

Advice to schools:
Issues that may
arise relating to

RELIGION AND BELIEF



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Introduction

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Portsmouth SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) provides advice to Portsmouth Local Authority and advises them on Religious Education and Collective Worship for schools in the area.

This document has been produced to help give further advice on issues that schools may face when teaching Religious Education or when they encounter issues or receive queries that involve religion or belief.

It begins with an overview of the legal requirements for teaching Religious Education and then looks at the issues that schools have sought advice on. The advice is not intended to be a definitive list of all situations, but rather reflects current issues. It is intended that the advice document is reviewed on a regular basis and updated or amended when necessary.

Portsmouth SACRE members have contributed to the information included in this advice document and recommend it to Portsmouth schools.

We uphold the right of all children to explore their own beliefs, while being respected for doing so.

The Legal Requirements for teaching Religious Education:

Living Difference III, as the Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, is the legal document to be followed for the teaching of religious education in Portsmouth schools.

It is the statutory framework which defines the matters, skills and processes to guide individual schools developing their curriculum for religious education.

The Education Act 1996, School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Education Act 2002 require that:

- religious education should be taught to all children and young people other than those in nursery classes and except for those withdrawn at the wish of their parents. Teachers' rights are safeguarded, should they wish to withdraw from the teaching of religious education.
- religious education in all community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools should be taught in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus.
- *an Agreed Syllabus should 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 in Great Britain.*
An Agreed Syllabus must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils
- an Agreed Syllabus Conference must be convened every five years to review the existing syllabus.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (now the Department for Education) guidance, Religious Education in English Schools: Non-statutory Guidance 2010, states that:

“Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The key document in determining the teaching of RE is the locally Agreed Syllabus within the Local Authority (LA) concerned. ... Schools designated as having a religious character are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses. An LA must, however, ensure that the Agreed Syllabus for their area is consistent with Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996, which requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.”

www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010

Schools must also take into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the implications of this for the school.

A link to the Act can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf

Time needed for RE in schools:

It is recommended that the following minimum hours should be devoted to religious education and Living Difference III planning has been designed with these time recommendations in mind:

- Reception classes: approximately 36 hours per year
- Key Stage 1: 36 hours per year
- Key Stage 2: 45 hours per year
- Key Stage 3: 45 hours per year
- Key Stage 4: 45 hours per year
- Key Stage 5: there is no recommended minimum time allocation.

The requirement to teach religious education does not apply to nursery classes but it does apply to children in Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Collective worship is not part of the taught day and cannot be considered as part of the recommended time for teaching the Agreed Syllabus.

PSHE should be taught in a distinct way from RE.

For further information on the requirements of the Living Difference III syllabus, including planning and assessment, the syllabus can be found here:

https://re.hias.hants.gov.uk/pluginfile.php/2464/mod_resource/content/1/Living%20Difference%20III%20pdf.pdf

Issues that may arise in schools to do with Religion or Belief

2a

In the first instance it is very important to communicate effectively with parents/carers about Collective Worship and RE. By doing so, many concerns will be prevented. It is also vital for schools to communicate with governors about RE and Collective Worship and to discuss the school's approach to RE and Collective Worship with them.

Where issues arise, Portsmouth SACRE's advice for all schools is to be flexible and to seek a solution that is relevant for all parties concerned.

In all cases, the first approach should be to check whether there is an established policy and to learn about the relevant religious practice. A conversation should then be held with the parents/carers about the issue raised and then to seek a solution, after having given careful consideration and taken further advice if necessary.

2a. Clothing

Schools may receive requests from parents/carers asking for their child to wear a particular item of clothing or for adjustment of the school uniform because of religious or belief reasons, traditions or cultural modesty.

Examples

The wearing of headscarves or head coverings, religious jewellery, or bracelets connected to religious festivals.

Wider considerations

The Equality Act 2010 has some useful advice on uniform which should be considered here. This states that schools need to be careful that they do not discriminate against students because of their religion or belief, among other areas. The act states that

"Schools should be sensitive to the needs of different cultures, races and religions and act reasonably in accommodating these needs, without compromising important school policies, such as school safety or discipline".

Therefore it is very important, before anything is done, to hold a meeting with the parents to learn more about the situation including the reasons for the request. The impact on school life, for example on safety, must also be discussed.

It may sometimes be necessary to seek further advice from SACRE's professional adviser if it is an area the school is unfamiliar with.

In such cases please email Patricia Hannam: patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk

2b

2b. Visits to places of worship

We recognise that religious communities are able to provide excellent support for both RE, particularly for Group C concepts in the **Contextualise** step, and for collective worship.

Examples

Many schools visit places of worship in their local area, such as the mosque, cathedral or Hindu temple, which can add depth to the learning about that religion.

Wider considerations

The school should decide when a visit will be most beneficial, planning the visit well in advance. It is necessary to check whether the school's policy requirements for visits, including those for safeguarding pupils, have been met for the visit. Not every visitor may be Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked and, therefore, staffing arrangements should be considered for the visit. The school should give the place of worship a clear explanation of the educational purpose of the visit, the nature and size of the group, and ways in which it is proposed to involve the children. The teacher will also need to provide some explanation about the concept in focus, the unit of work and the place in the conceptual enquiry where the visit fits. If there is any doubt about the response of parents/carers to the visit, the school should inform them in advance of the purpose and nature of the visit and its curriculum context. It is good practice to put your RE policy on your school's website, together with your plans for visits for the year. This allows parents/carers to see the educational purpose of such visits well in advance.

It is also good practice to highlight the links to the school's approach to SMSC and British Values, as such visits underpin a school's commitment to respect and tolerance of other religions.

2c. Stereotyping of religions or individuals

Schools may sometimes need to think about the language children use to address each other and in the wider community to avoid stereotyping taking place. It may need to challenge such language and role model the right use of language in school.

Examples

Children may say for example “all Christians” or “all Muslims” without appreciating the variety within a religion, or the fact that such comments are rarely true.

Children may also perceive people from a religion as looking similar (for example, assuming someone who is white must be a Christian)

Wider considerations

A school will need to consider its ethos and whole school approach to the curriculum here and consider how it embeds SMSC and Rights Respecting Education right across the school day and afterwards (such as after school clubs). It is also necessary to consider how you teach RE across all religions and world views. For example, showing a large diversity of people in different clothes and from different backgrounds when teaching about the religion is vitally important to help children see that you do not have to look the same to be a certain religion.

Ensuring teachers and children consider the words they use when talking about religions and beliefs is also very important. This role models the way children respond to religions. Using the words “most, some, a few...” is vital in ensuring that children never say “all”... about any religion. This is an important first step in helping children see that they cannot group people into religions and therefore forget individual differences.

Encouraging the children to ask questions and to consider their own beliefs is a very important part of good religious education and the use of labels for people should be avoided. Teaching about Muslims, Christians, etc is a more helpful approach than teaching about abstract religions such as Christianity and Islam, as this does not allow the child to see that each person in a religion interprets that religion for themselves and may see things in different ways.

Further information on this area can be obtained through the RE networks in Portsmouth. Please email Justine Ball on justine.ball@hants.gov.uk

2d

2d. PE

PE is an area of the curriculum that parents/carers who hold religious beliefs may wish to discuss with a school

Examples

Parents/carers may want to talk about the arrangements for changing or making adjustments to the uniform for example.

Schools may also want to consider the arrangements for safety if a child is wearing religious jewellery or giving thought to PE activities if children are fasting for a religious reason, for example.

Wider considerations

Arrangements for PE need to be discussed with parents/carers and safety concerns talked through. For example if the parents wish a child to wear jewellery relating to their religion (such as a Kara bracelet for a child who is Sikh), the jewellery might need to be taken off or substituted for the activity or covered up by a sweat band. Alternatives for the child may already be available and these should be discussed. Clothing for PE may also need to be removed or adapted to be safe for exercise.

If a child wishes to fast (for example for Ramadan) then a meeting with the parents/carers is also recommended in order to look at the whole of school life, including PE, lunchtimes and visits outside of school and consideration of what to do if the child is not coping well with fasting at any time.

2e

2e. Swimming

Examples

Schools may receive several queries from parents/carers who are concerned about the arrangements for swimming with the school.

This particularly covers changing arrangements and swimming with mixed classes of boys and girls.

Wider considerations

Schools should consider the arrangements made for the children in terms of male and female staffing and changing arrangements.

Swimming is part of the PE curriculum and withdrawal from it is not allowed.

2f. Curriculum

This covers concerns about subjects studied and books read in schools

Examples

Schools may receive queries from parents/carers regarding a section of the curriculum that they have concerns over.

Typical examples include books with magic or fantasy creatures in them and the study of evolution in year 6 as part of the science curriculum.

Wider considerations

The law on withdrawal for children relevant here applies to taught RE or collective worship. It does not apply to the rest of the curriculum. Therefore, any parental or carer concerns should be discussed with parents/carers, whilst making clear the position of the school.

The Equality Act 2010 is helpful here for providing further useful advice for schools. For further information or advice please contact Pat Hannam on patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk

2g. Absence requests

For example: taking part in a pilgrimage, religious convention or attending an important family occasion (such as in the Roma traditions).

Examples

Such requests may be a part of the religion, such as celebrating Eid-al-Adha, Diwali or celebrating Vaisakhi for Sikhs.

Wider considerations

Careful consideration needs to be given here as any response from the school must take into consideration the advice from the Portsmouth School Attendance Team before responding to any request.

Normally, if a religious festival is central to the religion, then a request for leave is accommodated, but usually limited to a day for the attendance.

It is important to discuss these requests with SACRE's professional adviser. In such cases please email patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk

Calendars can be obtained that show the dates of religious festivals for each year. Hampshire produce an Interfaith calendar each year and the link to this is: www.hants.gov.uk/shop/product.php?productid=51935

2h

2h. Dietary requirements

A parent/carer may wish for their child to follow certain dietary requirements because of religious or other reasons.

A parent/carer may wish their child to try to fast or to fast completely during the school day if the child is considered old enough for Ramadan. This may also be the wish of the child.

Examples

This can be a request in several religions, depending on the beliefs of the parents/carers. For example, following a vegetarian diet for many Hindus and a Kosher diet for many Jewish families.

Wider considerations

It is important to recognise here that every family is different and it should not be assumed that in a particular religion, everyone will request the same considerations from a school. Every religious person will vary in their practice, so some families may request several things to do with dietary needs, while others may not ask at all.

A discussion is advised as soon as possible to find out what the family is requesting and to consider what is possible for the school. The hot school meal providers and logistics of the school lunch time should also be considered before a decision is made.

A meeting with the family is advised and it is also advised that the school considers EMAS bilingual staff attending the meeting to provide support.

Schools may also want to consider where in the RE curriculum children are taught about dietary requirements in the religion – for example the fact that many Hindus tend to be vegetarian. This is an important area for children to learn about and can easily be mentioned in the RE lessons.

2i. Collective Worship

Parents/carers who want to withdraw their child from collective worship, either selectively or from all worship.

Examples

A parent/carer might be concerned about their child saying a prayer or singing a hymn or concerned about the content of the collective worship.

Wider considerations

By law, schools must have a daily act of collective worship and the school cannot withdraw children for their own reasons. A parent can however withdraw their child from some or all of the Collective Worship.

It is important for a school to consider their Collective Worship policy and the content of the Collective Worship that is most appropriate for their school. The guidance on Collective Worship (Circular 1/94) states that:

“Collective worship in county schools and equivalent grant-maintained schools must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, though not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination”.

It is important to decide what is worship and what is not, so that a school can communicate this clearly to parents/carers and children so that they can withdraw. Schools should also make it clear that children will be invited to respond in a way appropriate for them, for example silence, meditation or joining in a prayer.

The structure of a Collective Worship will also need to be considered as the focus of some Collective Worship may be more of an issue for a parent/carer than others (for example, one that focuses on the Bible rather than one that focuses on school values alone).

Schools may want to consider inviting parents/carers to observe a Collective Worship (not just a celebratory assembly at the end of the week) so that parents/carers can see the structure of a typical Collective Worship.

A church school will also need to consult the Diocesan policy for worship as well as Portsmouth guidelines.

It is also worth reminding teachers that their RE teaching should not involve worship for children – for example, asking them to write a prayer as if they were a member of a particular religion. Children should be invited to respond in a manner that suits them, such as music, writing, art or prayer.

2j

2j. RE withdrawal

A parent/carer may wish their child to be removed from RE, either selectively or from all RE.

Examples

This can happen for a variety of reasons, such as concern over a small part of the teaching or a visit or a wish to teach the subject themselves if they have particular religious views.

Wider considerations

Parents/carers can withdraw children from a part of or all of RE in the school. The school does not need to provide additional teaching for this but it does need to supervise children appropriately.

In these cases, it is always advisable to arrange a meeting with the parents to find out the reasons for the withdrawal. Very often, it is because parents/carers may be unclear about how RE is taught and an explanation of the enquiry nature of RE in the Living Difference III syllabus will help with this.

It is also recommended that the RE policy and plans for visits/visitors are placed on the school's website and talked through with parents on curriculum evening. This has shown to be a very effective way of helping to reduce misunderstandings with parents over the purpose of RE.

The SACRE recommends that schools consider the use of visitors and visitors to enhance a child's learning experience. Further guidelines on visitors and visitors can be obtained from the Hampshire RE centre (see the details at the end of this section).

Summary of beliefs

The following brief summaries are examples of religions that schools may come across. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but a starting point to help schools know something more about a family's religion before meeting with them. There are many training materials available to help inform teachers about the main religions and these are available from the Hampshire RE centre (the contact number is given at the end).

3a. Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic faiths (the other two being Christianity and Islam) and dates back around 4000 years. It traces its roots back to Abraham and to Moses. Jews believe that there is only one G-d and that all authority comes from the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, which was given to Moses by G-d. Many Jews will observe the Sabbath laws, which require all work to stop at sunset and the Saturday to be set aside for worship of God until sunset again.

Judaism has many festivals and many regard the weekly observation of the Sabbath as the most important. The next most important for many Jews is the period of Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, which are known as the High Holy Days. Schools may also study the festivals of Sukkot, Hanukkah and Pesach (Passover) in their Religious Education lessons.

3b. Christian beliefs

Christianity is founded on the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus Christ, who lived about 2000 years ago in Palestine. Christians believe that God is revealed through Jesus Christ, who is one with the father. Christians believe that the church has passed on the teachings of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. For Roman Catholics, the authority of the church lies with the Pope; for Protestants, the authority lies with the Bible guided by an individual's conscience.

Christians may attend church each week where Bible readings are a key focus as a guide for how a Christian should live their lives. Christians may attend church at Harvest time, during the period of Advent, Christmas day, Epiphany (celebrated 12 days after Christmas day), during the period of Lent, Easter and on many other occasions during the church year.

3c. Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in God and believe that Jesus was the son of God, but not God Himself. Therefore, they do not believe in the Trinity. They read the Bible and meet in Kingdom Halls locally. The Kingdom Halls do not have icons, religious pictures or crucifixes on display and children will not want to interact with these in school. They do not have priests, but have a body of elders who supervise the congregation. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas because they do not believe there is sufficient basis for the celebration of Christmas in the Bible. Therefore, they may request a child is withdrawn from taught RE lessons about Christmas and does not take part in a nativity. At Easter, Witnesses will commemorate Jesus's death, but not his resurrection, so they may not attend all the Easter activities organised by schools. Jehovah's Witness families do not celebrate birthdays, but will give gifts on different occasions throughout the year. They are required to be politically neutral, but to respect the rights and beliefs of others in all areas, including religious beliefs. Part of this may involve a refusal to take part in a national anthem or saluting a flag, as they believe this may have religious connotations.

3d. Islam

The foundation of Muslim beliefs are the Five Pillars which bind together all in a worldwide community (the Umma). The pillars are as follows:

- the Shahadah: this is the Muslim declaration of faith and is as follows: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (pbuh) is his messenger"
- Salah: the requirement to pray five times a day wherever you are at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening. Prayer is always directed in towards the Ka'ba shrine in Makkah and a prayer mat is used commonly. Muslims may pray at home or at the Mosque and the focus for prayer in the community is the noonday prayers on a Friday
- Zakah: the requirement to give 2.5% of their surplus income to charity. Muslims are also encouraged to donate additional voluntary payments (sadaqah)
- Hajj: the requirement to complete a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime, if they have the money and health to do so
- Sawm: this is the requirement to fast during the Holy month of Ramadan from just before dawn until sunset. The requirement extends to not eating and drinking anything during this time and extends to all Muslims from the age of puberty (unless ill health prevents this).

Muslim religious festivals

The two major Muslim festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha.

Eid-ul-Fitr occurs at the end of Ramadan and this celebration marks the end of fasting and involves the first meal eaten in daylight for a month, as well as thanking Allah for providing the strength to fast for such a long period of time. Muslim families may wish to attend a special celebration and many will wear new clothes and decorate their homes to celebrate this. It is also seen as a time of forgiveness.

Eid-al-Adha is the festival of sacrifice and is the second most important festival for Muslims. It remembers the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)'s willingness to sacrifice his son when asked to by God. In the story, God stops Ibrahim when he is about to kill his son and instead provides a sheep for sacrifice. In many countries the festival is celebrated by the offering of a sheep or goat, which is shared out among family, friends and the poor.

Among Shia Muslims, Ashura is a major religious festival and it is of central importance to them. It commemorates the death of Hussein, son of Imam Ali and grandson of Muhammad (pbuh).

3e. Sikhism

Sikhism is founded upon the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and nine successive Gurus. The 11th Guru is the Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which Sikhs consider the supreme spiritual authority and head of the religion. Practising Sikhs visit the Gurdwara often and they may choose to wear the five Ks of the Khalsa. These are Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb), Kacheera (undergarments), Kara (bracelet) and Kirpan (sword). Sikh families may request that their child wears these when attending school as it is an important part of Sikh identity for some families.

3f. Humanism

Humanists aim to bring non-religious people together in order to help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world. They are people who, therefore, do not believe in God and an afterlife, but instead emphasise making the most of the life people have. Logic and evidence are very important in shaping Humanist attitudes, as well as treating others with respect whatever beliefs they may have. Information on Humanist concepts can be found in the Living difference III syllabus and further information on the Understanding Humanism website.

3g. Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and is a vast collection of beliefs and practices. There is not one founder or one key religious book, but rather several of these. A key belief is the belief in Brahman, the spirit which is the universe and is present in all living things. Religion for a Hindu is a search for unity in diversity and that each individual can interpret this in many different ways. The principle of Ahimsa (non violence) is a key concept as in the belief in reincarnation, which is a cycle that only ends when an individual discovers his or her essential nature as spirit.

Hindus may celebrate many different festivals and these may vary from family to family. Key festivals include Diwali (the festival of Lights), Holi (the festival of colour and Spring), Raksha Bandhan (celebrating the protection of siblings for each other and the wearing of bracelets to commemorate this) and Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday).

3i. Buddhism

Buddhism is based upon the teaching of the Buddha, who was called Siddhattha Gotama and was born 2500 years ago in India. Approximately 6% of the world population are Buddhist. A central belief is the belief in reincarnation – that people can be reborn and reborn as humans, animals and sometimes Gods. People are reborn depending on their good or bad deeds (karma) and more importantly, their good or bad intentions. Buddhists follow the three refuges which are the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings) and the Sangha (the Buddhist community of monks and nuns). There are three main groups in Buddhism – Theravada, Eastern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism – which have similar core teachings but will differ in interpretation.

3j. Roma culture and practices

Roma culture is extremely diverse with different groups of Roma having different traditions, beliefs and customs. However, there are attributes common to all Roma, including: loyalty to family; standards and rules; and adaptability to changing conditions.

The Roma do not have an official faith and in the past they typically disdained organised religion. Today, they often adopt the predominant religion of the country where they are living and may describe themselves as “many stars scattered in the sight of God”. Some Roma groups are Catholic, Muslim, Pentecostal, Protestant, Anglican or Baptist.

However, Roma do live by a complex set of rules that govern things such as cleanliness, purity, respect, honour and justice. These rules are referred to as what is ‘Romano’. Romano means to behave with dignity and respect as a Roma person.

Ritual purity rules apply when a mother gives birth to a baby, at puberty and during menstruation. There are many customs around cleanliness, washing of clothes and so on. Young women often live with their mothers-in-law after marriage to ensure that the bride follows the purity laws satisfactorily.

4. Further information

There are many teaching materials available from the Hampshire RE Team and Portsmouth EMAS and these will help add detail to all of the religions and world views mentioned here, as well as other religions.

For further advice, please contact either

Dr Patricia Hannam

County Inspector/Adviser for RE, History and Philosophy

patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk

or

Justine Ball

General Inspector/Adviser for Primary RE

justine.ball@hants.gov.uk

For further information on planning and teaching packs to supplement your knowledge, please contact

Lydia Revett at the County RE Centre

re.centre@hants.gov.uk

To borrow SACRE artefacts and resources please contact:

Rubi Giles at Portsmouth EMAS

rubi.giles@portsmouthcc.gov.uk



You can get this information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 023 9284 1193