their own, which they are likely to encounter in their life's journey.
It enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expressions, as well as of the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.	The role of religious communities in the past and today in advancing causes, from the abolition of slavery to making poverty history, should be an important part of RE's contribution to the creation of community life in a church school.
Religious education encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions, while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.	Pupils are entitled to explore their own beliefs in response to the great traditions, an essential basis for developing any religious understanding. This enables them to discern and locate 'the Spirit that is within them' that 'leads...into all truth'.
Religious education encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community. Religious education has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning.	Most adults see themselves as belonging to a particular religious tradition (72% Christian in the 2001 census). In a Church of England school pupils are entitled to develop a strong sense of being part of a worldwide, growing faith.
It enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own. It promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.	This is a proper goal for Church of England, as for other, schools. Teaching about other faiths will include, at the right stages, a consideration of issues of truth.

5 Managing RE in church schools

“Church schools ... should ensure that ... the character and quality of religious education are a particular concern of the headteacher and governing body.”
[‘The Way ahead’ 4.6]

In **Voluntary Aided** schools the management of RE is a distinctive role of the governors and headteacher. From 1944 onwards successive Education Acts have placed the responsibility for the provision of RE with the governors, in accordance with the school’s trust deed. In practical terms, most VA schools have adopted guidance provided by the Diocesan Boards of Education.

This booklet should also be a useful source of additional advice for the planning of RE in **Voluntary Controlled** schools which are required in law to provide RE in accordance with their local agreed syllabus. It is the intention of this Guidance to provide material which can be used to supplement these agreed syllabuses to ensure that RE in church schools is in keeping with their distinctively Anglican character.

In implementing the advice in this Guidance governors and headteachers will need to consider the following management issues:

- All governors should be aware of:
 - the legal requirements for RE in a church school
 - the advice of their DBE on the development of the RE curriculum
 - the RE syllabus adopted, including the faiths to be studied
 - the standards achieved in the subject in the school.
- Religious Education should be managed separately from Collective Worship with separate policy documents and responsibilities. Ideally there should be separate leaders for each area, though it is recognised that this may be difficult in smaller schools.
- There should be a clear and detailed policy document for RE outlining the school’s vision and aims for the subject and the learning outcomes for each key stage or year group. It should be revised regularly in consultation with staff and governors. It should outline the school’s policy on the parental right of withdrawal from RE and how the school will deal with this issue.
- There should be a subject leader appointed for RE (if possible a practising Christian) with sufficient training to be confident and competent to support colleagues in the delivery and assessment of the curriculum.
- RE should regularly form part of the school’s improvement plan and self-evaluation procedures. The National Society’s self-evaluation toolkit supports this process.
- A detailed curriculum and scheme of work should be drawn up and agreed with all the teachers who will teach RE. This must be in accordance with the syllabus adopted by the governors.
- At least 5% of curriculum time should be assigned for RE in a clearly identifiable way. This does not include time spent in Collective Worship.
- Sufficient resources should be provided to deliver the curriculum in an exciting and dynamic way, including books, artefacts, ICT and video materials. This should be at a level at least equivalent to the level that is provided for foundation subjects.
- RE should be allocated time within the training programme for both the subject leader and for all teachers who teach the subject.

- A link governor, preferably one of the foundation governors, should liaise with the subject coordinator and keep the full governing body informed of these contacts and of the needs of the subject. The subject leader should make a regular report to the governing body.
- The subject leader for RE should maintain good links with the local parish, wider community and local faith leaders, involving them in the delivery of the subject where appropriate. Pupils' work should be displayed in the church from time to time.

Additional considerations in secondary schools

- Sufficient qualified specialist staff should be employed to teach all RE lessons.
- The Head of Department should receive an appropriate teaching and learning responsibility payment that reflects the special status that the subject has in a church school. In a VA school it is particularly important to appoint someone with a personal Christian commitment as Head of RE [School Standards and Framework Act 1998 section 60(5)].
- The minimum 5% of curriculum time applies to all pupils of compulsory school age (ie 11 – 16). It is also essential to ensure there is suitable provision of RE in the curriculum for 16 – 19 year old students, though not necessarily within the weekly timetable. More intensive provision through day conferences for whole year groups is a successful and innovative model established in some dioceses.
- The minimum expectation for Key Stage 4 in church schools should be that all pupils are entered for a GCSE Short Course in RS with sufficient Christian content; many church schools enter the complete cohort for the full GCSE course; some enter more able candidates for AS level at the end of year 11. Where there are post 16 students there should be well-resourced provision for AS and A2 courses in RS.
- The RE department should have a distinct and generous budget that reflects the special status of the subject in a church school. There should be sufficient provision for ICT and a dedicated specialist room for RE.
- The Head of Department, with the active support of the headteacher, should liaise with the heads of other subject areas to ensure that appropriate cross-curricular links are made.

6 Distinctiveness in the RE classroom

In what ways is the RE in a church school different from RE in a community school? This section assumes that a church school will already be aiming at the highest possible standards in RE; it therefore deals only with those issues that are distinctive of a church school.

Planning and preparation will include:

- Opportunities to explore the experience of the Church's year;
- Study of the story of the local Christian community with its saints and martyrs;
- Visits to places of worship, especially the local parish Church and the Cathedral, to develop the understanding of the church as a living community;
- Welcoming visitors from the local parish to share their experience of Christian belief and life;
- Liaison with the local parish to enable these visits and links to occur.

The classroom environment will provide:

- High quality displays that reflect the Church's year;
- Displays of the best Christian writing and reflection;
- Support for the pupils' confident use of religious language;
- A set of Bibles in language that can be understood by the learners and examples of Bibles and prayer books from a variety of contexts;
- The facility to experience Christian 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' from a wide variety of traditions;
- Access to Christian artefacts that are used with care, respect and confidence;
- A sacred space that can be used as a focus for prayer and silent reflection;
- Encouragement of mutual respect based on Christian values, where pupils and teachers are able to talk openly and freely about their own personal beliefs and practice without fear of ridicule.

The quality of learning in RE enables:

- High achievement in RE reflecting its importance in a church school;
- Pupils to be enthusiastic about their work in RE;
- Pupils to make excellent and appropriate progress in their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the Anglican tradition;
- Pupils to talk openly about their beliefs and values and to grow in their faith;
- Pupils with no religious background to face the challenge of Christianity and other faiths;
- Pupils of all backgrounds to have a safe place to explore the place of doubt and certainty in a maturing faith.

The quality of teaching in RE is enhanced by teachers who:

- Have excellent subject knowledge and the ability to speak with confidence about Christianity, the Anglican tradition and the other faiths studied;
- Are sometimes willing to speak of their personal beliefs and doubts;
- Show respect and sensitivity for their pupils as they search for personal faith and meaning;
- Are able to use religious language accurately;
- Provide opportunities for prayer and reflection in their classrooms.

7 The contribution of RE to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in a church school is distinctive because these four aspects of the school curriculum are inextricably rooted in the reality of God the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Religious Education curriculum in a church school is the place where excellent and distinctive SMSC is seen most clearly.

Spiritual development

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.

Psalms 139.13-14

Spiritual development within RE in a church school enriches and encourages the pupils' discovery of God the creator, of their 'inmost being' and of the wonder of the environment.

This is promoted through:

- exploring their relationship with God and the sense that they are his children, unique and loved by him;
- exploring and experiencing prayer and worship from a variety of Christian traditions;
- giving thanks to God for all aspects of school life;
- discussing and reflecting upon key questions of meaning and truth such as the existence of God, the origins and purpose of the universe, good and evil, life after death;
- considering the value of human beings and their relationship with God, with one another and with the natural world;
- discovering how the creative and expressive arts enable spiritual development;
- opportunities to discuss feelings and emotions openly;
- recognising and encouraging the use of personal and group gifts and talents;
- opportunities to develop their gift of imagination and creativity;
- encouraging curiosity and questioning so that their own views and ideas on religious and spiritual issues can be developed within a secure environment where faith is valued;
- developing a sense of personal significance and belonging;
- encountering Christian fellowship.

Moral development

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12.2

Moral development in RE in a church school is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, which offer pupils a secure foundation stone on which to make decisions and build their lives.

This is promoted through:

- developing a sense of right and wrong;
- considering the implications of Jesus' teachings and actions for people of our time;
- recognising the values identified within the Bible: truth, justice, trust, love, peace, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption and self-control;
- learning to follow a path through the conflicting demands of faith, family, peers, society, the media and the world of ideas;
- recognising the importance of personal integrity;
- developing mutual respect across racial and religious divides;
- recognising that people's rights also imply responsibilities;
- developing a sensitive conscience.

Social development

*As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.
John 13.34-35*

Social development in RE in a church school develops pupils' understanding of what it means to live in a Christian community where Jesus' command to love one another is put into practice.

This is promoted through:

- developing a sense of empathy, compassion and concern for others;
- building relationships within the school and between the school, the parish and the local community;
- considering how Christian beliefs affect decisions at personal, local and national level;
- investigating social issues from the perspective of Christianity and of other faiths, recognising the common ground and diversity that exists between them;
- providing opportunities for pupils to articulate their own views on a range of current issues and to show respect for the opinions of others and a willingness to learn from their insights.

Cultural development

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Galatians 3.28*

Cultural development in RE in a church school provides opportunities to develop an understanding of Christianity as a worldwide, multi-cultural faith that has an impact on the lives of millions of people.

This is promoted through:

- promoting an understanding of Christianity from a global perspective through encounters with people, literature and the creative arts from different cultures;
- exploring the diversity of Christianity worldwide with particular reference to the diversity of the Anglican Communion;
- considering the relationship between British and European culture and Christianity;
- appreciating the diversity of cultures within Britain.

8 In summary...

Church of England schools are committed to offering their pupils a sufficient understanding of Christianity as a vibrant, world-wide faith. There should be sufficient emphasis given to those key Christian topics and concepts that are vital for this understanding.

Church of England schools should encourage an emphasis on the church as people more than buildings and on the church as wider than a single parish. Teaching should reflect accurately the wide range of types and styles of being an Anglican. In a worldwide perspective Anglicanism represents an important 'bridge' between the catholic and protestant traditions.

Suggested resources and supplementary material are available on:

www.dioceseofyork.org.uk