

Inclusion issues and Religious Education in Oldham Guidance from SACRE

Religious education is a compulsory, core subject of the basic curriculum, and all pupils who are not withdrawn from RE by the wishes of their parents participate in RE throughout their school life. As such, RE has a contribution for every pupil to raising standards of attainment, and increasing pupils' opportunities to leave compulsory education with more qualifications. The new Agreed Syllabus for RE aims to contribute to a more inclusive education for all pupils, and is committed to helping teachers raise standards in RE.

Balance

The Oldham Agreed Syllabus for RE allows for balance in teaching about different faiths. It provides pupils with opportunities to explore their own thinking and beliefs, relating those to what they learn about a range of religious perspectives, and reflecting on their learning. Religious education is open to female and male pupils, believers of principal religious traditions, minority faiths, ethnic, racial or cultural groups, those who are unsure about religion and belief and those who have no religious faith. Belief on the part of pupils is in no way assumed by the syllabus, nor are pupils penalised if they have no faith. RE is also open to pupils with disabilities, those with special educational needs, higher and lower achievers and to gifted and talented pupils. Pupils who attend special schools and pupils with statements of special educational needs should be taught RE according to the Agreed Syllabus for RE as far as is practicable. Whilst being aware that religious education includes all pupils with special educational needs, teachers of RE will recognise that all pupils approach RE from their own special levels of knowledge, understanding and personal experience of faith and of life in general, and quality RE takes account of the individual in personalised learning.

The Oldham Agreed Syllabus for RE is intended to actively encourage positive attitudes and values to develop through well-taught religious education. It provides opportunities for consideration of different beliefs and ideas to one's own, and promotes anti-racist education and community cohesion and harmony through encouraging tolerance, respect and understanding towards those who have different viewpoints to one's own.

RE also very successfully promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils. OFSTED requires all subjects to promote SMSC, but acknowledges that RE makes the greatest contribution in the curriculum towards these areas. Affirming and supporting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils of all abilities and all ethnic and cultural groups is an important aspect of RE, and prepares pupils for life in a diverse society. This is part of RE's whole school contribution which is particularly significant in the new HMI Inspection Framework of 2012.

Religious Education and Special Educational Needs

This guidance is designed to stimulate, support and promote best practice and high standards of achievement in RE for all pupils in Oldham schools. It focuses on teaching and learning in RE among pupils with a range of special educational needs

1. Introduction

RE can make a powerful contribution to the learning of pupils with special educational needs. They can develop understanding of religious and life issues through discussion, use of artefacts and the creative arts which cannot always be reflected in their written work. What follows is guidance on how RE may be made more accessible for such pupils.

2. Principles for RE and pupils with special educational needs.

Valuing the importance of RE for pupils with special needs.

RE is part of the core curriculum and is a positive entitlement for all pupils and should be taught with the same educational purposes, validity and integrity to all. In special schools the law requires the Agreed Syllabus to be taught 'as far as is practicable', and quality teaching will tailor the syllabus carefully to the special needs of all pupils. The positive effect may be that in RE pupils with difficulties, problems or tragedies in their young lives find the most space to explore and seek to resolve their own conflicts.

Using pupils' experience of difficulty to develop their capacity to understand searching themes in RE.

There are areas in which pupils with special educational needs may show particular strengths. A pupil's experience of difficulties or suffering could lead to a heightened awareness of searching themes in RE. Sometimes small group work with pupils with special needs is particularly important in making space for reflection on experience and meaning. Good RE faces difficulties sensitively, rather than 'ducking the issues'.

Building on pupils' interest in people and what they do.

Some pupils with special educational needs sometimes show more awareness of people's feelings and a curiosity about what people do. This can lead to an interest in the effect of religious belief on people and interest in how individual religious people lead their lives. This may involve pupils working on their own ideas about belief and experience, considering meanings for themselves.

Valuing pupils' use of religious language.

Some pupils with special needs may show a lack of inhibitions in using religious and spiritual language, such as 'soul', 'heart' and 'spirit'. This can lead them into a spiritual perception of religion and human experience and an engagement with the symbolic.

Being sensitive to the variety of pupils' understanding of religious concepts.

It is difficult to generalise about the appropriateness of introducing certain religious concepts to pupils with special needs owing to the wide range of their needs. Teachers need to be sensitive in judging the appropriateness of different material on, for example, miracles and healing, which may be perceived differently by pupils with different disabilities. RE seeks to develop sensitive and respectful attitudes, and these can be exemplified by teaching which is sensitive and respectful.

Allowing pupils to engage with explicit religious material.

RE which lets the emotion and power of explicit religious materials loose in the classroom, and welcomes personal responses can provide powerful opportunities for spiritual development for pupils with a variety of special educational needs. An over-emphasis on seeing special needs pupils as needing a 'small step' approach can block the development of a vital and dynamic form of RE. Some pupils may respond to the 'burning core' of questions that engage the imagination and often lead from the spiritual into 'explicit RE.'

Promoting pupils' use of the arts as a way of expressing themselves.

Pupils with special educational needs may have an enjoyment and engagement with art, music, dance and drama. Using these forms of expression can be very effective with special needs pupils.

Recognising pupils' intuitive responses to religious issues.

Pupils with special educational needs may show a more intuitive approach to religion and human experience, and this may be expressed through questions, insights or gestures. These intuitive moments can display leaps of learning or understanding which are at odds with their understanding of other concepts. Some pupils with special educational needs will show a willingness to share a spiritual response. These achievements can be celebrated and noted by the teacher, but often no written product of achievement exists. A lack of permanent evidence of achievement does not matter in such cases.

Valuing pupils' achievement through creative forms of assessment and recording.

These forms need to be developed in order to reflect moments of intuition, insight and response. A 'Wall of Wisdom', where pupils' deep comments and questions about religion and human experience are written can be displayed in class, or a photographic or video record of significant events can be kept, or a running record in the teachers' notes.

3. Educational contexts.

The principles set out above apply to pupils with special educational needs in all settings. These include SEN pupils in mainstream schools, special units attached to mainstream schools, PRUs, hospital schools and special schools. Pupils have a wide range of backgrounds and needs, including learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In RE these may be accentuated by differences of home and faith backgrounds. It is important to recognise that all pupils can achieve in RE, and teachers have the task of unlocking that potential and facilitating that achievement.

4. Differentiation in Religious Education.

Legislation provides an entitlement for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum. A wide range of ability and experiences exists within any group of pupils. Teachers need to be able to provide equal opportunities in learning through a flexible approach and skills which differentiate teaching and learning, matching the challenge of RE work to individual learners' needs.

Differentiation within RE involves meeting the individual needs of pupils in ways that are relevant to their life experiences. Successful differentiation is dependent on planning, teaching and learning methods and assessment. This requires:

- an understanding by teachers of the ways in which pupils learn;
- providing imaginative learning experiences which arouse and sustain pupils' interest;
- supporting the learning which takes place in RE by what is taught in other curriculum areas.
- matching work to pupils' previous experience;
- an understanding of factors which may hinder or prevent pupils learning;
- careful analysis of the knowledge and skills which comprise a particular learning task;
- structured teaching and learning which will help pupils to achieve and to demonstrate their learning outcomes;

Differentiation strives to help all pupils to learn together through providing a variety of tasks at any one time. Pupils can also be given some choice over what and how they learn so their learning reflects their interests and needs.

The ethos of a school and the work of individual teachers is very influential in RE. A positive ethos facilitates differentiated teaching through excellence in relationships based on mutual respect. Two factors make an important contribution:

- **attitudes to learning** - a philosophy which encourages purposeful learning and celebrates effort alongside success, as well as helping pupils take responsibility for their own engagement in tasks;
- **a safe, stimulating environment** which recognises individual needs of pupils, sets appropriate challenges and builds on a positive, praising classroom culture.

5. Planning.

Once schools are familiar with the requirements of the Oldham Agreed Syllabus and have chosen which religions are to be studied in which Key Stage, long, medium and short term planning can be put in place which includes teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs. Special schools have the flexibility to modify the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to meet their pupils' needs, such as selecting materials from an earlier key stage or by planning to focus on just two religions. They must teach the syllabus 'as far as it is practicable.'

The development of pupils' individual education programmes (IEPs) allows for RE to be provided according to pupils' needs, such as focusing on communication, social, sensory or other skills to which RE can make a significant contribution. Some pupils may need additional experiences to consolidate or extend their understanding of particular concepts, so timing needs to be flexible enough to allow for this. Where teaching is good, the specific skills of reflection, expression and discernment will not be neglected.

Planning should provide for:

- the range of pupil ability in the group, with differentiated activities;
- the past and present experience of pupils;
- the family background of pupils;
- the individual needs of pupils, including their special educational needs;
- a range of opportunities to assess progress and to report to parents.

There are some commercial resources available to support this work, for example the 'Equals' programme offers well thought out work for SEN RE to schools.

6. Teaching and learning approaches for pupils with special educational needs

A wide variety of approaches can succeed, including the use of artefacts, video, visits and visitors, reflection, stilling and experiential activities, classroom assistants, the widest possible range of sensory and experiential approaches, and use of ICT including internet, CD Roms, a digital camera and scanner, new video technologies, big mac switches, concept key boards and overlays. New technologies are often created to help pupils with SEN: Good RE teaching must always seek to make the most of them.

7. Recording pupils' achievement.

Pupils with special educational needs want to be able to show their achievement. Teachers need to enable pupils to demonstrate statements of achievement and learning outcomes. For pupils who have greatest difficulty in learning this might be supported by using QCDA's Performance descriptions in religious education (P levels). Levels P4 to P8 refer to skills, knowledge and understanding in RE. Teachers can also make special use of the eight level scale. A particular level could be broken down into a number of smaller elements and steps to work on and celebrate achievements. These could include pupils' responses to:

- experiencing an activity
- sharing an awareness of the activity
- using the senses in different ways
- exploring artefacts, experiences, stories, music or other stimulus materials
- participation in the activity

- praising and being praised, thanking and being thanked.


The use of the eight level scale may provide an important tool in enabling teachers to: plan future work with objectives, tasks and learning experiences appropriate to pupils' ability and development;


- ensure continuity and progression to the next stage;
- set appropriate RE targets for pupils' personal IEPs;
- recognise pupils' levels of engagement and response.

8. Accreditation of RE.

The National Qualifications framework provides for entry level qualifications such as a certificate of achievement to accredit the achievement of students at 16 whose achievement is below that of GCSE. Entry level qualifications in RE/RS are available from several awarding bodies. These accreditation routes award grades of pass, merit and distinction roughly equivalent to National Curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3. These qualifications may allow appropriate forms of assessments for pupils with special needs. Local collaboration between special schools and other schools can provide support for the use of such accreditation.

Performance Descriptions for pupils achieving below level one in RE		Summary
Pupils...		
P1(i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encounter activities and experiences. • may be passive or resistant. • may show simple reflex responses, e.g. startling at sudden noises or movements. • any participation is fully prompted 	Encounter (present during activity)
P1(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show emerging awareness of activities & experiences. • may have periods when they appear alert and ready to focus their attention on certain people, events, objects or parts of objects e.g. becoming still in response to silence. • may give intermittent reactions e.g. vocalising occasionally during group celebrations and acts of worship 	Awareness (fleeting focus)
P2(i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begin to respond consistently to familiar people, events and objects. They react to new activities and experiences e.g. briefly looking around in unfamiliar environments. • begin to show interest in people, events and objects e.g. leaning towards the source of a light, sound or scent. • accept and engage in co-active exploration e.g. touching a range of religious artefacts and objects in partnership with a member of staff. 	Attention and response (deliberate but inconsistent)
P2(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begin to be proactive in their interactions. • communicate consistent preferences and affective responses e.g. showing that they have enjoyed an experience or interaction. • recognise familiar people, events and objects e.g. becoming quiet and attentive during a certain piece of music. • perform actions, often by trial and improvement, and they remember learned responses over short periods of time e.g. repeating a simple action with an artefact. • co-operate with shared exploration and supported participation e.g. performing gestures during ritual exchanges with another person performing gestures. 	↓

<p>P3 (i)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begin to communicate intentionally. • seek attention through eye contact, gesture or action. • request events or activities e.g. prompting a visitor to prolong an interaction. • participate in shared activities with less support. • sustain concentration for short periods. • explore materials in increasingly complex ways e.g. stroking or shaking artefacts and objects. • observe the results of their own actions with interest e.g. when vocalising in a quiet place. • remember learned responses over more extended periods e.g. following a familiar ritual and responding appropriately 	<p>Participation (with support)</p> 
<p>P3 (ii)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use emerging conventional communication. • greet known people and may initiate interactions and activities e.g. prompting an adult to sing or play a favourite song. • can remember learned responses over increasing periods of time and may anticipate known events e.g. celebrating their peers achievements in assembly. • may respond to options and choices with actions or gestures e.g. choosing to participate in activities. • actively explore objects and events for more extended periods e.g. contemplating the flickering of a candle flame. • apply potential solutions systematically to problems e.g. passing an artefact to a peer in order to prompt participation in a group activity. 	
<p>P4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use single elements of communication e.g. words, gestures, signs or symbols, to express their feelings. • show they understand 'yes' and 'no'. • begin to respond to the feelings of others e.g. matching their emotions and laughing when another pupil is laughing. • join in with activities by initiating ritual actions and sounds. • demonstrate an appreciation of stillness and quiet. 	<p>Involvement (active/ intentional)</p> 
<p>P5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond appropriately to simple questions about familiar religious events or experiences and communicate simple meanings. • respond to a variety of new religious experiences e.g. involving music, drama, colour, lights, food or tactile objects. • take part in activities involving two or three other learners. • may also engage in moments of individual reflection. 	
<p>P6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express and communicate their feelings in different ways. • respond to others in group situations and co-operate when working in small groups. • listen to, and begin to respond to, familiar religious stories, poems and music, and make their own contribution to celebrations and festivals. • carry out ritualised actions in familiar circumstances. • show concern and sympathy for others in distress e.g. through gestures, facial expressions or by offering comfort. • start to be aware of their own influence on events and other people. 	<p>Gaining skills and understanding</p> 

<p>P7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to and follow religious stories. • can communicate their ideas about religion, life events and experiences in simple phrases. • can evaluate their own work and behaviour in simple ways, beginning to identify some actions as right and wrong on the basis of consequences. • can find out about aspects of religion through stories, music, or drama, answer questions and communicate their responses. • may communicate their feelings about what is special to them e.g. through role play. • can begin to understand that other people have needs and to respect these. • can make purposeful relationships with others in group activity. 	
<p>P8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can listen attentively to religious stories or to people talking about religion. • can begin to understand that religious and other stories carry moral and religious meaning. • are increasingly able to communicate ideas, feelings or responses to experiences or retell religious stories. • can communicate simple facts about religion and important people in religions. • can begin to realise the significance of religious artefacts, symbols and places. • can reflect on what makes them happy, sad, excited or lonely. • are able to demonstrate a basic understanding of what is right and wrong in familiar situations. • are often sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and show respect for themselves and others. • treat living things and their environment with care and concern. 	<p>Gaining skills and understanding</p>

Expectations in Religious Education

Oldham Agreed Syllabus for RE levels 1-4

	Performance description Pupils are able to:	
Step 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recount outlines of religious stories. recognise features of religious life and practice; recognise some religious symbols and words; identify aspects of their own experience and feelings, in the religious material studied. 	Gaining skills and understanding
Step 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> retell religious stories; identify some religious beliefs, teachings and practices and know that some are characteristic of more than one religion; suggest meanings in religious symbols, language and stories. respond sensitively to others' experiences, feeling, values and concerns, including those with a faith, particularly in relation to matters of right & wrong realise that some questions which cause people to wonder are difficult to answer. 	Knowing about stories, beliefs, practices Responding, reflecting,
Step 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe some religious beliefs and teachings and their importance, and how some features are used or exemplified in festivals and practices; make links between these and the ways in which religions express themselves; compare aspects of their own experiences and ideas about questions which are difficult to answer with those of others; identify what influences their lives; make links between values and commitments, including religious ones, and their own attitudes or behaviour. 	Asking questions and suggesting answers
Step 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe the key beliefs & teachings of the religions studied, connecting them accurately with other features within them, making some comparisons between religions; show understanding of what belonging to religions involves; show how religious beliefs, ideas and feelings can be expressed in a variety of forms, they can give meanings for some symbols, stories and language, using technical terminology. ask questions and suggest answers from their own and others' experiences about the significant experiences of key figures, the puzzling aspects of life moral and religious issues, making reference to the teaching of religions, showing understanding of why certain things are held to be right and wrong. 	

Further reading on SEN and RE.

- *'Growing in RE'* by Anne Krismann (free download from www.retoday.org.uk) is a visionary and practical approach to SEN RE
- *'Religious Education For All'* by Erica Brown, published by David Fulton, 1996, ISBN: 1 85346 392 2 may help teachers wanting to develop better practice with regard to access and provision for pupils with special educational needs in RE.
- *'Secondary Religious Education Curriculum Modules for Pupils with Learning Disabilities'* by Jane Dowell, 2002, provides very well worked out examples of good practice. Available from the author at Piper Hill High School, 200 Yew Tree Lane, Northenden, Manchester, M23 0FF (0161 998 4068)
- *'Religious Education for Very Special Children'* by Flo Longhorn, 1993, ORCA publications, Isle of Man is a book full of insight into the SEN and RE issues.
- The Farmington website (www.farmington.ac.uk) includes reference to many papers written by the holders of the 'Farmington Institute Special Needs Millennium Awards' It is an excellent source for RE curriculum development among special pupils.
- Steps in RE from RE Today is a clear and well thought out programme of differentiated learning for lower achieving pupils in the secondary years.

RE and the gifted and talented pupil

In speaking of the gifted and talented pupil in RE, we are concerned both with children who have particular gifts or talents in RE and those who are very 'bright' and capable in a more general sense. The guidance identifies issues for teachers to consider concerning gifted, talented and most able pupils.

Recognising the gifted and talented in RE

The identification of the most able pupils in RE should be approached on the basis of distinct RE ability, skills, competencies and insight.

RE is centrally concerned with ultimate questions, critical thinking, analysis and interpretation and with very complex and multifaceted phenomena and concepts. This provides interest and motivation for the most able. Truth seeking in uncertain fields is hard work, and should stimulate the best in the best young minds! Able children in RE can quickly, at an expert level, develop and apply knowledge, understanding, skills and processes of RE (eg critical thinking, interpretation, insight, reflection, and synthesis). Talented and most able pupils have the potential to demonstrate high levels of understanding, insight, discernment, achievement and maturity.

RE provides many opportunities for engagement with story, symbolism, metaphor and analogy in its approaches to human meaning making. Links between RE and philosophy with primary and secondary aged pupils (and older ones) are relevant, and should attract the interest of many RE specialists. Thinking skills associated with argument, reasoning and logical analysis have a key place in RE achievements.

All these skills often involve the use of language and require bringing higher order language skills into the service of RE objectives. Strategies to challenge the most able language users are part of enabling the highest achievement of the talented pupil.

Professor John Hull has a useful insight into the concept of giftedness in RE and has written about primary aged children's engagement with the highest levels of religious discourse.

"A child in religious education may be thought of as being gifted when that child responds with high interest and outstanding attainment in the areas which are the aims and objectives of RE considered as an educational activity. The giftedness of the child will be as specific to RE as the attainment targets and so on are specific to RE..."

In the more direct, first order sense, there may also be children who have religious or spiritual gifts, whether these derive from the environment outside school, or whether they represent some kind of original vision. The RE teachers should be aware of such children, and may learn a great deal from them, but it is not the purpose of RE to nurture such children more than the rest..."

Professor John Hull, Resource, The Journal of PCFRE (now NATRE), 17.3, page 6, 1995

Giftedness in RE might be distinguished from high attainment scoring in other subjects. For example, the child who is gifted with regard to RE might show particular skills of insight, application and discernment, making sense and drawing meaning from religious symbols, metaphors and sacred writing at a high level. This is related to spiritual development. The concept of 'giftedness' in RE isn't the same as being religiously gifted, as a particular faith community might recognise a child's gifts. Teachers may find it fruitful to consider how giftedness in RE might be similar to giftedness in sport, music, mathematics or poetry, and how it might differ from these.

The concept of the teacher's professional judgment in RE is crucial. Teachers who know their pupils and their work and bring professional talent, expertise and awareness to RE are best placed to identify the most able, the gifted and the talented and then to make appropriate and challenging provision for them.

Provision and Progression

The willingness and capacity to take up opportunities for spiritual and moral development is a central aspect of the best work in RE. Teachers need to use their professional judgement sensitively in weighing up pupils' responses to these opportunities. Some of the most effective models for differentiation in the RE curriculum envisage a spiral of revisited concepts, attitudes and skills. These are understood, applied, linked and evaluated in increasing depth by learners. Such models offer a fruitful avenue for further exploration of how to provide for the most able in RE. Extension, top end differentiation, working beyond age related expectations, acceleration and provision for the most able are all issues here.

14 ideas for pedagogy and classroom development

The needs of the most able, gifted and talented pupils in RE require particular pedagogic skills from teachers in RE. Teachers might consider the place of the fourteen strategies given below in their own practice. Are there some which could usefully be developed in your school?

1. Use a variety of challenging questioning strategies to enable pupils to explore religious phenomena and questions deeply.
2. Set extension tasks that avoid mere repetition, or 'extra' work, but pursue instead the depth of understanding or reflection.
3. Use authentic material from inside a faith (eg prayer, sacred text, possibly music, argument or artefacts) to provide complex stimulus to learning.
4. Use carefully planned self-assessment instruments with gifted and talented pupils to involve them in identifying their own learning needs. Such work is most useful if it includes a focus on spiritual development.
5. Encourage ambitious work by the most able pupils, using target-setting strategies to open their eyes to 'distant horizons'.
6. Focus on the interpretation of symbol, metaphor, text or story and the ways in which these stimulate reflection on meaning and discernment.
7. Take strategies that challenge the most able, gifted and talented pupil's use of language, both spoken and written, from the general literature and apply these in RE.
8. Give pupils access to terminology and a language for the sophisticated handling of religious, spiritual, ethical and philosophical questions, ideas and materials, and giving them opportunities to develop and use that language.
9. Focus on application of ideas and learning in new or unfamiliar contexts: 'You've learned about how Christian monks live out their vows. Now compare the example of a Buddhist monk, who chooses to live by the Five Precepts...'
10. Use the ultimate or fundamental questions that lie below the surface of religious practice to open up for learners the ways in which they might learn from religion.
11. Provide particular challenges for most able, gifted and talented pupils with regard to learning from religion (see recent QCA non-statutory guidance on religious education).
12. Be willing to use questions and tasks from key stages beyond the age of the talented pupil, and to stimulate responses through difficult tasks, eg involving argument, analysis, prediction.
13. Model RE problem solving / problem centred activities from the 'world class tests' for use with talented pupils, eg using inter faith issues or arguments about the value of prayer, or questions about God.
14. Encourage expert learners to make connections between their work in RE and other subjects of the curriculum (eg with cosmology in physics, worship in music, ethics in PSHE or inequality in geography). Connections with learning beyond the school are a valuable extension as well.