

Bullers Wood Multi Academy Trust

Religious Education Policy (2018)



Quod Potes Tenta
Strive to your Utmost

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Religious Education Policy

Why is Religious Education important?

Religious Education (RE) should make a major contribution to the education of children and young people. At its best, it is intellectually challenging and personally enriching. It helps young people develop beliefs and values, and promotes the virtues of respect and empathy, which are important in our diverse society. It fosters civilised debate and reasoned argument, and helps pupils to understand the place of religion and belief in the modern world.

Bullers Wood School ('the School') is keen to ensure that all pupils receive high quality RE.

"RE has a vital and powerful contribution to make in equipping young people, whatever their backgrounds and personal beliefs with the skills to understand and thrive in a diverse and shifting world." – All Party Parliamentary Group for RE.

Religion and worldviews inform our values and are reflected in what we say and how we behave. RE is an important subject in itself, developing an individual's knowledge and understanding of the religions and worldviews which form part of contemporary society.

Religious education provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It can develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions, and non-religious worldviews that offer answers to questions such as these.

RE also contributes to pupils' personal development and well-being and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. RE can also make important contributions to other parts of the school curriculum such as citizenship, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE education), the humanities, education for sustainable development and others. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development, deepening the understanding of the significance of religion in the lives of others – individually, communally and cross-culturally.

Section 78 (1) of the 2002 Education Act states that all pupils should follow a balanced and broadly based curriculum which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, mental and physical development of pupils and of society, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'. Learning about and from religions and beliefs, through the distinct knowledge, understanding and skills contained in RE within a broad-based curriculum, is essential to achieving these aims. Exploring the concepts of religion and belief and their roles in the spiritual, moral and cultural lives of people in a diverse society helps individuals develop moral awareness and social understanding.

RE plays an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning. It helps children and young people become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. It gives them the knowledge, skills and understanding to discern and value truth and goodness, strengthening their capacity for making moral judgements and for evaluating different types of commitment to make positive and healthy choices.

RE subject matter gives particular opportunities to promote an ethos of respect for others, challenge stereotypes and build understanding of other cultures and beliefs. This contributes to promoting a positive and inclusive school ethos that champions democratic values and human rights.

In summary, RE for children and young people:

- provokes challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs, the self, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, and religious traditions that examine these questions, fostering personal reflection and spiritual development

- encourages pupils to explore their own beliefs (whether they are religious or non-religious), in the light of what they learn, as they examine issues of religious belief and faith and how these impact on personal, institutional and social ethics; and to express their responses. This also builds resilience to anti-democratic or extremist narratives
- enables pupils to build their sense of identity and belonging, which helps them flourish within their communities and as citizens in a diverse society
- teaches pupils to develop respect for others, including people with different faiths and beliefs, and helps to challenge prejudice
- prompts pupils to consider their responsibilities to themselves and to others, and to explore how they might contribute to their communities and to wider society. It encourages empathy, generosity and compassion.

RE has an important part to play as part of a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum to which all pupils are entitled. High quality learning experiences in RE are designed and provided by careful planning through the Bromley Agreed Syllabus (2013) and in schools, taking into account the need to offer breadth of content, depth of learning and coherence between concepts, skills and content.

Pupils and RE

All pupils are entitled to receive RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum at the School which promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Public Inspection of RE

RE in accordance with the Bromley Agreed Syllabus (2013) is inspected by Ofsted in the course of the periodic inspection of a school (under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005). All non-denominational academies are inspected on the quality of their RE by Ofsted as part of the normal inspections regime.

Religious Education at Bullers Wood School

The Funding Agreement for the School, an Academy without a religious designation, states that it must arrange for RE to be given to all pupils in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses that are set out in section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996 and paragraph (5) of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. This means a syllabus that reflects that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. It also means that the School must not provide a RE syllabus to pupils by means of any catechism. This gives the School the freedom to design its own RE syllabus (within those constraints) and not be bound by the specific locally agreed syllabus that maintained schools are required to follow.

This said, the School has opted to follow the Bromley Agreed Syllabus (2013), designed by Bromley Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education ('SACRE'). It is held that this Syllabus is robust and, because it is a local syllabus, meets the needs of pupils at the School well.

The General Aims of RE Provision

As well as meeting the legal requirements, the School strives to ensure that RE is:

- of a high standard, where expectations are clear to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public
- coherent and shows progression, particularly across the transitions of the key stages and post 16

- contributing to the School's aims to promote community cohesion and high standards of achievement
- well understood by the School community, who have confidence in the School's provision and achievement.

RE post 14

As RE remains statutory beyond the age of 14 for all pupils in the Schools including pupils in the sixth form (except those withdrawn from lessons), it is important that it continues to be part of a coherent curriculum that enables them to draw on their own values and beliefs in making independent decisions and choices, as they prepare for adult life.

RE for this age group should, among other aims, be relevant to pupils' needs and to the rest of their curriculum, and provide opportunities for pupils to:

- reflect on, express and justify their own opinions in light of their learning about and from religion and their study of religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual questions
- develop their own values and attitudes in order to recognise their rights and responsibilities in light of their learning about and from religions and beliefs
- relate their learning to the wider world, gaining a sense of personal autonomy in preparation for adult life
- develop skills that are useful in a wide range of careers and in adult life generally, especially skills of critical enquiry, creative problem-solving, and communication in a variety of media.

RE Qualifications

There is no legal requirement that pupils must sit public examinations, but it is increasingly the case that pupils from age 14 onwards are given the opportunity to have their learning and achievement in RE publicly recognised through accredited qualifications. The development of GCSE (Full Course) RS has revolutionised RE in Key Stage 4 in many schools.

The School will provide as appropriate opportunities for post-16 pupils to gain qualifications in Religious Studies or allied academic disciplines e.g. Philosophy.

The Terminology of RE at the School

'Religious Education' (RE) refers to the subject created by the 1988 Education Reform Act. It is understood to involve a rich mixture of academic disciplines and pedagogical approaches.

'Religious Studies' (RS) refers to the study of religion, typically in a phenomenological fashion. The preferred term for department at the School that caters for RE (and RE through RS) is the 'The Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy'.

This emphasises the use of dialogical philosophy as a mechanism to deliver RE objectives and to enable pupils 'to adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion.' (Ofsted 2013).

Purpose and Aims

The purpose of the Department of Religious Studies is to help students think for themselves, reflectively, responsibly, and respectfully, about religious, theological, philosophical, ethical, and other relevant subject matter. Therefore, core aims include: promoting freedom of thought and of speech, within the context of school values, aims, and purposes; helping students to become more articulate and more self-confident; promoting success, including academic success, in and beyond main subjects; fostering friendships in school, class, and group communities; and pressing our students to be responsible, in the truest sense of this term.

RE: Learning Outside the Classroom

Local members of religions and other worldview groups have an enriching contribution to make in hosting visits at local centres, places of worship or sacred spaces. Schools value the opportunity of bringing learning to life by giving pupils chances to meet and talk with people from the tradition they are studying, ask questions, experience an unfamiliar religious and cultural environment, and meet individuals who can respond to their thoughts and ideas. These visits contribute to pupils' spiritual development as well as giving many opportunities for exciting cross-curricular learning. Some centres have annual open days or events for the whole community, so that adults as well as pupils can enjoy the opportunity to find out about a new perspective.

Individuals or small teams may also be invited into schools to speak, answer questions or take part in panel discussions. Ideally, community members who take on such roles are those who have some experience of the age group concerned and who can work with the group's teacher to plan a visit which will marry well with the pupils' programme of learning. They will also need to be reasonably confident about answering questions at a level that pupils can understand. Visitors should not replace regular teachers of RE.

Sensitive Issues in the RE Classroom

Children in our classrooms come from a large variety of faith traditions, or none, and live in a multi-cultural and multi-racial society.

Sensitivity to the differences of faith, culture and practice within our schools leads to an atmosphere of tolerance to others and good will. An attitude of respect towards others and willingness to consult are more important than a detailed knowledge of every practice.

People who belong to the same faith may not practise their faith in the same way. There are many denominations of faith groups, to speak to the class as if we all belong to the same faith and have the same practices would be offensive to many. Statements which start with 'All Sikhs...' or 'All Buddhists...' or even 'As Christians we...' are generally wrong. Much better is 'Some Sikhs', 'Many Buddhists', or 'Speaking as a Christian I...'.

If RE teachers have a pupil who is a member of a faith community, they may, by asking privately beforehand, be able to get them to talk about their faith to the class. Teachers of RE should remember, and remind the class, that practices can be different so that the pupil does not become accountable for a whole faith tradition.

A pupil who is recently bereaved may need to be excused from discussions on loss, change, memorials. Generally if the pupil is warned in advance they will be able to cope and participate. Children often want to discuss the ideas of heaven, rebirth or afterlife and the Teacher of RE needs to be ready for these questions.

All religious artefacts should be carefully used, stored correctly and displayed with sensitivity and a respectful attitude; it may be an artefact to the teacher while it is a sacred object to the pupil. The Qur'an should be wrapped and kept on the highest shelf when not in use; the Holy writings of the Jewish people are called the Tenakh. When taking children on an RE visit it must be impressed upon them to be respectful at all times; it is important for parents to know that pupils will achieve a better understanding of the religion through a visit and that there will be no participation in worship involved.

Attitudes in RE

The following attitudes are those which the School seeks to promote. As an integral part of the learning process in RE, they need to be carefully built into the planning of schemes of work. They are essential pre-requirements for pupils entering fully into the study of religion and learning from their study. The development of these attitudes should also enhance pupils' contribution to other aspects of school life.

Pupils should be encouraged to develop:

- Commitment – this includes understanding the importance of commitment to a set of values by which to live; willingness to develop a positive approach to life; and the ability to learn, while living with certainty and uncertainty.

- Open mindedness – this includes listening to the views of others without prejudging the response; careful consideration of the views of others; willingness to consider evidence and argument; readiness to look beyond superficial impressions or stereotypes; and being prepared to reconsider existing views.
- Respect – this includes developing respect for one’s own beliefs, values and traditions; those who have different beliefs and customs; the rights of others to hold their own views without embarrassment, ridicule and intimidation; and caring for each other, the environment and the needs and concerns of others.
- Self-esteem – this includes affirming the uniqueness of each person; developing a mature sense of self-worth and value; developing the confidence to ask important questions of meaning; and developing the ability to reflect.
- Appreciation and Wonder – this includes developing a personal interest in ultimate questions; the desire to search for the meaning of life; developing a sense of awe, wonder and appreciation; willingness to ask questions and to explore; curiosity and a desire to seek after the truth; developing a personal interest in ultimate questions; and the desire to search for the meaning of life.

The Right of Withdrawal

The School, and the Bromley Agreed Syllabus (2013), aims to offer an open and inclusive approach to RE. The hope is that parents, carers, and pupils of all faiths and none will benefit from it.

However, the School recognises the legal right of parents or carers to request that their child may be excused from all or part of RE on the grounds of religious conscience.

Pupils can choose to withdraw themselves once they are 18.

The right of withdrawal does not extend to other areas of the curriculum when, as may happen on occasion, spontaneous questions on religious matters are raised by pupils or there are issues related to religion that arise in other subjects such as history, philosophy, or citizenship. Note that teachers may also withdraw from teaching RE by reasons of their religious conscience. Teachers wishing to exercise this right, where appropriate, are advised to contact the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy to discuss the matter.

The use of the right to withdraw by should be at the instigation of parents (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over). In the first instance, a letter should be sent to the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy. It should be made clear and explicit whether the request is withdrawal from (i) the whole of the subject or (ii) specific parts of it.

Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from RE without influence from the School. Parents are encouraged to discuss the matter informally with the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy beforehand to ensure that the decision is informed. However, the School will ensure parents are informed of this right and are aware of the educational objectives and content of the RE syllabus by publishing details on the School website. In this way, parents can make an informed decision.

On receipt of a letter requesting that a pupil is withdrawn from RE on the grounds of conscience, the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy will seek to contact the parents as appropriate to ensure that they are aware of the nature, aims, and purposes of RE at the School.

Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right will be respected, and the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy will contact the parent or carer to discuss how the School will accommodate this request.

If pupils are withdrawn from RE, the School has a duty to supervise them, but not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Pupils will have to remain on school premises, unless agreed otherwise by the Headteacher. Pupils will have to engage in RE considered appropriate by the parents concerned, and the curriculum time cannot be used for non-RE

purposes. Within these parameters, it is at the discretion of the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy as to how pupils withdrawn from RE are provided for.

If parents have withdrawn a pupil from RE provided at the School and asked for alternative RE to be provided in accordance with the tenets of a particular religion or denomination, then the School will *either* (i) provide facilities for the alternative RE to be given at the School unless there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so *or* (ii) agree to outside arrangements being made as long as no financial burden falls on School as a result of these arrangements.

Where a pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parent wants the pupil to receive. This RE could be provided at the School in question, with the permission of the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy, or the pupil could be sent to another school where suitable RE is provided if this is reasonably convenient, and with the consent of the Headteacher. If neither approach is practicable, outside arrangements can be made to provide the pupil with the kind of RE that the parent wants, and the pupil may be withdrawn from School for a reasonable period of time to allow them to attend this external RE. This would need to be agreed by the Headteacher.

In light of the above, parents wishing to exercise the right to withdraw their child from RE will be made aware of by the Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy that, unless agreed otherwise, responsibility for the religious education of the child ultimately rests with the parent rather than the School.

Parents will need to make the necessary arrangements for this, typically in terms of setting and marking work from their own faith or secular tradition.