

RE and inclusion

Providing Effective Learning Opportunities For All Pupils

This agreed syllabus is the starting point for planning religious education that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils. The following notes outline how teachers can modify, as necessary, the agreed syllabus programmes of study to provide all pupils with relevant and appropriately challenging work at each stage.

Religious Education and Special Educational Needs

Requirements

All maintained schools must provide religious education, or for pupils to be wholly or partly excused from receiving such education in accordance with the request of the pupil's parent (Education Act, 2002, 80 (1) (a) and in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (c. 31)). It is therefore part of each pupil's curriculum entitlement to have provided appropriate opportunities to make progress in religious education, as an important subject in its own right, and which makes an important, although not exclusive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Education Act, 2002, 78).

In **special schools** the requirement to provide religious education is varied by section 71(7) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 which states that, 'so far as practicable, every pupil attending a community or foundation special school -

(a) receives religious education and attends religious worship,

or

(b) is withdrawn from receiving such education or from attendance at such worship in accordance with the wishes of his parent.'

All teachers are teachers of children with special educational needs. In religious education, as with other subjects of the curriculum, teachers are engaged in a continuous cycle of planning, teaching and assessing which takes account of the wide range of abilities, aptitudes and interests of children. Assessment against the level descriptions for subjects of the National Curriculum and RE (see pages 45-50 of this Agreed Syllabus) will enable the school to consider the individual child's attainment and progress against the expected levels for the majority of their peers. Those children whose overall attainment falls outside the expected range may have special educational needs (see the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2001, DfES, p44).

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice recommends that when undertaking assessment of pupils' attainment and progress, 'It should be recognised that some difficulties in learning may be caused or exacerbated by the school's learning environment or adult/child relationships. This means looking carefully at such matters as classroom organisation, teaching materials, teaching style and differentiation in order to decide how these can be developed so that the child is enabled to learn effectively' (2001, p44). This applies to religious education as to other subjects of the curriculum.

Interpretation

Schools adopting *Awareness, Mystery and Value 2011* should secure the curriculum entitlement for religious education for all pupils, including those pupils with a special educational need.

The special educational need may be connected with cognition and learning difficulties, physical and sensory difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or difficulties with communication and interaction. The majority of pupils with statements are now in mainstream schools and all pupils in special schools have statements or are in the process of statutory assessment.

For **mainstream schools** following this syllabus the requirement to provide religious education for all pupils, including those with a special educational need, has been made clear. All schools are reminded of the estimates of minimum curriculum time for religious education. No exception is made within this recommendation for pupils with a special educational need.

Principles

A fundamental principle of the SEN Code of Practice is that, 'children with special educational needs should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education' (*ibid.* p7). This necessarily includes the National Curriculum and religious education, and pupils in the Foundation Stage. Each pupil with a special educational need should have described in *his/her individual education plan* any provision to be made which is 'additional to or different from the differentiated curriculum plan that is in place as part of normal provision' (*ibid.* p37). Schools should ensure that the differentiated curriculum plan includes religious education and relates to the requirements of this agreed syllabus. Provision for RE will therefore only be included in a pupil's individual education plan where it is additional to or different from the curriculum plan for RE.

Examples of appropriate strategies for RE are provided in the linked guidance >> [LINK 'Guidance on appropriate teaching for different kinds of learning difficulty' E4]

The National Curriculum Inclusion Statement (*'Inclusion: providing effective learning opportunities for all children'*, QCA/99/458) emphasises the importance of providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils and offers three key principles for inclusion:

- setting suitable learning challenges;
- responding to pupils' diverse needs;
- overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

This applies to RE as to other subjects of the national curriculum. The key to success, according to the Code of Practice, 'lies in the teacher's knowledge of each child's skills and abilities and the teacher's ability to match this knowledge to finding ways of providing appropriate access to the curriculum for every child' (*op. cit.* p51).

In RE, teachers should use the appropriate Agreed Syllabus programmes of study to teach knowledge, understanding and skills using a variety of methods that are appropriate to the abilities of individual pupils. For some pupils it will be necessary to choose work from earlier key stages so that they are able to progress and demonstrate attainment.

For **special schools** the requirements to provide religious education 'as far as practicable' needs some clarification and direction. DFE circular 3/94 provides some advice: 'It is for the school to decide what is practicable but, in general terms, the Secretary of State would expect the question of practicability to relate to the special educational needs of the pupils and not to problems of staffing or premises.'

Planning, teaching and assessing religious education for pupils with learning difficulties

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) publication, *'Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties: Religious Education'*, 2001, ref. QCA/01/750, contains guidance on planning appropriate learning opportunities relevant to RE, including for pupils 'who are unlikely to achieve above level 2 at key stage 4' and pupils who 'may be working at age-related expectations in some subjects but are well below this in others' (p2).

The document also indicates the importance of RE to pupils with learning difficulties, noting, for example, that 'RE offers pupils opportunities to:

- develop their self-confidence and awareness;
- understand the world they live in as individuals and as members of groups;
- develop positive attitudes towards others, respecting their beliefs and experience; and
- deal with issues that form the basis for personal choices and behaviour' (p6).

Such opportunities can be provided to support pupils' learning about religion and learning from religion. In particular, the document recommends that staff can make RE more accessible for **all** pupils by focusing on the senses:

- 'using sensory materials and resources through sight, touch, sound, taste, or smell, *for example, music, tactile artefacts, plants in a sensory garden;*
- giving pupils first-hand experiences, *for example, visitors to school, visits to religious buildings, involvement in festivals;*
- organising a range of activities to give person experiences, *for example, dance, drama, visits to a range of environments;*
- helping pupils to understand and appreciate their world and its diversity' (p8).

As with all subjects of the curriculum, access to RE can be improved where staff use a range of resources and specialist aids and equipment where appropriate, adapting tasks or environments to allow space, time and freedom for pupils to develop skills for themselves.

'Performance Descriptions for pupils with learning difficulties' ('P' scales), in relation to RE are available here >> [LINK to P Scales in RE B10]

Qualifications at Key Stage 4

Accredited courses that may be considered appropriate for pupils with a special educational need include:

- GCSE in Religious Studies;
- GCSE Short Course in Religious Studies;
- Entry Level Certificate in Religious Studies;
- Award Scheme of the Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN - Youth Award - Belief and Values Unit);
- Accreditation for Life and Living Skills (ALL) certificate for pupils who have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Teachers should ensure in ALL cases that the Key Stage 4 requirements in this syllabus are being met [LINK to KS4 programme of study B9].

Further Guidance on Appropriate teaching for different kinds of learning difficulty >> [LINK E4]

Religious education for pupils from all religious and cultural backgrounds

The relationship between religion and culture is a complex one, often difficult to untangle. In religious education pupils learn, not just about individual religious traditions, but about how people from different faiths and cultures interact.

The subject has an important part to play in challenging racist and stereotypical views and in appreciating positively differences in others. There are many opportunities for teachers to do this within the programmes of study for this syllabus, for example:

- in the Foundation and Key Stage 1 programme of study, an enquiry into 'How we should live our lives' requires pupils to identify values that may be important to themselves ... and think about how they could show these values in their lives;
- in the Key Stage 2 programme of study, an enquiry into 'what is important to me' requires pupils to explore beliefs about the value of human beings;
- in the Key Stage 3 programme of study, an enquiry into 'what we can learn from religions, beliefs and communities today' requires pupils to consider the causes of hatred and persecution and what might be done to prevent it.

Whatever their religious or cultural background, pupils are entitled to have their views and traditions respected within the law. Religious education provides opportunities to recognise and value pupils' own specific beliefs in supporting their identity and self-esteem. For example, pupils should be entitled to participate safely in clothing appropriate to their religious beliefs. The programmes of study provide opportunities for pupils to consider the impact of people's beliefs on their actions and lifestyle.

There are a variety of perspectives from which religious education supports anti-racist education:

- From a **spiritual and moral** point of view, RE addresses issues of fear and ignorance at the root of racism.
Racism is an insidious evil which, for the sake of the future unity and stability of our society, must be countered. *Swann Report, 1985.*
- From a **social and cultural** point of view, RE can bring a dimension to children's education which enhances their experience of the rich cultural diversity which exists in many parts of the country. Christianity, for example, is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic religion, and it cannot be presumed that a particular cultural or ethnic background is implied by adherence to a particular religion. 'Schools in "all white" areas have a particular duty to counter stereotypes and prepare all their pupils for living in a multi-cultural and multi-racial society and world. If they do not do so, their pupils will be both misled and ill-equipped for the society they will enter.'

Alma Craft and Gillian Klein, 1986, Agenda for Multicultural Teaching, School Curriculum Development Committee, Longman.

'RE can help pupils to recognise, value and celebrate the cultural and religious identity of those families which find themselves in a minority within the school community. We have moved beyond the view that 'we treat all our pupils the same' and 'we don't see any differences' to one which emphasises similarities AND recognises and values difference.

‘Education is not concerned only with equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to earn a living. It must help our young people to have respect for other people, cultures and other beliefs, become good citizens, think things out for themselves and value themselves and their achievements.’

- *Sir Ron Dearing, 1993, The National Curriculum and its Assessment, SCAA.*

- From a **legal** point of view, RE can help a school to fulfil the requirement of the 2002 Education Act which charges every governing body with the duty to ensure ‘a balanced and broadly based curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society and prepares the pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.’ (para. 78)

Promoting multicultural and anti-racist education is an essential element in ensuring that all pupils regardless of their gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural background or disability have equal access to an education which meets their needs:

- an education which is broad, balanced and prepares them for living in a multicultural society;
- an education of equal quality which provides equality of opportunity to fulfil their potential...

.. in a safe environment free from harassment.

Statement on multicultural and anti-racist education, 1997, Somerset Education Services.

Further support, advice and training for North Somerset schools can be accessed from the Ethnic Minority Advisory Service (EMAS) at <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Community/Equalities/EMAS/>.

In Somerset, further information and support can be accessed via the following links on SiX:

www.six.somerset.gov.uk > Pupil Support > Equal Opportunities > Pupils