

RE AND INCLUSION:

Providing Effective Learning Opportunities for Pupils from All Religious and Cultural Backgrounds

The relationship between religion and culture is a complex one, often difficult to untangle. In religious education pupils learn, not just about individual religious traditions, but about how people with different religions, beliefs and cultures interact. All children are entitled to quality education and to feel that they are full members of the community in which they live. To promote social and emotional well being children need to be given the opportunity to learn to live together and accept each other's identity and differences.

Religious Education (RE) has an important part to play in challenging racist and stereotypical views and in appreciating positively, differences in others. In this way schools actively foster, mutual respect for those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith. The syllabus offers many opportunities for teachers to do this within the programmes of study, for example:

- in the Foundation and Key Stage 1 programme of study, an enquiry into 'How we should live our lives' requires pupils to identify values that may be important to themselves ... and think about how they could show these values in their lives;
- in the Key Stage 2 programme of study, an enquiry into 'what is important to me' requires pupils to explore beliefs about the value of human beings;
- in the Key Stage 3 programme of study, an enquiry into 'what we can learn from religions, beliefs and communities today' requires pupils to consider the causes of hatred and persecution and what might be done to prevent it.

Whatever their religious or cultural background, pupils are entitled to have their views and traditions respected within the law. The Equality Act (2010) requires that schools cannot unlawfully discriminate against pupils, because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief or sexual orientation. "Religion" in the Act refers to all the major faith groups and "belief" includes non-religious world views such as humanism.

Religious education provides opportunities to recognise and value pupils' own specific beliefs in supporting their identity and self-esteem. For example, pupils should be entitled to participate safely in clothing appropriate to their religious beliefs and to avoid foods that are forbidden.

The programmes of study provide opportunities for pupils to consider the impact of people's beliefs on their actions, diet and lifestyle.

There are a variety of perspectives from which religious education challenges stereotypes, intolerance and prejudice.

- From a **spiritual and moral** point of view, RE addresses issues of fear and ignorance at the root of racism. It explores the effects of intolerance and the inspiring people that have taken a stand against it.
- From a **social and cultural** point of view, RE can bring a dimension to children's education which enhances their experience of the rich landscape of religion, belief and cultural diversity in modern Britain. Christianity, which is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ is a world religion with over two billion followers that include people from all races and cultures. Christians express their beliefs in

cultural contexts and in different ways. It cannot be presumed that a particular cultural or ethnic background is implied by adherence to a particular religion.

All schools, should pay particular attention to promote British values which requires them to counter stereotypes and prepare all their pupils for living in a religiously, culturally and racially diverse society and world. In this way schools encourage respect for other people with different faiths or beliefs that differ from their own, challenge prejudice and discrimination and find strategies to deal with it and prepare their pupils for life in 21st Britain.

Good RE can help pupils to recognise, value and celebrate the cultural and religious identity of those families which find themselves in a minority within the school community. It enables schools to investigate and understand different responses to life and meaning which religious and non religious views offer. Many pupils come from families without religious beliefs who reject religious or supernatural explanations for the meaning of life.

RE signposts students to recognize and value difference in religion and belief as well as similarities and to note where religion and belief may clash and divide people. Schools do this by creating an **ethos of respect** in an environment where issues can be explored in a safe space, that is free from harassment.

- From a **legal** point of view, RE can help a school to fulfil the requirement of the 2002 Education Act which charges every governing body with the duty to ensure 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society and prepares the pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.' (para. 78) and with aspects of the Equality Act (2010).

Further information:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/religion-or-belief-discrimination>

<http://www.christianconcern.com/sites/default/files/equality-provision%20of%20service-proof.pdf>