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Introduction

The importance of religious education

'The United Kingdom has a rich heritage of culture and diversity. This is continuing today in an era of globalisation and an increasingly interdependent world. Religion and belief for many people forms a crucial part of their culture and identity. Religion and beliefs have become more visible in public life locally, nationally and internationally. The impact of religion on society and public life is constantly brought to public attention through extensive media coverage. The rapid pace of development in scientific and medical technologies and the environmental debate continue to present new issues, which raise religious, moral and social questions. The internet enables learning and encourages participation in public discussion of issues in a new and revolutionary way.' (Religious education guidance in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010)

Religious education 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 develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other worldviews that offer answers to questions such as these. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development. It enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression. It also explores the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.

Religious education encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning. Religious education encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community.

Religious education has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning. It enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own. It promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

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The contribution of religious education to the school curriculum - supporting the values of the curriculum

Religious education actively promotes the values of truth, justice, respect for all and care of the environment. It places specific emphasis on:

- pupils valuing themselves and others;
- the role of family and the community in religious belief and activity;
- the celebration of diversity in society through understanding similarities and differences; and
- sustainable development of the earth.

Religious education also recognises the changing nature of society, including changes in religious practice and expression, and the influence of religion in the local, national and global community.

Supporting the aims of the curriculum

Aim 1: The school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve.

Religious education should be a stimulating, interesting and enjoyable subject. The knowledge, skills and understanding in this syllabus are designed to promote the best possible progress and attainment for all pupils. It develops independent and interdependent learning and makes an important contribution to pupils' skills in literacy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Religious education promotes an enquiring approach in which pupils carefully consider issues of beliefs and truth in religion. It also enhances the capacity to think coherently and consistently. This enables pupils to evaluate thoughtfully their own and others' views in a reasoned and informed manner.

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Aim 2: The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.

At the heart of this Agreed Syllabus for religious education is a focus on developing a reflective approach to life and engaging with ultimate questions and ethical issues. This focus enables pupils to appreciate their own and others' beliefs and cultures and how these impact on individuals, communities, societies and cultures.

Religious education seeks to develop pupils' awareness of themselves and others. This helps pupils to gain a clear understanding of the significance of religions and beliefs in the world today and learn about the ways different faith communities relate to each other. A major objective of the Agreed Syllabus is to promote religious understanding, discernment and respect whilst challenging prejudice and stereotyping.

Religious education is committed to exploring the significance of the environment, both locally and globally, and the role of human beings and other species within it.

A central concern of religious education is the promotion of each pupil's self-worth. A sense of self-worth helps pupils to reflect on their uniqueness as human beings, share their feelings and emotions with others and appreciate the importance of forming and maintaining positive relationships.

The legal position

Religious education must be taught to all registered pupils in maintained schools, including those in the sixth form, except to those withdrawn by their parents. This requirement does not apply to nursery classes in maintained schools.

Religious education is a component of the basic curriculum, to be taught alongside the National Curriculum in all maintained schools, other than voluntary aided schools with a religious character. It must be taught according to a locally agreed syllabus. Each Local Authority (LA) must by law convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference to produce a syllabus. Once adopted by the LA, the programme of study of the local agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught.

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The Education Act 1996 states that an agreed syllabus must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented.

Each LA must have a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The SACRE may require a review of the agreed syllabus at any time. This is in addition to the requirement on LAs to convene a conference to reconsider the agreed syllabus every five years.

The aims of religious education in Lewisham schools

Religious education in schools celebrates the diversity of religious and human experience. It encourages pupils to grow with the knowledge, skills, sensitivity and understanding to develop as confident and productive members of their local multi-faith community and the world.

Religious education should help pupils to:

- develop a positive attitude towards living in a society of many religions and beliefs, respecting others right to hold different beliefs from their own;
- acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions and non-religious world views represented in Great Britain;
- develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures;
- develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues, with reference to their own beliefs and the teachings of the principal religions and beliefs represented in Great Britain; and
- enhance their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by:
 - developing awareness of the fundamental questions of life raised by human experiences, and how religious teachings and philosophies can relate to them;
 - responding to such questions with reference to the teachings and practices of religions and to their own understanding and experience; and
 - developing the ability to reflect on their own beliefs, values and experiences in the light of their study.

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Fundamental British values

Schools should promote the fundamental British values of **democracy**, the **rule of law**, **individual liberty**, and **mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs**.

Ofsted stated in the *School inspection handbook 2015*: “RE contributes to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all children and young people when taught well in schools, and through this makes a significant contribution to helping pupils develop and demonstrate skills and attitudes that will allow them to participate fully in and contribute positively to life in modern Britain.”

Through practising the skills of tolerance and mutual respect as seen in fundamental British values, religious education provides schools with opportunities to develop pupils learning, understanding around people they will meet, work and live alongside. It can help schools build up resilience skills within the lives of children and young people.

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Time allocation

The Agreed Syllabus is based on the expectation that 5% of curriculum time which equates to the following hours, should be devoted to religious education:

| | |
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| Key Stage 1 | 36 hours per year |
| Key Stage 2 | 45 hours per year |
| Key Stage 3 | 45 hours per year |
| Key Stage 4 | Adequate time to deliver an accredited examination course for all pupils |
| Key Stage 5 | 18 hours per year. |

Using the Agreed Syllabus

The agreed syllabus should be used by:

- Headteachers and governing bodies in ensuring adequate provision for religious education that meets statutory requirements
- subject leaders in drawing up their school's scheme of work
- head teachers and subject leaders in ensuring progression in pupils' learning
- governors who have responsibility for religious education development
- faith leaders and members when looking to understand the nature and content of religious education in our schools
- parents who wish to learn more about the nature and content of religious education in schools