

Religious Education (RE) in schools in England

Some things it's helpful to know...

- All schools are required, by law, to teach RE.
- It is recommended that schools devote 5% of curriculum time to RE (the equivalent of about an hour a week).
- In community schools, RE is non-confessional, in other words, its aim is to help pupils learn about religion and from religion but they are not required to be or become religious. It is a study of religion rather than the practice of the religion.
- In Church schools (Roman Catholic, Church of England, Methodist), pupils study religion. Christianity will be the main focus of study but it is likely other world faiths will also be studied. The teaching and learning, however, takes place in a setting that is grounded in the Christian faith. In some Church schools this Christian ethos is more explicit than others.
- Most subjects in school are taught according to the National Curriculum. RE is different from other subjects because the syllabus is created locally. The syllabus is called the Local Agreed Syllabus. This is prepared and 'agreed' by a local body called the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). It is made up of people of different faiths and world views, teacher representatives and Local Authority representatives
- Most schools follow the Local Agreed Syllabus. (Some Church schools are able to follow a syllabus devised by their local Diocese and Academies can choose any syllabus. In practice, they usually go with the one from their local area.)
- SACREs are required to draw up a syllabus which reflects the fact that the religious traditions of England are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions. In practice, this has come to mean that pupils study Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism and other world views, including secular and Humanist viewpoints.
- When we think of schools we often focus on the curriculum; the different subjects that pupils will study. It is, however, important to remember that the whole curriculum, and all aspects of school life, should make a contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils.

Learning about Religion and Learning from Religion

<p>Learning about religion</p> <p>This is called Attainment Target 1</p>	<p>It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• enquiry into and investigation of, religious beliefs, teachings, practices• skills of interpretation, analysis and explanation• communicating knowledge and understanding using specialist vocabulary• identifying and developing an understanding of ultimate questions and ethical issues
<p>Learning from Religion</p> <p>This is called Attainment Target 2</p>	<p>It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• developing pupils' reflection on and response to their own experiences and learning• skills of application, interpretation and evaluation in relation to questions of identity and belonging, values and commitments.

To get a flavour of the kinds of things pupils are expected to learn, these statements about levels of attainment offer some guidance.

By the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7), most pupils should be able to:

AT1: Learning about religion	AT2: Learning from religion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use religious words and phrases to identify some features of religion • recognise that religion is important for some people • show awareness of similarities in religions • retell stories • suggest meanings for religious actions and symbols • identify how religion is expressed in different ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond to questions about their own and other' experiences and feelings • recognise their own and others' values in issues of right and wrong • recognise that some questions are difficult to answer

By the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11), most pupils should be able to:

AT1: Learning about religion	AT2: Learning from religion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a developing religious vocabulary • describe and show understanding of religious practices and beliefs • make links between beliefs and practices and their impact on peoples' lives • describe similarities and differences within and between religions • suggest meanings for different forms of religious expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise and suggest answers to questions of identity and belonging • apply ideas to their own and other peoples' lives • describe what inspires and influences themselves and others

How does all this affect me if I'm invited to lead a Godly Play session in a school?

If you look at the background to RE in English schools it is clear that Godly Play has a great deal to offer in helping pupils to learn about and learn from Christianity. There is also rich potential for nurturing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is likely that you have been invited into a school because you are a member of a Christian community willing to share Godly Play. (Put link here to Heather's intro). It is helpful to know the background to RE teaching in schools and to be aware of the RE syllabus that is being followed by the school. The head teacher or class teacher will be able to tell you how the Godly Play session/s will contribute to the RE curriculum.

Bear in mind that Godly Play is a confessional approach to religious nurture. It was designed to nurture children from Christian families in a church context. RE in schools is a non-confessional study of religion. Godly Play, however, is an open approach which invites an enquiring exploration of the stories and materials and as long as the Storyteller and Doorperson are aware of these issues and are willing to present Godly Play sensitively in a school setting, it can work very effectively.

One useful technique is to use 'distancing language'.

- When introducing a story one can say, for example, "This is a story that is important for Christians."
- If you are presenting one of the Liturgical lessons, it can be introduced as "something Christians do when they go to church/meet together".
- When discussing beliefs or practices, avoid talking about what 'we' do or what 'we' believe. The likelihood is you will have children with you who hold different beliefs and world views.