

A08 RE AND INCLUSION: Providing Effective Learning Opportunities For All Pupils

This agreed syllabus is the starting point for planning religious education that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils. The following notes outline how teachers can modify, as necessary, the agreed syllabus programmes of study to provide all pupils with relevant and appropriately challenging work at each stage.

Religious Education for ‘most able’ pupils

There are a number of terms that have been used in education to refer to learners who are ‘most able’ and capable of work that go beyond their peers. For example; ‘gifted and talented’, ‘highly able’, ‘fast learner’, or those with exceptional talent or ‘marked aptitude’.

Currently the DfE and Ofsted refers to these pupils as ‘most able’ and are concerned about the lack of stretch and wasted opportunities for ablest pupils who do not achieve their full potential at this end of the learning spectrum, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is not appropriate for teachers to assume that bright students will learn anyway. They too have to be stretched and given demanding work to challenge them to achieve to their highest ability.

Pupils who are most able or gifted in RE are likely to:

- show high levels of insight into, and discernment beyond, the obvious and ordinary;
- make sense of, and draw meaning from, religious symbols, metaphors, texts and practices;
- be sensitive to, or aware of, the numinous or the mystery of life, and have a feeling for how these are explored and expressed;
- understand, apply and transfer ideas and concepts across topics in RE and into other religious and cultural contexts.

In more general terms, they may also:

- have highly-developed skills of comprehension, analysis and research;
- show quickness of understanding and depth of thought.

The identification of pupils who are ‘more able’ or gifted in RE should be approached on the basis of distinct RE ability, skills, competencies and insights. The teacher’s professional judgement is crucial. RE teachers who know their pupils and their work, and bring professional talent, expertise and awareness to the subject, are best placed to identify gifted pupils. However, especially if not RE specialists themselves, they will probably find it helpful to talk to other teachers.

Giftedness in RE is not the same as being religiously gifted. Teachers may find it helpful to consider how being gifted in RE compares with being gifted in sport, music, mathematics or poetry.

It is also worth encouraging parents to support their child's interest at home.

Important Strategies for Inclusion of all pupils and the 'most able':

◆ **Focus the Teaching**

This means having clear criteria for most able pupils to inform teacher's planning which are included in schemes of work, **differentiated** tasks and learning outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.

◆ **Provide Challenge**

Teaching in RE demands imaginative, individual and innovative responses from pupils to questions of meaning, purpose and value. It provides opportunities for all pupils to respond in their own ways and for pupils to challenge opinions and ideas with sensitivity and skill. Teachers model a range of higher order thinking skills and diverse learning strategies in RE, including P4C (philosophy for children).

◆ **Make Concepts and Terms Explicit**

Teachers help pupils to develop and use the key concepts, terms and language of religion and belief confidently and to analyse and interpret different narratives, genres of writing and expressive sources, including symbol and the expressive arts for religion and belief. Pupils look at evidence, identify perspectives and bias within and across religion and belief, and in media reporting. They understand the nature of religion and belief, how it impacts on people's lives and practice and why some people reject religious or supernatural perspectives and adopt non-religious world views.

◆ **Structure the Learning**

Learning should be both a process of discovery, (a learning journey) and chunked into starters, parts and plenaries that link together and enable progress in knowledge, understanding of similarities and differences and in the application of religion and belief. Lessons that are carefully organised provide good sequences of work that challenge and develop students' skills and ideas.

Learning should stimulate student's interest and voice and they should be given opportunities and responsibilities to manage parts of the lesson, for example debriefing and giving feedback for plenaries. The most able students can be encouraged to be student teachers and to teach parts of the lesson to small groups or share their investigations with the class.

◆ **Make learning Active, Compelling, Engaging and Motivating**

Teaching communicates the teacher's enthusiasm and enjoyment for RE, relates to pupils' interest and experience and resonates with their personal and cultural identity in religion and belief. Thought provoking starters using quotes, big questions or images to explore, hook their

interest and arouse curiosity. More able students can be given extension tasks.

◆ **Build in Reflection and Review**

Teaching encourages students to learn from religion and belief and to reflect on their own work and the work of others, as well as what and how they have learned. Thinking words for RE can be displayed around the classroom to prompt reflection and review of individuals learning journeys and where they find themselves in RE.¹

For RE, this could include:

- ◆ Exploring open ended Big Questions which have no answer to draw out deep learning on for example mystery, truth, the meaning of life and death using higher order thinking skills.
- ◆ Researching, imagining and exploring the role of an inspiring, visionary and courageous person (historical and contemporary) who has stood up for a cause, e.g. modern day slavery, trafficking, injustice, discrimination or the oppression of peoples or groups, - **in role** assuming the character and answering questions posed to them from their peers –(including questions about meaning, values, commitments and beliefs that motivate them to take risks and live courageously for the benefit and improvement of others).

By enhancing critical reasoning skills and the development of empathy, students are offered the opportunities to pose sensitive and thoughtful questions in a safe space of trust, while looking for well informed and reasoned judgement from the person **in role** in response to their questions.

- ◆ Engaging in writing competitions, Spirited Arts, drama and musical productions, meeting visiting experts, e.g. artists, taking GCSE full course as an extension to the short course, additional individual research projects, school, regional or federation-wide enrichment days/weeks, involving thinking skills, time for reflection and creative expression.

Amongst the strategies recommended for gifted pupils in religious education is the use of higher order questions. According to Bloom's taxonomy of thinking skills, there is a useful distinction to be made between **lower order questions** which test recall of knowledge, comprehension or application of material being studied, and **higher order questions** which require skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. For pupils who are very able or gifted in religious education, it is the higher order questions which will arouse curiosity and interest, focus their attention, stimulate discussion and elicit their views, feelings and experience².

¹ Adapted from National Strategies KS3 (2004) link above.

² Adapted from *Teaching for Effective Learning - A Paper for Discussion & Development*, Scottish CCC, 1996.

An effective questioning strategy is to make increasing demands on the learner. Teachers might therefore move from simple knowledge / recall questions, through questions that ask for comprehension, explanation and application, then on to analysis, synthesis and evaluation, for example, moving from 'what' and 'how' to 'why' and 'what for'?

Examples of lower order questions:

- **Knowledge:** *Who.. What.. Where.. When.. How..?*
- **Comprehension:** *What do we mean by? Explain?*
- **Application:** *What other examples are there?*

Examples of higher order questions:

- **Analysis:** *What are the features of parts of what is the evidence for?*
- **Synthesis:** *How could we add to improve, design or solve?*
- **Evaluation:** *What do you think about criteria to assess or judge?*

Gifted pupils may need to start with the higher order questions when they are already proficient in the lower order skills. They may also respond to questions which require *prediction* and *creativity*, e.g., 'What would happen if...'

Useful Resources and Links

V. Baumfield, (2002) *Thinking through religious education*. Chris Kington Publishing.

Guidance on the use of KS3 Strategy training materials to support the teaching of gifted and talented pupils in religious education (2004). This resource related to the National Strategies of 2004 is still very useful and has good examples of challenge in the RE classroom:

http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/AGT_RE.PDF

Heidi Munson (2008) *Farmington Fellowship Trust Report 'Gifted and Talented Pupils in Religious Education': Who are they and what do we do with them?* http://www.farmington.ac.uk/documents/new_reports/TT229.pdf

See especially Appendix 7 p61 where she develops Bloom's taxonomy as a chart and applies it to RE.