

The Legal Requirement

The Education Act (1996) requires that:

- RE should be taught to all pupils in full time education in schools except for those withdrawn at the request of their parents (details to be found in DCSF publication: RE in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010, p27-30).
- RE in community schools and foundation schools not of a religious character should be taught in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus recommended by the Agreed Syllabus Conference to the Local Authority. In schools with a religious foundation, the RE curriculum offered is to be determined by the governing body in accordance with the trust deed. The governing body may recommend that the school follows the Local Authority's agreed syllabus.
- As part of the curriculum, RE should promote the 'spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils'.
- An agreed syllabus should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Education Act, 1996)
- The Education Act (1944) requires that an agreed syllabus 'shall not include any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination' (The Education Act 1944 section 26(2)). This is understood to mean that an agreed syllabus should not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils.
- It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and the governing body to ensure that sufficient time and resources are given to RE in schools to meet the statutory requirements. It is important to note that the status of RE in Key Stage 4 and post 16 is not the same as most other subjects. Here, as well as in the other key stages, it is a compulsory subject for all pupils who have not been withdrawn by their parents.

Time for RE

Although time can be allocated to RE creatively and flexibly over terms and the subject might be planned in combination with other subjects, this agreed syllabus has been based on the expectation that the following hours be devoted to RE:

Key Stage 1: 36 hours per year Key Stage 2: 45 hours per year

Withdrawal from RE

The right of parents to withdraw their children from religious instruction on conscience grounds was included in the Education Act of 1944. All subsequent legislation has retained the clause that allows parents to withdraw their children from all or any part of RE. It also protects teachers' right to withdraw from teaching the subject. Since 1944 the nature of RE has changed significantly from the nurture of children in a faith tradition to an open and educational enquiry. It is hoped that parents and teachers will feel comfortable with the nature and areas of learning found in this syllabus and that, as a consequence, few will feel the need to withdraw either their children or themselves from the subject. However, every school should provide parents with information about the right of withdrawal (Further details can be found in DCSF publication: RE in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010, p27-30)

The aims of RE

RE should help pupils to:

Learn ABOUT religion by

- acquiring and developing knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain
- developing an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures.

Learn FROM religion by

- developing a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold beliefs different from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions
- developing the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues with reference to the teachings of the principal religions represented in Great Britain
- enhancing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by:
 - developing awareness of the fundamental questions of life raised by human experiences, and how religious teachings can relate to them
 - responding to such questions with reference to the teachings and practices of religions and to their understanding and experience
 - reflecting on their own beliefs, values and experiences in the light of their study.

These aims are achieved through a focus on two key aspects of RE as below:

- Learning ABOUT religion includes enquiry into, and investigation of, the nature of religion, its beliefs, teachings and ways of life, sources, practices and forms of expression. It includes the skills of interpretation, analysis and explanation.

Pupils learn to communicate their knowledge and understanding using specialist vocabulary. It also includes identifying and developing an understanding of ultimate questions and ethical issues. Learning about religion covers pupils' knowledge and understanding of individual religions and how they relate to each other as well as the study of the nature and characteristics of religion and its impact on the lives of believers.

- Learning FROM religion is concerned with developing pupils' reflection on and response to their own and others' experiences in the light of their learning about religion. It develops pupils' skills of application, interpretation and evaluation of what they learn about religion.

Pupils learn to develop and communicate their own ideas, particularly in relation to questions of identity and belonging, purpose and truth, and values and commitments.

The importance of RE

- 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.
- RE 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.
- RE enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression, as well as of the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.
- RE offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development.
- RE encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning.
- RE challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.
- RE encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging.
- RE enables pupils to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community.
- RE has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning.
- RE enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own.
- RE promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

RE across Key Stages 1-3

The Non-statutory National Framework for RE suggests that all pupils should have been introduced to the six religions deemed to be the principal faiths found in Great Britain by the end of Key Stage 3, having explored Christianity, as one of these faiths, in each key stage. This is the principle on which the previous locally agreed syllabus for RE was written. In line with existing practice, therefore, religions have been allocated to key stages as core areas of required study. Christianity is included as a core area of study in each key stage and each of the other five faiths is included once as a core area of study in Key Stages 1-3. Schools and teachers may choose to include study of non-core religions, over and above the required minimum number of religions in each key stage.

The syllabus is structured around questions based on themes suggested for each key stage in the Non-statutory National Framework for RE Coverage is summarised in an overview of the questions for Key Stages 1-3. These have been grouped around three main strands of learning about religion: Believing, Behaving and Belonging. For each key stage, suggestions for a breakdown of questions, content and examples of attainment expectations are outlined. Teachers will need to ensure they cover each strand (believing, behaving and belonging) by addressing:

- all the key questions in a study of Christianity

- some of the questions for the other core religions (ie Judaism in Key Stage 1, Hinduism and Sikhism in Key Stage 2)
- where schools choose to extend key questions to include the study of non-core religions, either the UK's principal religions or other faiths or secular belief systems deemed to be of interest in particular situations, teachers can select freely from the key and suggested questions.