

St Thomas à Becket Church of England Federation

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Religious Education Policy

Our Vision is to raise the aspiration of all pupils to “Be the Very Best they can Be”, through providing an engaging and Christian environment alongside an exciting broad and balanced curriculum striving to develop the skills, attitudes and Christian values of the whole Federation Community to face the new challenges of the 21st century with confidence.

CONTENTS	PAGE
Background	3
Values and Aims	3
Objectives	4
Assessment, Recording and Reporting	6
Time Allocation	6
Planning	6
Cross Curricular Opportunities	7
Equality	7
Leadership and Management	7
Review	8

Background

Religious Education (RE) is not a National Curriculum subject but must be taught to all registered pupils. As RE is not nationally determined, the Local Education Authority must provide an Agreed Syllabus for Schools to follow. The St Thomas à Becket Church of England Federation (which is referred to as the Federation in the rest of this document) follow the East Sussex RE Agreed Syllabus June 2017, "*Continuing the Journey*" which has been used as the basis of their planning and delivery of RE.

Families who send their children to the Federation Schools are in the main 'nominally' Christian, however other faiths are sometimes represented. RE is concerned with "learning about religions and beliefs" and "learning from religions and beliefs" and it is not the practice of the Federation Schools to preach to or convert their pupils. The faith background of both members of staff and pupil's families is respected at all times.

Parents of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school have the right to withdraw their child/children from all or part of the RE programme. Where parents have concerns about their child/children taking part in RE, they are asked to discuss their concerns first with their Headteacher. Who will be able to discuss the RE programme and teaching methods in greater detail and give parents access to the RE curriculum and resources used. Agreement on alternative provision for the child/children would need to be reached should they be withdrawn from the RE programme. Teachers may also withdraw from the teaching of RE.

Values and Aims

We believe that in giving children the opportunity to study RE; to gain a deeper understanding of the Christian faith, other faiths and those following no faith, exploring how all are relevant today, and learning wisdom from the teachings of Jesus; this will inspire them to "Be the best they can be", to "live life in all its fullness" and to help to shape the world.

We believe at the Federation that RE both supports and strengthens what we aim to do in every aspect of school life. Our caring ethos and the value which we place on the development of the whole child - spiritually, morally, socially, culturally and intellectually is reflected in the RE curriculum. Specifically, RE at our Federation aims to enable pupils of whatever ability and level of development to:

1. Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of principal world faiths practised in Great Britain. These include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, each of which is represented in East Sussex;
2. Develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures, including the local community;
3. Develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues with reference to the teachings of the principal religions;

4. Enhance their own spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by:
 - a) developing awareness of the fundamental questions of life arising from human experiences, and how religious beliefs and practices can relate to them;
 - b) responding to the fundamental questions of life in the light of their experience and with reference to religious beliefs and practices;
 - c) reflecting on their own beliefs, values and experiences in the light of their study;
 - d) expressing their own personal viewpoints in a thoughtful, reasoned and considerate way.
5. Recognise the right of people to hold different beliefs within an ethnically and socially diverse society.

Objectives

Learning

RE provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning 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. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses. RE should encourage all participants to reflect on their own beliefs and values and to acknowledge that others hold beliefs different from their own.

RE has two closely related aspects: Learning about Religions and Beliefs (AT1) and Learning from Religions and Beliefs (AT2). These two attainment targets with their associated statements set out the broad objectives in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills for the RE curriculum. RE is at its most effective when these two attainment targets are closely related in the learning experience.

AT1 Learning about Religions and Beliefs

Building up knowledge and understanding of religions and beliefs: This includes investigating, thinking about and interpreting religious beliefs, teachings, sources, practices, ways of life and ways of expressing meaning with reference to the specific beliefs and religions studied.

AT2 Learning from Religion

Building up investigative, reasoning and evaluation skills: This includes engaging with, reflecting on and responding to questions of identity, belonging, diversity, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments, making increasingly insightful links to the specific beliefs and religions studied.

Teaching

Teaching the programmes of study should contribute to pupils' knowledge and understanding and provide opportunities for reflection on six key areas:

- Beliefs, teachings and sources - e.g. stories, religious leaders, books, God/gods, self-sacrifice, truth, life after death;
- Practices and lifestyles - e.g. people, festivals, pilgrimages, places, events, artefacts, lifestyle choices, actions, effects on individuals;
- Expressing meaning - e.g. sacred texts, art, music, literature, symbolism, poetry, dance, drama, prayer, forms of religious and spiritual expression, silence/stillness;
- Identity, diversity and belonging - e.g. belonging, preferences, relationships within family and community, influences on own lives, inspirational people;
- Meaning, purpose and truth - e.g. amazement, sadness, disappointment, joy, awe, in connection with the natural world and life's journey, making sense of ultimate questions of life raised by life experiences;
- Values and commitments - e.g. values, ethics, principles, rules, morality.

The teaching of RE seeks both to impart knowledge and develop understanding of religious experiences, feelings and attitudes through a variety of teaching and learning approaches. Providing a balance between the two key attainment targets underpins the teaching of RE at the Federation. At Key Stage 1 pupils' learning focuses primarily on Christianity and Judaism. At Key Stage 2 pupils build on their understanding of Christianity and also study Islam and Hinduism although festivals and celebrations from other faiths such as Judaism, Buddhism or people of no faith may be considered.

RE teaching specifically draws on the following:

1. Visits and visitors; enabling children to see at first hand religious people, objects, symbols, places, events, stories and explore with people who have faith;
2. Role play and drama; encouraging children to learn through familiar or unfamiliar settings and ask questions from their own encounters;
3. Artefacts; being able to explore items which are precious and/or used in religious worship, encouraging respect and questioning whilst deepening knowledge;
4. Music and the arts; enabling children to experience elements of religions in a sensory way;
5. Parents; by valuing the family backgrounds of the children and making them part of the Federation community;
6. Food sampling; making and baking foods from different faiths to support children's understanding.

The teaching of RE will involve some direct teaching and whole class, group, paired or individual activities. A range of teaching styles will be used including enquiry, exploration, discussion, asking and answering questions, artefacts, visits and faith visitors, to ensure pupils are actively engaged in learning.

Assessment, Recording and Reporting

The Federation uses its own system for the assessment of RE which breaks each unit down into statements that describe the expected standard and what the unit would look like for children working towards or working above the expected standard.

Through activities, for example discussion with pupils, group activities, marking and guiding their work, observing, displaying work, asking and answering questions, Teachers are continually finding out about their pupils' achievements. This information is then recorded against the statements of attainment in line with other areas of the curriculum. At the Federation, we appreciate that a vital aid to learning is for pupils to be actively involved in their own assessment. Members of staff have undertaken moderation exercises to ensure that we are familiar with the statements and what they mean in the context of a pupil's work. School reports are sent home in the summer term of each year and the RE report is written with reference to the records made or pieces of work retained.

Time Allocation

In line with the recommendations of the East Sussex Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education 2011, approximately 5% of curriculum time is given to RE. At Foundation Stage RE will be delivered flexibly according to the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). At Key Stage 1 pupils spend around 36 hours per year and 45 hours per year at Key Stage 2. The time allocation does include visits and RE curriculum days, but not school productions related to festivals or collective worship time. (See Collective Worship Policy).

Planning

In order to ensure that our aims are met and the Programme of Study is covered at each key stage, the Federation use the East Sussex units of learning for RE, "Understanding Christianity" which builds in coverage of and progression in both the content and concepts outlined in the Agreed Syllabus. We have used a combination of teaching RE through the creative curriculum. We teach RE as a separate subject but have also used RE days to enhance this learning.

Our medium-term plans give details of each unit of work for each term. The RE Subject Leader within the Federation reviews these plans on a regular basis. As we have mixed-age classes, we carry out the medium-term planning on a two-year rotation cycle. By so doing, we ensure that pupils have complete coverage of the Agreed Syllabus but do not have to repeat topics.

Short-term planning of individual lessons is a matter for the Class Teacher. The RE Subject Leader is available to help with this and keeps a range of Teachers' resources as a guide. (When planning each unit of work the Teacher will identify which parts of the programme of study are to be the focus, the learning objectives for the unit, the learning tasks planned to achieve them, time allocated and any resources, visits or visitors needed. The work planned must be relevant to the needs of the pupils). Planning support is made available for Teachers from the Parish Vicar to help increase their subject knowledge. Each unit has a big question to answer and Teachers need to break this down into smaller questions for each lesson to support the children in answering the big question.

Cross Curricular Opportunities

RE teaching and learning will be the means to many wider cross-curricular themes and dimensions. There are clearly very special opportunities to explore multicultural and equality issues and for consideration of the environment.

Moral questions will be raised, and pupils will develop a sense of citizenship through many aspects of the explicit RE curriculum. Links will be made with people and communities within the locality. Pupil's skills in oracy and literacy will be enhanced. Problem-solving, decision-making and interpersonal skills will be developed.

Equality

Provision for RE is in accordance with the Federation's Equality Policy. In accordance with the aims of the Federation the pupils will develop an appreciation of and respect for the beliefs and philosophies of others. Pupils will be encouraged to value the rich variety of cultural traditions and lifestyles represented in Great Britain. It is acknowledged and respected that deep beliefs are held in the area of RE. It is therefore the aim of the Federation to deal with any matters arising as sensitively as possible. Provision for pupils with special educational needs, including more able pupils, will follow the Federation's Policies in these areas. Pupil's needs are carefully monitored and supported through Teacher planning and assessment. This enables objectives, tasks, teaching methods, resources and Teacher/adult input to be matched to pupil needs. It includes the use of more challenging objectives or extension materials and tasks for the more able.

Leadership and Management

The RE Subject Leader for the Federation manages this area of the curriculum in line with the requirements of a Subject Leader. They attend East Sussex network meetings to ensure they are up to date with current practice in RE. There are regular staff meetings on RE and Collective Worship, led by the Subject Leader; where areas for development are discussed and evaluated against the subject action plan as part of the Federation Development Plan. This Policy is reviewed as required at that meeting to ensure it still represents the values and practice of the Federation.

The Federation subscribe to the support service provided by the Diocesan Education Team. The advisor visits the Federation Schools on a regular basis and evaluates their practice. It also provides feedback, information on best practice and INSET to members of staff and Governors. The Federation has Foundation Governors who monitor provision. They are responsible for providing feedback to the Governing Body. Parents are invited to share their children's learning during open afternoons which may include a focus on Religious Education.

Complaints regarding Religious Education are dealt with in line with the Federation's Complaint Policy.

Review

This Policy will be reviewed as it is deemed appropriate, but no less frequently than every four years. The Policy review will be undertaken by the Federations Headteachers and the Governing Body's Policies Working Party.