

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This guidance applies where religious education is provided in accordance with a locally agreed syllabus and is inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 (*see note on page 59*).

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

Standards and achievement

Judge **standards** and learning in religious education (RE) in relation to the requirements of the agreed syllabus. Base judgements on how well the pupils achieve in relation to the standards expected. Look for differences in learning between different groups of pupils and ask yourself whether the pupils' **achievement** is as much as it should be for their age, ability and circumstances. Make use of DfEE/QCA non-statutory guidance for RE.

To make judgements you need to focus on the pupils':

- knowledge and awareness that the religious traditions in the United Kingdom are mainly Christian although other principal religions are represented;
- knowledge of the richness and diversity of religion;
- understanding of the distinctive features of religious traditions and their application to everyday life to believers;
- understanding of religious concepts and symbolism;
- ability to form thoughtful views on religious issues; and
- skills in using appropriate terminology to explain matters of religious belief and practice.

Using data

There are no national performance data for judging standards in RE. The agreed syllabus may have locally formulated indicators to measure standards and the school might use these together with teacher assessment to evaluate the pupils' standards and achievement in RE.

Analysing pupils' work

You are not likely to find a great deal of recorded RE work from younger pupils. Look at work throughout the school with an emphasis on Years 2 and 6 focusing on the rates at which all pupils learn. Use evidence from pupils' work to contribute to your judgements on standards in most aspects of RE. It is usually more effective if pupils are asked questions about some of the work you analyse. Judge how well the pupils use appropriate language and explore the depth of their understanding through discussion. For example, at age seven, pupils might write terms such as Qur'an, Bible and Torah for special books. By talking to them, reach a judgement about the extent to which they understand these terms and recognise what these 'special books' are.

Written work illustrating pupils' knowledge of the richness and diversity of religion might include festivals and rites of passage.

Example RE1 – extract from the analysis of written work in RE.

Y2 work shows good knowledge of Easter, Christmas and Divali. Accurate reference to terms such as font, altar, diva lamp. Work takes account of different levels of literacy and degree of maturity. More-able pupils write with good understanding about role of Godparent. Least able can identify a few artefacts correctly, eg font.

Year 6 write accurately about the meaning of light in different religions. They explain how its symbolism varies between Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths, and demonstrate good understanding of principal religions represented in Great Britain. The most able relate the significance of light to the stories which underpin each festival. The least able can attribute meaning to the relevant festival.

Talking with pupils

Asking questions of pupils is a secure way to find out what they have learned. Ensure that your questions fit in with the context of the work rather than slavishly trying to cover criteria. Talk to pupils about their understanding of religious concepts, language, symbolism and the place of religion in the lives of believers and about how far they can articulate their own ideas about religion.

Example RE2: evidence from a discussion with Year 2 pupils after a visit to the church where the vicar had helped them to role-play a christening.

Questions asked:

‘What part did you play in the baptism?’, ‘What does a Godparent do?’;

‘What did the vicar do with the baby?’, ‘Did anyone have special clothes?’, ‘Where in the church did the baptism take place?’, ‘Is everyone baptised?’, ‘What is a baptism for?’.

Evidence:

Pupils know about the role of the Godparent. ‘I have an important part to play because I have to promise to help the baby to follow Jesus as he grows up.’

They use terms such as font, cross, candle and baptism accurately.

They know that the vicar uses special water for the baptism but are not sure why the water was special. Most pupils know that not everyone is baptised. A few of the most-able pupils talk about baptism being a way to welcome someone into the church. Pupil who was Baptist had not been baptised but knew she would be when she grew up.

Commentary: Year 2 pupils develop a good understanding of symbolism and the importance of religion in everyday life. The role-play has given the pupils a good insight into infant baptism. Those pupils who took key roles (the most able) such as the parents and Godparents had thought very carefully about the purpose of the baptism and had a mature grasp of its significance. All children understand and use the right kind of language; the most able demonstrate a deeper understanding of the purpose of the ritual in this particular religion. Attainment is in line with the agreed syllabus; achievement for the most-able pupils is good and that for the average and below is sound.

With older pupils at or near the end of Key Stage 2 explore their knowledge of different religions and try to find out whether they have formed their own views on religious issues.

Example RE3: evidence from a discussion with Year 6 about Lent. Umar, the only Muslim in the class, has just given a presentation on Ramadan.

Questions asked:

‘Is Ramadan the same as Lent?’, ‘Are there any differences/similarities?’, ‘Why do people keep Ramadan and Lent?’

Two pupils think Ramadan and Lent are the same because they are times when people give up eating. All pupils know that Christians give up eating things they particularly like and Muslims refrain from eating completely until the evening. One girl remembers that Umar told them children did not have to fast; he did it because he wanted to. The pupils know that nuns and monks give up meals or eat things like bread and water. They think they are more strict than most people although they are not as strict as Muslims. Umar points out that some Muslims do not keep Ramadan. The pupils know fasting is meant to help people to think about God. Although one girl thinks if she is hungry she will think about food. The pupils know that festivals and fast commemorate important events in the faith history. They agree that when people keep Ramadan and Lent they are concentrating on God and remembering important stories from the past.

Commentary: Year 6 pupils acquire new knowledge and understanding of the distinctive features of religious traditions and their application to everyday life is satisfactory. Attainment is in line with the agreed syllabus.

Lesson observation

As you observe pupils in lessons, evaluate the standards they achieve and whether they are learning well enough. Be aware of any significant differences between particular groups and how personal experiences can be used to support learning in RE.

Example RE4: evidence from a Year 2 lesson about the story of Moses.

Teacher uses good technique to revise story so far. Where was Moses when we listened to his story last? How did he know something important was happening to him? All hands shoot up, eager to answer. Teacher asks class to answer first question together, all know Mount Sinai. SEN boy targeted to answer second question. Thinks for long time but says there was a burning bush, a special sign. Beams when teacher praises his good thinking.

An able pupil in hot seat, looks keen but nervous. Questions show pupils have sound knowledge of Moses' life so far. Where were you born? Who found you? Who was your Dad?

Teacher adds in challenges 'How did you feel when you knew you had to lead the people of Israel?', 'What did you want to do when everyone was moaning about the journey and the discomfort?', 'What frightened you most?'. Pupil really stretched gave good answers. 'I was frightened when the sea was parted and I saw how strong God was.'

Pupils able to say where in the Bible story of Moses came. Brief discussions about rules. CA has to leave to drive home and talks about rules of the road she will think of as she goes. Pupils talk in small groups about rules they think are important. Teacher records two ideas from each group. All clear about the need for rules. Least able give one word, simple phrase answers. Most able explain reasons using good vocabulary and use clauses in sentences.

Asks pupils to think what sort of rules Moses might bring. Good half of class suggests following God's instructions.

[Attainment average (4); learning good (3)]

Commentary: pupils know term Bible, know it tells a story and know about Moses. Knowledge of Bible stories is as expected for this age. All pupils, except for three with SEN, give clear explanation of rules and their purposes. Literacy skills support learning in RE. Most pupils are able to give thoughtful response to the rules of religion. Overall, attainment is average and achievement is good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

(This section should be read in conjunction with the teaching and learning criteria, printed on page 6.)

Observing teaching and learning in lessons

Judge teaching by its impact on learning. Ascertain whether or not the pupils are learning the right kinds of things as well as they can. Form your judgements from lesson observations, the analysis of pupils' work, evidence from displays and the quality of the planned provision. Teaching should be free from denominational bias, should help pupils to understand different faiths and traditions and should challenge them to form their own insights about religious beliefs.

Example RE 5: evidence from a very good Year 2 lesson; there are 11 Sikh children in the class. The class was invited to visit Gudwara on Guru Nanak's birthday. The children are given lunch in the Langar.

The Sikh leaders have prepared a simple version of the story of Guru Nanak to read to the children. They read very well. The children listen attentively as they sit cross-legged on the floor having lunch. The teacher asks challenging questions, 'Is it usual to have a meal in a place of worship?' 'Why do people eat a meal after prayers?' The children refer to Holy Communion using their previous knowledge well. They like eating together. One child thinks it's good that no one at home has to cook when everyone eats together. The Sikh children pair up with others in the class to tell them that everyone sits down together to show that they are equal and that they care for one another. The Sikh children really enjoy explaining about the symbolism to their friends who are eager to ask questions. The children show a very good understanding of this when they talk about giving presents and sharing birthday cake.

The teacher has planned the lesson effectively to maximise learning. On returning to school the children go to another class and tell them in detail about their visits. They show excellent recall and they explain the symbolism of Langar very well. When children discuss how they care for one another they decide to invite their friends to the class for orange juice and biscuits. The teacher guides the children well to help them to think of what they need to prepare invitation cards, food and drink.

[Teaching and learning very good (2)]

Commentary: the teacher has a very good **understanding** of how children learn and she uses **resources** effectively. The pupils enjoy eating lunch and show sustained **interest** in the lesson. She **manages** the pupils very well, and shows good awareness of social inclusion. The pupils **concentrate well** in the question and answer session and the questions they ask show they **think** carefully and try to make connections in their learning.

Example RE6: evidence from a satisfactory Year 2 lesson on ‘the Prodigal Son’.

Pupils are very noisy. Teacher shouts and noise level increases. Poor technique for gaining attention. She asks all pupils to put their hand up when they are listening; this works and pupils listen. Valuable time lost in managing behaviour. She talks to them quietly and asks them to write the aim of the lesson in their books, not easy to read from the board. Pupils work quietly. Very good questions relating to pupils’ experiences. Can you think of times when you have said to your brother/sister or friend ‘it’s not fair’?. Pupils tell about two examples they can remember. Co-operate well and show good listening skills. Teacher adds a challenge: What are the most common reasons for thinking something is unfair? Share ideas in fours. Good level of discussion. Teacher circulates and asks questions to push thinking. Pupils respond to teacher’s challenge and analyse ideas well. Each group records one key reason on the board.

Excellent telling of the parable of ‘the Prodigal Son’. Pupils open-eyed and keen to listen. Groups pupils for role-play and sets them challenging questions, eg what would you say to your parents if you were the person who waited at home? How would you feel about your brother? Pupils asked to decide on outcome and to role-play. Very noisy. Teacher circulated, set time limits and reinforced expectation that time would be used effectively. Helped one group to find gestures/body language to show feelings. Pupils organise themselves well and allocate roles quickly. Noisy but discussion is focused on the task. First group ready quickly; act out their conclusion very well and give good reasons as parents for the welcome they give the son they thought was lost. Others watch intently. Other groups to wait until next lesson. Ran out of time. Homework given hastily.

[Teaching and learning satisfactory (4)]

Commentary: the teacher has a shaky start and noise levels are high but the teacher gradually uses effective strategies to **manage** behaviour. The pupils **respond positively** and, once their **interest is engaged**, **concentrate well**. Teacher’s **subject knowledge** is sound and she has a good knowledge of drama techniques. **Methods** selected well to maximise learning. The pupils effectively learn how to express feelings through gesture. **Time** is not always used well. The lesson has a slow start and a hasty end. Teacher takes account of previous learning when setting **homework**. Her **expectation** that pupils work hard results in **productive group work**.

Example RE7: evidence from a poor Year 6 lesson about the festival of Holi.

Good, calm introduction but T unsure how to respond when pupil says Qur’an contains some Old Testament Scriptures. Subject knowledge?

Reads abbreviated version of the story of Holika but only mentions the importance of colours used in Holi festival. Superficial, asks nothing of pupils. Pupils do not understand ‘moral’ of the story although can talk about good and evil. They enjoy the story and have good rapport with teacher. Sprays praise for very little effort. Least able work hard to colour in cartoon strip of story on their worksheets but cannot read the text. (Poor literacy skills.)

Most able very noisy when using database to find different festivals. Lack of challenge in the tasks. Learn nothing new. One child went to India during the festival, very knowledgeable. Pupils talked to inspector about work in geography on India; teacher made no reference to this work. Previous knowledge not built on.

[Teaching and learning poor (6)]

Commentary: recapping the previous lesson and introduction of story of Holika show teacher’s limited **subject knowledge**: The teacher does not provide the right sorts of activities to **challenge** the pupils. Poor use of **assessment and weak planning** takes insufficient account of **literacy skills** of the least able. The teacher takes no account of previous learning, and pupils **acquire** no new knowledge. Despite the good relationships and the generally good behaviour of the pupils, the quality of teaching of RE is unacceptably poor and hinders learning.

WRITING THE REPORT

The subject section of an inspection or evaluation report needs to be a coherent and convincing evaluation of the subject and explain why standards are as they are. Link explanations to the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' achievement. Show how much the subject has improved since the last inspection and give a clear indication of the action needed to improve it further.

Example RE8: extract from a report on a primary school.

During the last inspection little religious education was taught and it was not possible to make any firm judgements about the pupils' standards. This is no longer the case; religious education is now taught regularly and, in most classes, effectively.

At the age of 7 years children's knowledge and understanding of religious education is in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. By the time the pupils are aged 11 their attainment is slightly below what it should be. This reflects the fact that religious education had a low profile in the school and while the oldest pupils have achieved a great deal in the last three years there are still gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

The quality of teaching is predominantly good at both key stages although there was one unsatisfactory lesson in Year 5. Lessons are planned to take account of the pupils' knowledge and experiences. As a consequence the Year 5/6 pupils have good knowledge of Bible stories commonly taught to younger children but have little knowledge of the world's leading faiths. In contrast, the Year 4 pupils are knowledgeable in both of these areas of work. Teachers use a variety of interesting methods to enthuse the pupils. In a Year 2 class the children learn a significant amount about symbolism through their role-play of an infant baptism, and the Year 6 pupils develop a wider understanding of the religious significance of fasting during Ramadan from a thoughtful presentation by a Muslim pupil.

The pupils take pride in presenting their work and they enjoy the variety of approaches teachers encourage them to use. The Year 3 children are particularly proud of the good-quality booklet they produced using extracts from the Internet and digitally produced pictures to illustrate prayers they wrote. Children are expected to think for themselves and to make connections between stories they hear and every-day life. For example in Year 1, children listen attentively to the parable of 'the Good Samaritan'. The teacher's questions are probing and help the children to explore the complexities of tolerance. The children respond well to the teachers' expectations to concentrate on what they have been asked to do, work hard in lessons and learn as much as they can. This was particularly evident when a Year 2 class had lunch in the Langar. Lessons, teachers' plans, the work displayed and pupils' books show that, in the main, teachers provide a balanced religious education programme based on good subject knowledge. In most lessons teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are explicit and they spend little time on the management of pupils. The pupils understand routines, know what they are allowed to do and are keen to participate in lessons. In one Year 2 class, the teacher had few strategies for maintaining control, and this led to a loss of teaching time at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers make effective links with literacy, reading stories and showing pictures and encouraging pupils to write independently, practising the skills taught in the Literacy Hour. Literacy skills are of a good standard.

Subject co-ordination is satisfactory. The co-ordinator has ensured that her planning corresponds to the locally agreed syllabus. She has carried out some classroom monitoring and has criteria for the focus of her observations. For example, 'Is there time for discussion?', 'Are all children contributing to the discussions?' and 'Are artefacts used to help children understand more about religious education?'. The teachers make very good use of local resources, particularly places of worship, and their use of the expertise of religious leaders in the community is exemplary. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support this subject.

NOTE ON INSPECTING AND REPORTING ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE) AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Every section 10 inspection must include the inspection of RE unless the school is only teaching denominational RE, which is inspected under section 23. This means that you do not inspect RE in a school which has a religious character unless parents have requested that their children be taught non-denominational RE according to the LEA agreed syllabus. You will usually inspect RE in voluntary controlled schools and in foundation schools unless they have a religious character and teach denominational RE at the request of the parents. You should always check the school's responses to section G1 in Form S1 before the inspection.

Special schools cannot be designated as having religious character and RE will always be inspected under section 10.

The following guidance applies only to the inspection of schools providing non-denominational RE which is inspected under section 10.

Statutory RE

RE should be taught to all pupils at school (unless they have been withdrawn from RE by parental request), including those in the foundation stage in reception classes; it is not mandatory in nursery classes.

Non-denominational RE must follow the locally agreed syllabus, with which the person inspecting RE must be thoroughly conversant.

All judgements on attainment and learning must be based on the objectives, content and where included, benchmarks in the agreed syllabus.

RE should be provided in special schools so far as is practicable. The use of the agreed syllabus is not mandatory for such schools, but schools usually include elements of it.

RE and collective worship

Do not use evidence from collective worship to make judgements about RE for the following reasons:

- the law on RE and collective worship is different, (for example, collective worship must be daily);
- RE has to be taught according to an agreed syllabus; collective worship does not have to take account of an agreed syllabus;
- RE has to include the teachings of religions other than Christianity; collective worship does not;
- collective worship has to be '*wholly or mainly of a broad Christian character*'; this is not the requirement for RE;
- in schools where collective worship is inspected under section 23 and RE is inspected under section 10, section 10 inspectors may not make judgements on the content of collective worship, although they will be inspecting RE; and
- in some schools more pupils are withdrawn from collective worship than from RE (so if judgements are made about RE attainment and learning in collective worship, these pupils will be excluded).

Collective worship should contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and this may be planned to **reinforce** learning in National Curriculum subjects or RE. Collective worship should not be used as a **substitute** for any subject, including RE.

In special schools the law requires the provision of daily collective worship as far as is *practicable*.