

The purpose of religious education

The aims and purposes of religious education in this syllabus reflect those set out in the 2019 Statement of Entitlement¹. They are to enable pupils:

- to know about and understand Christianity as a diverse global living faith through the exploration of core beliefs using an approach that critically engages with biblical text.
- to gain knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews appreciating diversity, continuity and change within the religions and worldviews being studied.
- to engage with challenging questions of meaning and purpose raised by human existence and experience.
- to recognise the concept of religion and its continuing influence on Britain's cultural heritage and in the lives of individuals and societies in different times, cultures and places.
- to explore their own religious, spiritual and philosophical ways living, believing and thinking.

Appropriate to their age at the end of their education in Church schools, the expectation is that all pupils are religiously literate and, as a minimum, pupils are able to:

- Give a theologically informed and thoughtful account of Christianity as a living and diverse faith.
- Show an informed and respectful attitude to religions and non-religious worldviews in their search for God and meaning.
- Engage in meaningful and informed dialogue with those of other faiths and none.
- Reflect critically and responsibly on their own spiritual, philosophical and ethical convictions.

The purpose of RE is captured in the principal aim, which is intended to be a shorthand version for day-to-day use. It should be considered as a doorway into the wider purpose articulated above.

Principal aim

The principal aim of religious education is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that pupils can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and ways of living.

Schools should make use of this principal aim throughout their planning to ensure that all teaching and learning contributes to enabling pupils to achieve this aim. Schools and RE departments will find that discussing how the principal aim relates to the purpose of RE, and talking about how classroom RE can contribute to the aim, will be helpful for teachers in clarifying what RE is for in their school and classroom.

¹ As taken from *Religious Education in Church of England Schools: A Statement of Entitlement 2019*. www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/religious-education

The aims of RE

The threefold aim of RE elaborates the principal aim.

The curriculum for RE aims to ensure that all pupils:

1. make sense of a range of religious and non-religious beliefs, so that they can:

- identify, describe, explain and analyse beliefs and concepts in the context of living religions, using appropriate vocabulary
- explain how and why these beliefs are understood in different ways, by individuals and within communities
- recognise how and why sources of authority (e.g. texts, teachings, traditions, leaders) are used, expressed and interpreted in different ways, developing skills of interpretation

2. understand the impact and significance of religious and non-religious beliefs, so that they can:

- examine and explain how and why people express their beliefs in diverse ways
- recognise and account for ways in which people put their beliefs into action in diverse ways, in their everyday lives, within their communities and in the wider world
- appreciate and appraise the significance of different ways of life and ways of expressing meaning

3. make connections between religious and non-religious beliefs, concepts, practices and ideas studied, so that they can:

- evaluate, reflect on and enquire into key concepts and questions studied, responding thoughtfully and creatively, giving good reasons for their responses
- challenge the ideas studied, and allow the ideas studied to challenge their own thinking, articulating beliefs, values and commitments clearly in response
- discern possible connections between the ideas studied and their own ways of understanding the world, expressing their critical responses and personal reflections with increasing clarity and understanding

Throughout schooling, teachers should consider how their teaching contributes towards the principal aim of RE in Manchester Diocese, and how they help pupils to achieve the threefold aims above.

Notes:

These aims incorporate the former attainment targets of 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion'.

This agreed syllabus builds on the good practice from the 2004 *Non-statutory Framework for RE*, produced by the then Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and also the core ideas in the RE Council's non-statutory framework from 2013.² It takes account of recent reports, including the RE Council of England and Wales Commission Report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (2018), the OFSTED Education Inspection Framework (2019), and the OFSTED Research Review in Religious Education (2021).

Legal requirements: what does the legislation in England say?

RE is for all pupils:

- Every pupil has an entitlement to religious education (RE).
- RE is a necessary part of a 'broad and balanced curriculum' and must be provided for all registered pupils in state-funded schools in England, including those in the sixth form, unless withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over).³
- This requirement does not apply for children below compulsory school age (although there are many examples of good practice of RE in nursery classes).
- Special schools should ensure that every pupil receives RE 'as far as is practicable'.⁴
- The 'basic' school curriculum includes the national curriculum, RE and relationships and sex education.

RE is determined locally, not nationally:

- In a Voluntary Aided Church of England school, governors are ultimately responsible for the subject and they must ensure that their Religious Education syllabus and provision is in accordance with 'the rites, practices and beliefs of the Church of England' and we strongly recommend that they are based on this Diocesan syllabus.
- In a Voluntary Controlled or Foundation Church of England school, RE must be taught according to the Locally Agreed Syllabus of the authority where the school is located, unless parents request RE in accordance with the trust deed or religious designation of the school. This 2023 Diocesan Syllabus offers useful support materials to VC and Foundation schools to support excellence in RE.

RE is plural:

- The RE curriculum drawn up by a Diocese, or by an academy or free school 'shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.⁵
- According to case law, an agreed syllabus has a duty 'to take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in a pluralistic manner' and 'must accord equal respect to different religious convictions, and to non-religious belief'.⁶ Note that the term 'religion' encompasses both religious and non-religious beliefs.⁷

As education policy changes, the legal requirement for RE for all registered pupils remains unchanged. RE is an entitlement for all pupils, unless they have been withdrawn by their parents from some or all of the RE curriculum.

Right of withdrawal

This was first granted when RE was actually religious *instruction* and carried with it connotations of induction into the Christian faith. RE is very different now – open, broad, exploring a range of religious and non-religious worldviews. However, parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE lessons or any part of the RE curriculum⁸ and the school has a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Where the pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parents want the pupil to receive. These arrangements will be made by the parents; the school is not expected to make these arrangements. This RE could be provided at the school in question, or by another school in the locality. If neither approach is practicable, the pupil may receive external RE teaching as long as the withdrawal does not have a significant impact on the pupil's attendance. Schools should have a policy setting out their approach to provision and withdrawal. However, it is good practice to talk to parents to ensure that they understand the aims and value of RE before honouring this right. Students aged 18 or over have the right to withdraw themselves from RE. More guidance on withdrawal can be found in *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*, available online at www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010

³ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Schedule 19; Education Act 2002, section 80.

⁴ The Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Consolidation) (Amendment) Regulations 2006 Regulation 5A.

⁵ Education Act 1996 section 375.

⁶ www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/r-fox-v-ssfe.pdf. 'Equal respect' does not entail equal time.

⁷ In accordance with Human Rights Act 1988.

⁸ School Standards and Framework Act 1998 S71 (3).

Religious education in different school types

Religious education in Voluntary Aided (VA) schools

For Voluntary Aided Schools with a religious character Religious Education is the responsibility of the governing body. The Manchester Diocesan Board of Education strongly recommends this syllabus for adoption.

If governors decide to adopt a different syllabus than this one, they must ensure that its requirements are at least as rigorous and that it is in accordance with the school's Trust Deed and the '*Religious Education in Church Schools: A Statement of Entitlement*' 2019.

Religious education in Voluntary Controlled (VC) and Foundation schools

Voluntary Controlled schools should follow the Local Authority Agreed Syllabus unless parents request a denominational one. There is much in this Diocesan Syllabus to support schools to achieve excellence in RE and the Diocese of Manchester strongly recommends that schools use the support materials in this syllabus as they will complement the locally agreed syllabus.

Religious education in an academy

The requirements for religious education in an academy with a religious foundation are specified in the funding agreement for that academy.

For a VA school that converts to academy status the model funding agreement specifies that an academy with a religious designation must provide RE in accordance with the tenets of the particular faith specified in the designation. This Diocesan Syllabus is written to support academies within the Diocese of Manchester to meet the requirements of their funding agreement.

Sponsored Academies usually adopt the VA model within their funding agreements, irrespective of whether they were previously VA or VC.

Foundation or Voluntary Controlled schools with a religious character that convert to academy status must arrange for RE in accordance with the syllabus requirements as set out in the funding agreement (being 'in the main Christian whilst taking account of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain') unless any parents request that their children receive RE in accordance with the tenets of the school's faith. If any parents do request this, the academy must make arrangements for those children to receive such RE unless, because of special circumstances, it would be unreasonable to do so⁹. The funding agreement sets this out (by applying the relevant provisions of the Education Act 1996 and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998).

Religious Education in Community Schools

Community schools must follow their locally agreed syllabus. The Manchester Diocesan Board of Education's syllabus for religious education has a flexibility allowing for a balanced selection of material to be made reflecting the local context. The Diocesan Syllabus could be used alongside its counterpart from the Local Authority to provide extra support materials.

⁹ Schedule 19(3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998. See p15, Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance, DCSF 2010.

Time for religious education

In order to deliver the aims and expected standards of the syllabus, the Manchester Diocesan Board of Education strongly recommends a minimum allocation of curriculum time for RE based upon the law and the statement of entitlement from the Church of England Education Office¹⁰:

Sufficient dedicated curriculum time, meeting explicitly RE objectives, however organised, should be committed to the delivery of RE. This should aim to be close to 10% but must be no less than 5% in key stages 1-4.

In practice, this means a starting point of 60 minutes per week for Key Stage 1 and 75 minutes per week for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 RE.

36 hours of RE per year	
4–5s	(e.g. 50 minutes a week or some short sessions implemented through continuous provision)
36 hours of tuition per year	
5–7s	(e.g. an hour a week, or less than an hour a week plus a series of RE days)
45 hours of tuition per year	
7–11s	(e.g. 75 minutes a week, or a series of RE days or weeks amounting to 45+ hours of RE)
45 hours of tuition per year	
11–14s	(e.g. 75 minutes a week)
5% of curriculum time, or 70 hours of tuition across the key stage	
14–16s	(e.g. an hour a week for 5 terms, or 50 minutes per week, supplemented with off-timetable RE days)
NOTE that full course GCSE RS course requires 10% curriculum time, or two hours per week, comparable with other Humanities GCSEs.	
16–19s Allocation of time for RE for all should be clearly identifiable	

Important notes:

- **RE is legally required for all pupils.** Plural RE that conveys and accords equal respect to different religions and non-religious worldviews (e.g. humanism) is a core subject and an entitlement for all pupils throughout their schooling, from Reception year up to and including Key Stage 5. For schools offering GCSE short course RE in Y9 and Y10, there is still a requirement that there is identifiable RE in Y11. (Note that teachers should ensure that KS4 accords equal respect to religious and non-religious worldviews. Following a GCSE course does not automatically fulfil this requirement.)
- **RE is different from assembly/collective worship.** Curriculum time for RE is distinct from the time spent on collective worship or school assembly, even though making links between the collective worship and the purposes and themes of RE would be good practice. The times given above are for RE.
- **Flexible delivery of RE.** An RE themed day, or week of study can complement (but not usually replace) the regular programme of timetabled lessons.
- **RE should be taught in clearly identifiable time.** There is a common frontier between RE and such subjects as literacy, citizenship or PSHE. However, the times given above are explicitly for the clearly identifiable teaching of religious education. Where creative curriculum planning is used, schools must ensure that RE objectives are clear. In EYFS, teachers should be able to indicate the opportunities they are providing to integrate RE into children's learning.
- **Coherence and progression.** Any school in which head teachers and governors do not plan to allocate sufficient curriculum time for RE is unlikely to enable pupils to achieve the standards set out in this syllabus. While schools are expected to make their own decisions about how to divide up curriculum time, schools must ensure that sufficient time is given to RE so that pupils can meet the expectations set out in this agreed syllabus to provide coherence and progression in RE learning.

¹⁰ Religious Education in Church of England Schools: A Statement of Entitlement 2019. www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/religious-education

What religions are to be taught?

This syllabus requires schools to help pupils develop an overall understanding of Christianity and of some of the other principal religions and worldviews in the UK. The balance between depth of understanding and the coverage of material in these religions is important, so the syllabus lays down the recommended religions to be taught at each key stage. This is in line with the Statement of Entitlement of Religious Education in Church Schools 2019, which says:

Reflecting the school's trust deed or academy funding agreement parents and pupils are entitled to expect that in Church schools Christianity should be the majority religion studied in each year group.

- KS1 – KS3: Christianity should be at least 50% of curriculum time. (NOTE that this is a change from the previous requirement of at least two-thirds Christianity.)

Pupils are to study in depth the religious traditions of the following:

4–5s Reception	Children will encounter Christianity and other faiths, as part of their growing sense of self, their own community and their place within it.
5–7s Key Stage 1	Christians, Jews and Muslims.
7–11s Key Stage 2	Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews.
11–14s Key Stage 3	Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists.
14–16s Key Stage 4	Two religions are required, including Christianity. This will be through a course in Religious Studies or Religious Education leading to a qualification approved under Section 96. ¹¹
16–19s RE for all	Religions and worldviews to be selected by schools and colleges as appropriate.

Important notes:

This is the **minimum requirement**. Many schools may wish to go beyond the minimum.

- **The range of religious groups in the UK.** Groups such as Quakers, the Bahá'í faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Jains are not excluded from study in this scheme for RE. Schools are always advised to make space for the worldviews of the local community, which is why the table above expresses minimum requirements.
- **Notice the language.** 'Christians' rather than 'Christianity', 'Hindus' rather than 'Hinduism'. This is to reflect the fact that RE starts with encounters with living faiths rather than the history and belief structures of traditions. This also recognises the diversity within and between people of the same and different religions.
- **Non-religious worldviews.** Good practice in RE, as well as European and domestic legislation, has established the principle that RE should be inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews. Schools should ensure that the content and delivery of the RE curriculum are inclusive in this respect.
- This syllabus requires that, in addition to the religions required for study at each key stage, non-religious worldviews should also be explored in such a way as to ensure that pupils develop mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. This is enabled through the following units: F4, 1.9, 1.10, L2.11, L2.12, U2.10, U2.11, U2.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16 and 3.17.
- **Depth rather than breadth.** Learning from four religions across a key stage is demanding: the syllabus does not recommend tackling six religions in a key stage. Depth is more important than overstretched breadth.
- **Flexible thematic units.** The thematic units offered in this syllabus allow for schools to draw in different traditions, where they fit the theme and question, and where there are representatives of those traditions in the school and local community.

¹¹ Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This requires maintained schools to provide only qualifications approved by the Secretary of State. See <https://section96.education.gov.uk/> and <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

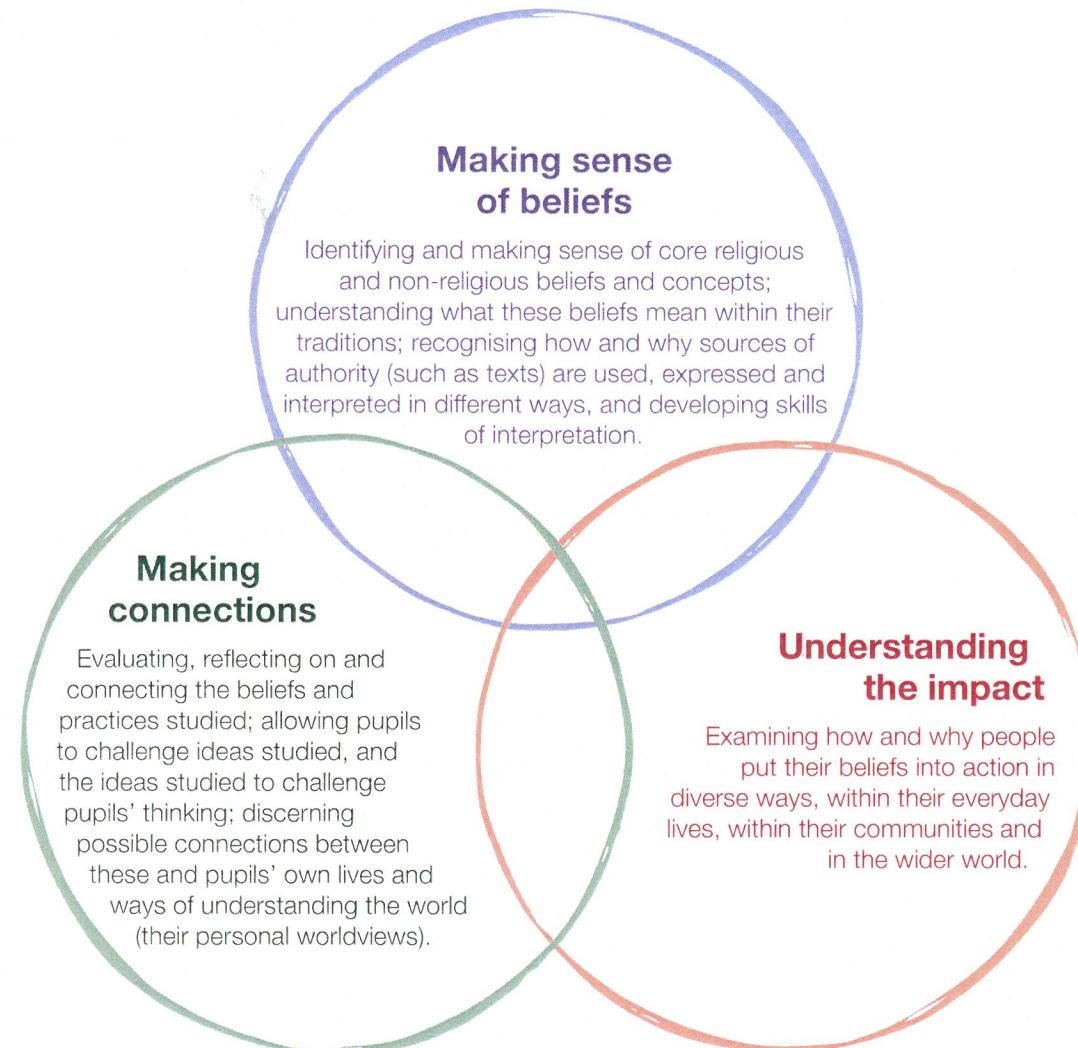
The RE teaching and learning approach in Manchester Diocese

This syllabus is designed to support schools in developing and delivering excellence in RE. It responds to national calls for deepening pupils' knowledge about religions and for developing their 'religious literacy'.¹² It does this by studying one religion at a time ('systematic' units), and then including 'thematic' units, which build on learning by comparing the religions, beliefs and practices studied.

In order to support teachers in exploring the selected beliefs, this syllabus sets out an underlying teaching and learning approach, whereby pupils encounter core concepts in religions and beliefs in a coherent way, developing their understanding and their ability to handle questions of religion and belief.

The teaching and learning approach has three core elements, which are woven together to provide breadth and balance within teaching and learning about religions and beliefs, underpinning the aims of RE outlined on p.8. Teaching and learning in the classroom will encompass all three elements, allowing for overlap between elements as suits the religion, concept and question being explored.

These elements set the context for open exploration of religion and belief. They offer a structure through which pupils can encounter diverse religious traditions alongside non-religious worldviews – which reflect the backgrounds of many pupils in our schools. The elements present a broad and flexible strategy that allows for different traditions to be treated with integrity. These elements offer a route through each unit while also allowing for a range of questions reflecting different approaches, for example, from religious studies, philosophy, sociology, ethics and theology.



¹² e.g. OFSTED (2013) *Religious Education: Realising the Potential*; Clarke, C. and Woodhead, L. (2015) *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools*, London, Westminster Faith Debates; Dinham, A. and Shaw, M. (2015) *RE for REal: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief*, London, Goldsmiths University of London/Culham St. Gabriel's; Commission of Religion and Belief (2015) *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*, The Woolf Institute.