



Section 2

Religious Education in Church of England Schools

Religious Education in Voluntary Aided (VA) Church of England Schools

In its recent guidance on the teaching of religious education in VA schools, the Church of England's Education Division identified the following two key principles: firstly, that the religious education in a church school should be of the highest standard, always striving for **excellence**; and secondly that it should reflect the school's **distinctive** Christian character.

In these following extracts from *Excellence and Distinctiveness*¹, the role of religious education in a Church of England school is interpreted in the light of the teachings and practices of the Anglican Church.

Over recent years both Ofsted and denominational inspections have shown that there is much good and improving practice in religious education, especially in church schools. This progress will be maintained, if the provision in church schools is a high priority for leadership teams and governing bodies. They should aim to ensure that religious education is at the heart of the curriculum and recognised as such by the whole school community. The quality of teaching and learning should be at least as good as in any other subject. All church schools should be, in a sense, 'specialist schools' for religious education.

Distinctive Religious Education

In an Anglican school, the educational process is rooted in the living faith of the school. This goes beyond the ethos of the school to affect the planning and teaching in every curriculum area. Religious education is not just an academic subject, but, lying at the very heart of the curriculum, has an important role in reflecting and conveying the distinctively Christian character of the school.

In developing this distinctive approach to religious education, consideration should be given to what lies at the heart of the Christian faith. This can be expressed in relation to religious education's two attainment targets².

Learning about religion

¹ *Excellence and Distinctiveness*, The Church of England Education Division with the National Society, October 2005.

² RE: The Non Statutory Framework, QCA, 2004

We learn about:

- the God who reveals the truth about himself and humanity through creation, the giving of the law, God's action in history and through the prophets;
- the God who reveals himself ultimately in Jesus his Son, living among us and dying and rising for us;
- the God who reveals himself in his Spirit working in the living faith of the Church experienced through scripture, tradition and reason.

Learning from religion

We learn from:

- an empathetic response to the Christian faith and a critical engagement with it;
- responding personally to the transforming power of Jesus Christ;
- developing a vision for life that transcends a dull materialism and recognises the reality of the spiritual realm;
- understanding ourselves and others, celebrating our shared humanity and the breadth of human achievement;
- examples of Christian living which give priority to the claims of justice, mercy, holiness and love.

Religious education does not exist in a vacuum; it comes as a challenge to the learner's existing values and practices. It involves and confronts the individual in a way no other subject can. A vision of education inspired by Jesus Christ is a catalyst for a process of formation for the whole person and the whole human family. Religious education is key to fulfilling the purpose of a church school as described by the late Lord Runcie when he was Archbishop of Canterbury:

- to nourish those of the faith;
- to encourage those of other faiths;
- to challenge those who have no faith.

Maintaining the balance between these intentions will always require skill and tact and will need to reflect local circumstances.

Religious Education in Church Schools Should Help Pupils to...

- think theologically and explore the great questions of life and death, meaning and purpose;
- reflect critically on the truth claims of Christian belief;
- see how the truth of Christianity is relevant today and face the challenge of Jesus' teaching in a pluralist and post-modern society;
- develop the skills to handle the Bible text;
- recognise that faith is based on commitment to a particular way of understanding God and the world;

- respond in terms of beliefs, commitments and ways of living;
- develop a sense of themselves as significant, unique and precious;
- experience the breadth and variety of the Christian community;
- engage in thoughtful dialogue with other faiths and traditions;
- become active citizens, serving their neighbour;
- find a reason for hope in a troubled world;
- understand how religious faith can sustain them in difficult circumstances and in the face of opposition.

Teaching About World Faiths and World Views

As 'schools of faith', Church of England schools recognise the common search of all humanity for ultimate truth and relationship with the divine while acknowledging the widespread secular assumptions to be found in today's world. Thus schools operate in diverse communities containing those with a religious faith and those for whom religion is meaningless. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that respect for the great world faiths is fostered in religious education within a church school. This respect must be based on an accurate and sympathetic understanding of the other faiths which is consistent with the school's loyalty to its Christian foundation.

A positive outcome of this approach is to provide learners with a greater understanding of the world and society in which they are growing up. Another outcome is that learners will be able to see the faith of others in relation to their own. Both of these outcomes contribute to building up harmonious relations within communities, promoting inclusion for all and combating the evils of racism. In a church school there should be opportunities for children to grow in the understanding of their own faith, in the faith of others and to have the opportunity to study secular world views where appropriate. Religious education should equip pupils for the critical evaluation of a range of different world views.

Religious Education in Church Schools Should Help Pupils to...

- learn **about** other faiths, their beliefs, traditions and practices and **from** them through encounter and dialogue;
- recognise and respect those of all faiths in their search for God;
- recognise areas of common belief and practice between different faiths;
- enrich and expand their understanding of truth while remaining faithful to their own tradition;
- enrich their own faith through examples of holy living in other traditions;
- recognise the common human quest for justice, peace and love and the common goal of the survival of life on this planet.

The Legal Position

The legal requirements for teaching religious education are to be found in the Education Act 1996 and Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. Religious education must be taught

to all registered pupils in maintained schools unless they are withdrawn by their parents. This requirement does not apply to nursery classes in maintained schools.

Religious education forms a component of the Basic Curriculum to be taught alongside the National Curriculum in all maintained schools.

Voluntary Aided Schools

The Governors have to formally agree the school's religious education syllabus.

Religious education will normally be predominantly Christian, following the Trust Deed statement. The staff and Headteacher work with the support of the Governors. Material in the Diocesan syllabus is designed to help schools meet their legal obligations as set down in the Instruments of Government.

If parents request it and it is reasonable (e.g. because it is not possible for their children to attend another school) provision should be made for religious education in accordance with the Local Agreed Syllabus.

The Bishop is the arbiter of the religious education in the school and so he, together with the officers of the Diocesan Education Team, deal with complaints about religious education rather than the Local Authority.

Inspection of religious education is arranged by the Governors under the **Section 48** provision to take place within eight working weeks of the Ofsted Inspection. When a school has an Ofsted inspection it is required to have a **Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools, SIAS** for short. The inspection framework is based, as is Ofsted, on school self-evaluation. The Inspection Framework is available from the [National Society website](http://www.natsoc.org.uk) (www.natsoc.org.uk). There is also a self-evaluation **Toolkit** available for schools from the **Diocese of Chelmsford's website** to help with the self evaluation process (www.chelmsford.anglican.org). There are links in the Toolkit to the Ofsted SEF.

Voluntary Controlled and Foundation Schools

Religious Education is taught following the Local Agreed Syllabus.

Parents can request Church of England religious education in line with the Trust Deed, and this could be taught by a "Reserved" teacher or another member of staff approved by the Foundation Governors. There is, therefore, a split responsibility between the Local Authority and the Diocese over inspection and complaints, depending on the particular arrangements in each Controlled and Foundation School.

The Ofsted team may inspect the religious education taught according to the Local Agreed Syllabus. Under the new Ofsted arrangements, however, it is rarely reported. Subject inspections for religious education are carried out by Ofsted.

Right of withdrawal

Parents have a legal right to withdraw their child/children from religious education. In community, voluntary controlled and foundation schools, head teachers and teachers may

also exercise this right. In voluntary aided schools, where heads and teachers have signed a National Society contract, it is expected that this right will not be exercised.

The allocation of teaching time for religious education

The diocesan syllabus is based on the expectation that the following **minimum** times be given to religious education:

Key Stage 1: 36 hours per year

Key Stage 2: 45 hours per year

The time allocation can be blocked.

Time allocated to teaching Christianity

It is recommended that in VA church schools between two-thirds and three-quarters of the religious education curriculum time is spent in the study of Christianity and that other faiths and world views are covered in the remainder of the time. This proportion of time spent on Christianity is essential to fulfil the requirements of the distinctive Christian character of the school

The material in this syllabus is designed to help schools and their governors meet their legal obligations as set down in the Instrument of Government.