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# Religious Education Policy

*In our Church of England Federation, we take strength in collaboration, yet celebrate uniqueness. As schools, we may be small, but together we encourage children to be the best they can be so they are ready to make their mark on the world. We welcome the child yet embrace the whole family. We celebrate our rural environment yet aspire to look beyond our boundaries. We strive for knowledge and gratefully accept opportunities that come our way to enable us to live life in all its fullness. We all take a pride in our Federation as we follow in Jesus' example.*

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## **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 September 2022-2027, *“Faith and Belief in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”* 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 a pupil’s family 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 Agreement on alternative provision for the child/children would need to be reached should they be withdrawn from the RE programme.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.

## **Intent**

**The 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.

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

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- 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.

## **Implementation**

### **Learning**

The agreed 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'. 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.

The agreed 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.

Teaching and learning in the classroom will encompass all three elements,

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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.

The three elements of the teaching and learning approach in the agreed syllabus reflect the aims for RE. Each unit of study offers content and ideas for enabling pupils to achieve these aims.

The three elements are:

### **Making sense of beliefs**

- identify, describe, explain and analyse beliefs and concepts in the context of living religions and non-religious worldviews, 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

### **Making connections**

- 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 worldviews – their ways of understanding the world, expressing their critical responses and personal reflections with increasing clarity and understanding

### **Understanding the impact**

- 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

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RE teaching specifically draws on the following:

1. Visits (often online and virtual tours) 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.

## **Planning**

In order to ensure that our aims are met, the Federation uses 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 discrete subject but have also used RE days to enhance this learning based on analysis of our assessment data.

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). 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. Pupils' 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. Pupils' 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.

### **Time Allocation**

Schools must ensure that sufficient time is given in order to enable pupils to meet the expectations set out in the agreed syllabus, ensuring that the curriculum is coherent and shows progression, particularly across transitions between key stages.

In Reception, RE will be delivered flexibly according to the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). RE sits very firmly within the areas of personal, social and emotional development and understanding the world. The framework enables children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others, and to learn how to form positive and respectful relationships. They will do this through a balance of guided, planned teaching and pursuing their own learning within an enabling environment. They will begin to understand and value the differences of individuals and groups within their own immediate community. Children will have the opportunity to develop their emerging moral and cultural awareness.

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).

## **Impact**

### **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. We look specifically at the children who are working towards this statement, or working beyond this statement and record these in an assessment grid. We make it specific the gaps in learning for our working towards group of children to enable future learning to return to these areas and help the children to remember more.

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.

### **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.