

The Legal Framework for Religious Education

The agreed syllabus for Religious Education (RE) provides the legal framework for its planning and delivery within our schools.

1.1 The importance of Religious Education to the school curriculum

RE is part of the basic curriculum for all pupils. The programmes of study required in each key stage set out what pupils should know, understand and be able to do through their encounter with learning about and learning from religion.

It contributes by:

- developing pupils' knowledge, understanding of and ability to respond to Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain, increasing their awareness and insight into the influence and importance of religion, beliefs, values and traditions (including ethical life stances) on individuals, societies, communities and cultures;
- enabling pupils to know about, understand and respond to a range of beliefs, practices and values both intellectually and through reflection on their own, and other peoples' experiences thus making a significant contribution to their spiritual development;
- encouraging pupils to address and respond to moral and ethical issues in the light of their understanding of the beliefs, teachings and practices of religions (and ethical life stances), thus enabling them to make reasoned and informed judgements on such issues and contributing to their moral development;
- involving pupils in working together co-operatively, learning to respect and care for others, whose views may be very different from their own, thus contributing to their social development;
- enhancing their cultural and multi-cultural awareness through developing insights into the cultural context of the country in which they live and the diverse beliefs and cultures represented within it, including addressing the relationship between religious beliefs and practices and cultural expression;
- promoting respect for and empathy towards people of different beliefs, practices and cultures, preparing pupils for adult life as citizens of a diverse world.

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RE contributes to developing

Skills

- investigation - asking questions, information gathering, evidence
- Interpretation - understanding meaning and symbolism, religious language, suggest meaning
- Reflection - feelings, relationships, experience, ultimate questions, beliefs and practices
- Empathy - consideration (thoughts, feelings, experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values of others), imagination and identification (feelings such as love, wonder, forgiveness and sorrow), seeing through another's eyes
- Evaluation - debate (with reference to evidence and argument), "weighing up" (self-interest, other's interests, religious teaching, individual conscience), seeing "both sides of the argument"
- Analysis - distinguishing between opinion, fact and belief, features of different religions
- Synthesis - linking features of religion together in a coherent pattern, connecting different aspects of life
- Application - making associations (religions, individual, community, national, international)
- Expression - explanation (concepts, rituals, practices), identifying and articulating matters of conviction and concern, responding to religious issues

Attitudes

- Commitment - set of values by which to live, positive approach to life, change and certainty
- Fairness - listening to and considering the views of others, considering evidence and argument, looking beyond surface impressions
- Respect - for self and others, recognising and respecting views, beliefs and customs of others, discerning between what is worthy of respect and what is not (respecting that a perceived opinion may be regarded as a fact by the holder)
- Self-understanding - mature sense of self-worth and value, personal relevance of religious questions (and answers)
- Enquiry - seeking after truth, personal interest in "meaning of life", reconsidering existing views, valuing insight and imagination

RE does not seek to urge religious beliefs on pupils or compromise the integrity of their own, or the teacher's faith position, by promoting one religion over another. However, it does seek to encourage pupils to learn from religion things that will promote their own spiritual development and contribute to their own framework for decision making, life and living. RE is not the same as collective worship which has its own place within the life of the school.

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1.2 The legal framework for Religious Education:

The statutory requirements for the delivery and inspection of Religious Education in schools are to be found in the Education Acts - 1944, 1981, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1998.

Since 1944 the syllabus for Religious Education has been determined locally. Religious Education, although not part of the National Curriculum, is to have equal standing and status with the subjects of the National Curriculum as part of the basic curriculum.

The requirements of the Wandsworth Council Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education forms the legal and educational basis for RE within schools in the borough (see types of school below).

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and its predecessor, the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) have issued guidance on Religious Education. This guidance includes for example, the SCAA Model Syllabuses for RE (1994) and the QCA Non-statutory Guidance and Schemes of Work for RE (2000).
Although helpful documents they are entirely advisory.

The statutory requirements for Religious Education - a summary:

- Religious Education must be provided for all pupils age 4-19 on the school roll - this includes those in reception classes through to sixth forms. It does not include nursery schools or nursery classes in primary schools or those of sixth form age in institutions of further education.
- The introduction of the Foundation Stage (children aged 3 to 5) from September 2000 *does not alter in any way the requirements for Religious Education*. For children, other than those in reception classes, Religious Education is not statutory although aspects of Religious Education may be explored (e.g. stories from different faith traditions, religious festivals, etc.). The six areas of learning and the early learning goals have much within them that link to Religious Education (see non-statutory guidance page 29)
- Parents may withdraw their children, on grounds of conscience, from a school's Religious Education programme.
- Teachers have the right to withdraw from teaching RE, on grounds of conscience.
- The subject must be taught in accordance with a Locally Agreed Syllabus prepared by the Agreed Syllabus Conference and agreed by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). It is then recommended to the Education Committee of the Local Education Authority (LEA) who may accept it as the syllabus for Religious Education to be followed within their area (see below for the requirements in relation to RE in different types of schools).
- The Religious Education provided in compliance with the agreed syllabus must not be denominational in character but it is permissible for teaching about denominational differences to take place.
- Section 8 of the 1988 Education Religion Act (ERA) makes the requirement that an agreed syllabus published subsequently to the Act must *"reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices*

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of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain". The Education Act 1993 places the requirement on local education authorities to institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus within five years of its last review and every five years subsequently.

- Section 2 of the 1988 ERA identifies the special status of Religious Education as part of the basic curriculum. It states that Religious Education should have equal standing and status with subjects of the National Curriculum. Religious Education is not subject to nationally prescribed attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements. An Agreed Syllabus Conference can develop these and recommend their inclusion in the syllabus to the LEA through the SACRE. This agreed syllabus for Religious Education includes attainment targets, end of key stage statements of attainment and programmes of study. The QCA Non-statutory Guidance on RE (2000) includes some levels of attainment for RE under the heading of National Expectations in RE. The Wandsworth Council syllabus does not have such levels and so the use of levels in RE is non-statutory. However, schools are encouraged to draw on and adapt the non-statutory QCA levels to help them in their assessment of pupils' progress in RE.
- RE in Special schools is to be taught "as far as is practicable" (see 1981 and 1993 Education Acts) to pupils, subject to withdrawal by their parents on grounds of conscience. It is suggested that special schools within the borough should contact the Wandsworth Professional Centre for specific advice if necessary on interpreting this clause for their pupils.
- Under the requirements of the Education Acts 1992 and 1996 Religious Education taught in accordance with an agreed syllabus is subject to Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) inspection arrangements.