



# The Church School RE Subject Leaders Handbook

**2022-23**

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# 1. Welcome

The role of the RE subject leader is different to any other subject leadership role. The subject forms part of the basic curriculum, not the National Curriculum and also includes an opt out clause for parents. However, it is also one of the most important subjects to ensure that children have the knowledge they need to navigate successfully in an increasingly complex world and to enable each a safe space to explore the questions of meaning that the RE classroom thrives upon.

As a subject leader, you will not only have to promote a much misunderstood subject, model high standards of teaching and think about progress and attainment, but you also need to be aware of the wider RE world and changes and developments in the subject at a national level. You may be aware of the Statement of Entitlement with its ambition for RE specialists in every school and wondering how best to achieve this as well as strengthen your teachers' subject knowledge at a time where it feels every curriculum area is competing for CPD.

I am here to help and support as you navigate through the world of RE. This document will be regularly updated to give you access to the information you need quickly.

**Gemma Kingston**

**Schools' Adviser**

## 2. What is the role about?

### 1. Core purpose of the RE subject leader

Your core purpose is to provide professional leadership and management for RE in school, which will secure:

- **high quality teaching**
- **effective use of resources**
- **improved standards of learning and achievement for all pupils**
- **to secure an Excellent outcome in a SIAMS inspection**



### 2. Key outcomes of effective RE subject leadership

Where your leadership role is effective, it will be seen in:

#### a. pupils who

- show sustained improvement in their RE subject knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to prior attainment;
- understand the key ideas in RE at a level appropriate to their age and stage of development;
- show improvement in overall literacy and oracy skills, as well as their religious literacy;
- are well prepared for any tasks, tests or examinations in RE;
- are enthusiastic about RE, seeing its relevance, and highly motivated to continue with their studies;
- through their attitudes and behaviour, contribute to a purposeful working environment in lessons;
- demonstrate the ability to engage respectfully with those whose beliefs differ from their own

#### b. teachers who

- work well together on RE, and show an enthusiasm which reinforces the motivation of pupils;
- support the aims of the subject and understand how they relate to the school's aims;
- are involved in the formation of policies and plans and apply them consistently in the classroom;
- are dedicated to improving standards of teaching and learning in RE;

- have high expectations for pupils and set realistic but challenging targets based on a good knowledge of their pupils and the progression of concepts in the subject;
- make good use of guidance, training and support to enhance their RE knowledge and develop expertise in their teaching;
- take account of relevant research and inspection findings
- make effective use of subject-specific resources;
- select appropriate teaching and learning approaches to meet RE objectives and pupil needs;

#### **c. parents who**

- are well informed about the nature of RE and the idea of being religiously literate in a modern world;
- show interest in their child's learning and achievements in RE;
- know how they can support or assist their child's learning in the subject;

#### **d. headteachers and other senior managers who**

- understand the needs of RE, its statutory obligations, and the role it can play in a child's education;
- ensure all children receive their RE entitlement and that all staff are well resourced and trained;
- use information about achievements and development priorities in RE in order to make well informed decisions and achieve greater improvements in whole school development
- work with the Subject Leader, Foundation Governors and other staff, to prepare for SIAMS inspection

#### **e. other adults in the school and community, including admin staff, classroom assistants, external agencies and faith community representatives, who**

- are informed of RE subject matter, achievements and priorities;
- are able, where appropriate, to play an effective role in supporting the teaching and learning of RE in the school, including the involvement of local faith communities

*(based on national subject leader standards)*

### 3. Documents you must read



**RE is of high importance in a Church school, often seen as a core subject or specialism.**

The Church of England Education Office issues its own

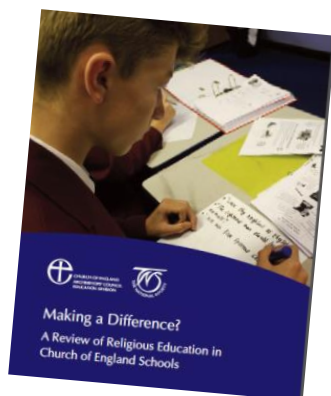
Statement of Entitlement to good quality, inclusive RE. **You must read this:**

[https://www.cofesuffolk.org/uploads/Feb\\_19\\_RE\\_Statement\\_of\\_Entitlement\\_for\\_Church\\_schools.pdf](https://www.cofesuffolk.org/uploads/Feb_19_RE_Statement_of_Entitlement_for_Church_schools.pdf)

**Do you feel that pupils in your school currently get this entitlement? If so how? If not, how might you enable them to have this entitlement?** More on this later....

You should also read the '**Making a Difference?**' report (2014).

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2014\\_making\\_a\\_difference-a\\_review\\_of\\_religious\\_education\\_in\\_church\\_of\\_england\\_schools\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2014_making_a_difference-a_review_of_religious_education_in_church_of_england_schools_web_final.pdf)



Make yourself familiar with the current **SIAMS Evaluation Schedule**

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-inspections>



The 2018 **Final Report of the Commission on RE** which sets out a National Plan for RE comprising of 11 recommendations. Read the full report or executive summary at: <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/>

## ‘THEOS’ The Theos Report

RE is under threat. This report interprets and develops the idea of “worldview” and explores its implications for the classroom. (2020)

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2020/10/21/worldviews-in-religious-education>

## 4. RE and the Law

### Headlines:

- RE is a statutory subject of the school curriculum for all pupils aged between 5 and 19, unless withdrawn by parents, or, if over 18, the students themselves.
- RE is to be delivered in accordance with the Locally Agreed Syllabus in VC schools and former VC academies. For academies we suggest the Suffolk syllabus.
- In VA schools, or former VA Academies, RE is to be delivered in accordance with the school's trust deeds.

### If you want to read more detail:

- **DfE Circular 1/94: Religious Education and Collective Worship** available on line

### Parental Right of Withdrawal

This was first granted in 1944 when RE was called 'Religious Instruction' and carried with it connotations of induction into the Christian faith. RE is very different now – open, broad and exploring a range of religious and non-religious worldviews. In the UK, parents still have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to provide their own RE. **This provision will be the parents' responsibility.** This right of withdrawal exists for all pupils in all types of school, including schools with and without a religious designation. Students aged 18 or over have the right to withdraw themselves from RE. Parents also have the right to withdraw their child from part of RE, **and can do so without giving any explanation.**

Teachers may also have the right to withdraw from the teaching of RE. However, this does not apply to teachers who have been specifically employed to teach or lead RE or teachers in VA schools. If a teacher wishes to withdraw from the teaching of RE, a letter requesting this must be submitted to the head of the school and its chair of governors. If a teacher withdraws from the teaching of RE, the school must still make provisions for the pupils to receive their entitlement to RE.

**NATRE have a helpful document about the right to withdraw from RE available on their website: <https://www.natre.org.uk/membership/guidance-on-withdrawal/> This document includes helpful scenarios with examples of how to respond.**



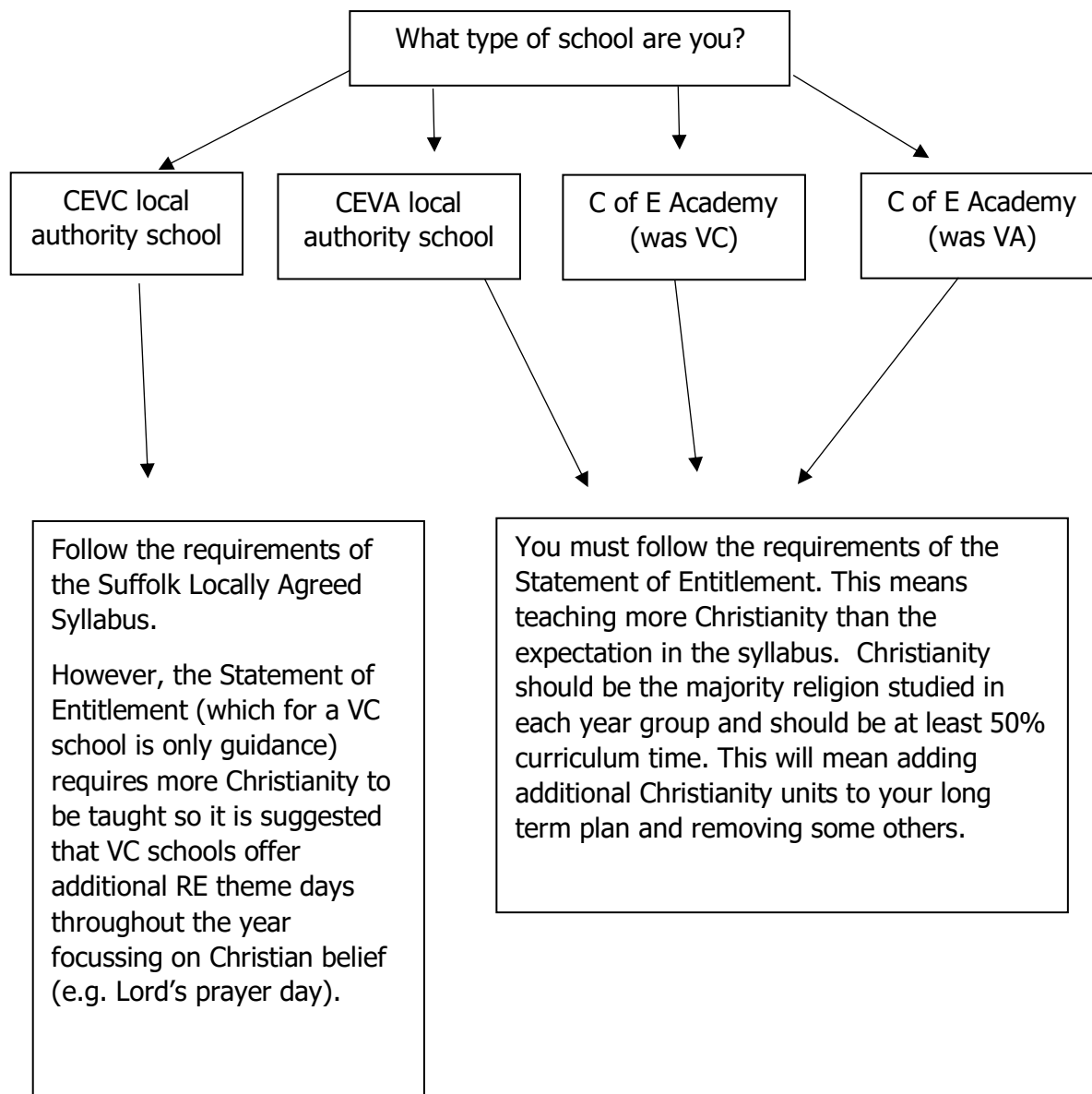
## From NATRE: Ten tips to manage the right of withdrawal in your school

1. Include a short statement about RE being **inclusive** in your prospectus and on your website. Inclusive RE is essential.
2. Give information about withdrawal on your website after **positive explanations** about what RE in your school is. Parents are often trying to withdraw from something you don't do.
3. Use parents' evenings, assemblies and displays to **showcase** what goes on in RE lessons and to promote religious literacy, cultural diversity and visits to places of worship.
4. Parents have a right of withdrawal from all of RE or part of RE. Some schools choose to state that they are not supportive of selective withdrawal from part of RE. This does not override a parental right to withdraw from part of RE – if requested, this partial withdrawal must be granted.
5. Ask parents considering withdrawal to contact the head teacher to arrange a discussion.
6. Ensure that parents who wish to withdraw their children are met with quickly.
7. Discuss the religious issues the parents would object to their child being taught about.
8. Show parents the kinds of things you do in RE by showing the locally agreed syllabus, aims of RE, learning objectives and examples of lessons.
9. If a parent has withdrawn their child from RE it is **good practice to review** this with the parent every year.
10. Parents can only withdraw their child from RE, not other curriculum areas. For example, pupils can't be withdrawn from a study of religious art in an art lesson, or parts of the history curriculum such as the study of Christian conversions.

### GUIDANCE: DEALING WITH WITHDRAWAL FROM RE



## 5. How much Christianity should I be teaching?



## 6. SIAMS

All church schools have a SIAMS inspection (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist schools) every 3 to 5 years. The principal objective of the inspection is to evaluate the distinctiveness, effectiveness and sustainability of the school as a church school.

You can find your school's last report on the Diocesan website, although it should be on your school website too.

<https://www.cofesuffolk.org/inspections>

[SIAMS Inspection Reports | The Church of England](#)

**Were there development points on RE to act on? Check this.**

If they concerned RE, gather evidence to prove you have progressed these.

The SIAMS Evaluation Schedule has one inspection question: How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

This is explored through seven strands:

- Vision and Leadership
- Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills
- Character Development: Hope, Aspiration, Courageous Advocacy
- Community and Living Well Together
- Dignity and Respect
- The impact of collective worship
- **The effectiveness of religious education**

The SIAMS inspector will look at RE in all church schools to see how it contributes to the overall effectiveness of the school as a church school. In addition, in voluntary aided schools and academies with former VA status the effectiveness of **teaching and learning** will be separately graded.

School leaders and managers can expect questions about issues related to RE such as:

- 1. Do arrangements for RE meet statutory requirements?**
- 2. Is priority given to staff expertise and specialist qualifications in RE?**
- 3. Is priority given to professional development in RE?**

#### 4. What is the level of resourcing for RE?

##### **In summary: what does Strand 7 say?**

**That RE should reflect the 2019 Statement of Entitlement.** This means:

- A balanced and coherently progressive curriculum
- A curriculum which develops skills of evaluation, critical thinking, analysis and interpretation
- Christianity is taught as a living and diverse faith
- Theological concepts are taught
- Children will have an informed and respectful understanding of other religions and worldviews
- A safe space to explore beliefs
- Effective assessment
- CPD for all teachers

In VA schools and academies inspected as VA:

- Inspectors will verify if RE teaching and learning **as monitored by the school** is consistently graded good against their own judgement.
- Progress is expected for all pupils, including SEND **and** vulnerable groups

##### **In addition, Strand 1 Vision and Leadership states the following:**

- RE is well resourced, funded and monitored
- Leaders ensure sufficient curriculum time for RE

## SIAMS for RE Subject Leaders

### What do I need to know to understand the expectations of strand 7?

#### Good RE should contribute to an education which enables all to flourish.

How does your school vision affect the way RE is seen and understood? Can you articulate how RE expresses the school vision within your setting? The Christian vision of a school needs to thread its way through all subjects and other aspects of school life. RE is just an example of one area in which it should be reflected.

#### In this strand the following must be explored:

- **How effective the school is in ensuring pupils flourish through the provision of high quality religious education reflecting the Church of England Statement of Entitlement.**
  - **How effective the school is in ensuring that religious education expresses the school's Christian vision.**
- In developing effective religious education, a school must evaluate the extent to which:
- a) Through effective curriculum planning, RE provision reflects the *Church of England Statement of Entitlement*, or Methodist equivalent, develops religious literacy and meets statutory obligations.
  - i. How well does RE help pupils to know about and understand Christianity as a living world faith

through the exploration of core theological concepts using an approach that critically engages with text? How well does RE help pupils consider the impact and connection that Christianity has on Britain's cultural heritage and the lives of people worldwide?

- ii. How well does RE enable all pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of other major world religions and world views and their impact on society and culture?
- iii. How well does RE give pupils a safe space to critically reflect on their own religious, spiritual and/or philosophical convictions?

b) Do teachers share effective practice locally and regionally and engage in professional development? Does RE have in place rigorous systems of assessment?



c) **How effective is RE teaching and learning in the school?**

Theological concepts lay at the heart of the Emmanuel Project scheme of work. Religious text is included in explore 1.

How do pupils in your school view Christianity? Do they know the significant impact in the past on our culture today, and that for millions it is a living faith?

How high is the quality of your RE? How familiar are you with the *Church of England Statement of Entitlement*? It is an important document for RE subject leads. Find the most recent 2019 version here:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/RE%20Statement%20of%20Entitlement%20for%20Church%20Schools.pdf> Stick as closely as you can to this document when writing a RE policy.

Religious Literacy is the aim of RE teaching.  
Do you know your statutory obligations?

Note the phrasing of 'all pupils' – this will include vulnerable groups the identity of which will influence the outcome of your inspection.

All Church of England schools are inspected by SIAMS, but only VA schools and former VA Academies have the effectiveness of teaching and learning inspected. The effectiveness of RE in VC schools will form part of your inspection report, but you will not receive a separate grade as in VA schools.

## The grade descriptors for 'GOOD'

Curriculum planning for RE is effective, reflecting a good balance between theology, philosophy and human science. Pupils are able to engage with religious text and theological ideas. They have developed age appropriate skills of enquiry, critical analysis and interpretation. In this way well-constructed and coherent RE provision results in pupils who give an age appropriate thoughtful account of Christianity as a living and diverse faith with some reference to theological concepts.

- There is an emphasis now on RE being 'balanced.' Theology, philosophy and human science are the academic disciplines that appropriately underpin learning in RE and can be explored at <https://balancedre.org.uk/> The Emmanuel Project is balanced when all three explore areas are included in the sequence of learning. Explore one relates to theology (examining the key ideas or concepts in religions and belief) with a focus on religious texts. Explore two relates to human science (conversations about the human dimension of religions and beliefs) with a focus on religious communities. Lastly, explore three relates to philosophy (conversations about thinking, reasoning and making judgements) with learning focussed around the impact on the individual's way of life.
- *Engage with religious text.* Are pupils in your setting being asked to critically engage in text in meaningful ways like you would expect in other subjects? The first explore lesson of each Emmanuel Project unit, and some enquiry lessons, address this area of learning.
- Engage with *theological ideas* – the Emmanuel project engages with theological concepts and considers big questions.
- Pupils develop '*age appropriate skills.*' How well do your pupils progress from the skills of recalling and remembering, to retelling, describing and explaining? How well are they able to evaluate and make comparisons?
- Is your RE provision 'well-constructed and coherent?' The Emmanuel Project builds knowledge and ensures progression. More information can be found in the Emmanuel Project teacher handbook.
- Christianity as *living and diverse* – do you have evidence that what Christians believe has an influence on what they do in their daily lives? About impact of the concept (think explore 3)

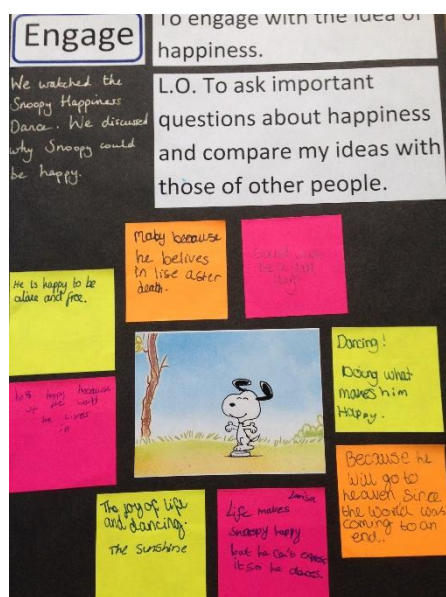
Pupils demonstrate an informed and respectful understanding of a range of religions and worldviews. RE lessons provide a safe space for pupils to discuss religious, spiritual and/or philosophical ideas. Pupils explain ways in which their thinking has been challenged. Statutory obligations are met and RE is largely in line with the *Church of England Statement of Entitlement*.

- Pupils have an '*informed and respectful understanding*' - do you know how your pupils talk about world faiths? Do they understand why it is important to understand the views of those with faith or with none? This is an area where recording discussions in some format would be useful.
- RE lessons are a '*safe space*.' Are pupils confident to share their ideas? During lessons, do teachers ask pupils not just what their ideas are but what are the ideas of others in the class?
- You will only get *challenging thinking* if you are asking challenging questions! How are questions being differentiated in RE to ensure challenge for all?

The school leader of RE has put in place systems for assessment that result in teachers and pupils being able to gauge progress and attainment in RE. Assessment informs planning, securing accurate challenge and supporting pupils to gain a clear understanding of how to make progress. Good practice is shared within the school and with other schools through involvement with local, national and regional groups. The school leader for RE has regular opportunities to share new ideas and pedagogy so ensuring that all staff teaching RE do so with confidence and to a high standard.

- Assessment is a vital part of good RE. The key word here is 'robust' and what this system looks like will be school dependant. This includes all methods of assessment – formative and summative, self and peer. Assessment should also be in line with the expectations from the Locally Agreed Syllabus and Emmanuel Project.

## 7. Decisions about recording



Alongside the introduction of The Emmanuel Project, many schools were encouraged to adopt the use of 'class 'scrapbooks' for RE. This was a deliberate move. Trials showed how using scrapbooks could make a huge difference to pupil attitudes to learning in RE and helped teachers focus their teaching more clearly and learn to enjoy RE and understand religions better themselves.

Scrapbooks contain a record of the teaching and learning of a particular unit of work in the RE scheme. It may contain pictures, photos, post-its and text describing the journey through the unit. A particular feature should be the recording of children's responses to key questions asked in each lesson, making it a valuable record of 'pupil voice'.

### The Main Reasons for Scrapbooking

**For the schools' Adviser /RE subject leader** to help a teacher see the flow and focus of the unit and gain a sense of what they are doing as they progress through the Enquiry cycle (it is easier to check this with a single book), and make suggestions to improve delivery.

**For an RE subject leader** to develop confidence in helping colleagues in concrete ways, focus discussion, offer encouragement, spot misunderstandings about RE and consider possible training needs.

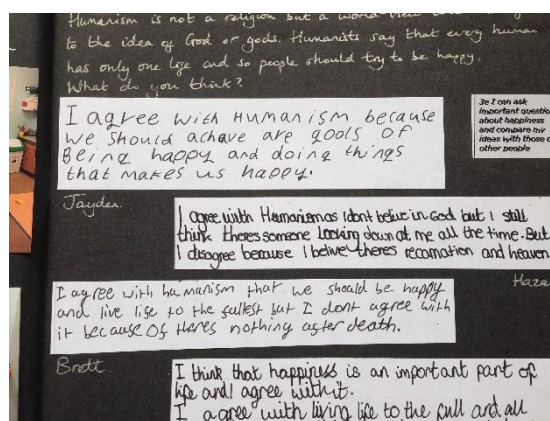
**For the class teacher** to celebrate the children's learning, especially the answers / comments they give in discussion, to have a record of children's ideas and questions e.g. during debates, and to take pride in sharing with colleagues.

**For the pupils** to record their ideas and learning, so it can be used for review in class, for enjoying with friends, and also for sharing their learning with Subject Leaders, Senior Leaders, Foundation Governors and Inspectors.

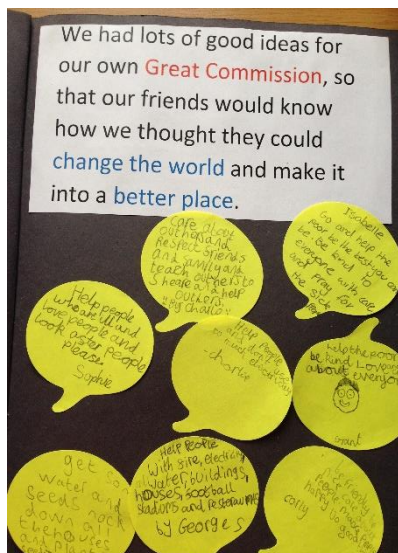
**For older pupils** to take responsibility for creating the scrapbook and to share their own take on the work being done by their class

**For Governors** to be able to see what is happening in RE and have a clearly set out body of work to discuss with children.

**For Inspectors and Senior Leaders** to have easy access to the pupils' attitudes and insights in RE, and a sense of the teachers' background knowledge of their subject.







**All scrapbooks convey their own messages, some better than others.** Poor scrapbooks may:

- leave the reader unclear as to the RE being taught or the aspect of a religion or worldview that is the actual focus of the learning
- lack RE-focussed labels to connect the pictures and text to the key RE questions of the unit
- only feature a narrow range of children’s answers to key questions rather than valuing all answers
- contain pictures labelled with no reference to the activity or its purpose, or no labels at all
- lack a sense of progress through a unit, rather than showing each lesson
- be an adult-only exercise, beautifully crafted, but not owned by, shared or reviewed with, children

- remain incomplete and without purpose

**Such scrapbooks suggest the need for action – they may be symptoms of:**

- inadequate time or resources for RE
- pressure on teachers or unrealistic expectations on HLTAs
- lack of support, training or guidance from an RE subject leader or from SLT

**What about alternatives to scrapbooks?**

Scrapbooks in RE are not compulsory. However, they do give a good idea about the RE experience in the classroom, much more so than a set of incomplete exercise books or a teacher’s comment on how little was recorded as the whole lesson was spent talking.

Having said this, many schools are now using other methods of recording instead of or to supplement class scrapbooks. These include the following:

- A pupil book for RE for individual recording in KS2.
- A RE prog

It is for you to decide what method of recording is most appropriate for your school and teachers but it may be useful to consider the following questions:

1. If you commit to class RE books, how will you ensure the work recorded is of a high standard? How will you avoid a set of incomplete exercise books by the end of the year?
2. There should always be space for pupil voice, so if you have the same photo being used in numerous books, each child can write their own caption and personal response

**Evidence doesn’t always have to be written!**

Avoid the temptation to turn RE into another Literacy lesson (although to have high expectations and use of Literacy targets whilst writing in RE is a definite “yes”). Written work has its place but should be mixed with other ways of communicating. Photographic or video evidence of dance, drama or role play can be used and can be stuck into books or kept electronically. Yes for an inspection it is necessary and useful to keep progressive evidence but that doesn’t mean writing facts in every lesson. We have also used our virtual

learning platform to set up forums on which the children can comment about their progress towards answering the question and on each others' views – still recorded evidence but far more interactive!

**Big book or individual book?**

This is not an exhaustive list; it is designed as a guide when thinking about where to put things. This list will also depend on which key stage you are working in.

<b>Scrapbook</b>	<b>Individual book</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silent discussion pages</li> <li>• Drama activity photos</li> <li>• Record of a visit or visitor in</li> <li>• A sorting activity</li> <li>• Pictures and evidence of practical activities.</li> <li>• Whole class or group discussion</li> <li>• Thoughts and questions about the unit big question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freeze frame annotations</li> <li>• Annotated artwork</li> <li>• Personal thoughts</li> <li>• Text analysis</li> <li>• Short and extended pieces of writing</li> <li>• I wonder thought bubbles</li> <li>• End of unit response to the unit big question.</li> </ul>

## 8. EYFS and RE

### What can young children gain from RE?

Taken from 'Firm Foundations - Exploring Christianity at Foundation Level' by Margaret Cooling and Penny Kite



#### Are Foundation stage children too young to do RE?

When teaching RE at foundation stage teachers sometimes feel confused because the messages they get seem to conflict. For example:

- Theories about how children's thinking develops (religious or otherwise) makes teachers wary of tackling abstract subjects with young children, and God is seen as an abstract idea.
- But research suggests children are

thinking about deep questions from an early age, even those from non-religious backgrounds. Many children have their concept of God formed by the age of six.

- The beauty of the world and the challenge of suffering stimulates some children's thinking about God. Avoiding religious issues does not stop children thinking about them. The world presents children with joys, sorrows, mysteries, and experiences that they puzzle over.
- Pupils often lack the language and ways of thinking to handle big ideas.
- Research seems to suggest that early childhood is a time when deep spiritual experiences often happen.

#### Can young children understand abstract ideas such as God?

Abstract ideas are things that cannot be seen or touched. John M. Hull, in his book 'God Talk with Young Children,' suggests it is a mistake to think that young children cannot understand these types of ideas at all. They have some degree of understanding of ideas such as love and hate and other things that cannot be touched or seen, such as 'tomorrow.' If abstract ideas are embedded in concrete experiences or stories, children have more chance of understanding them. The problem lies with abstract ideas that are not embedded in things children can relate to, such as experience or stories.



Although God cannot be touched, heard or seen, God may be no more abstract to a young child than a long dead great grandparent about whom stories are told. Children also form their concept of God by generalizing from stories, celebrations and situations. We can over emphasise the abstract. Many of the images of God used in the Bible are 'concrete' rather than abstract: friend, king and shepherd. God is also seen in 'concrete' form in Jesus.

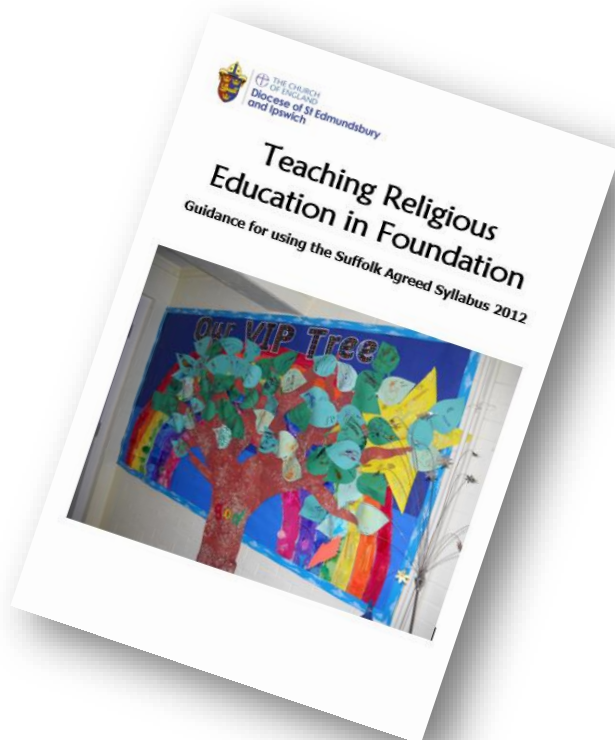
### **Some things that make RE easier for young children**

Children can handle more if what they are being asked to think about is well within their experience. The following may help

- Careful phrasing of tasks and questions helps.
- Do things in the context of stories and situations. Role play is helpful.
- Encourage imagination and empathy, as these are crucial to moral and spiritual development. Ask questions about characters; how do you think he feels? Insist on a few seconds thinking time before a response
- Ask questions that make children think about their own responses.
- Encourage the use of books in RE.

**Further information can be found in the following document available at:**

**<https://www.cofesuffolk.org/schools/school-leaders/religious-education/re-resources/>**



## 9. Visits and Visitors

Visits to places of worship are an invaluable learning opportunity, as is a visitor who communicates clearly and relates with young people. Both can create memorable and challenging learning experiences but it is important to get it right, to ensure the experience is a positive one for all involved. Some schools are experiencing reluctance from parents in allowing their children to take part in visits to places of worship, particularly mosques. This guidance seeks to support you in the planning and implementation of such visits, trying to pre-empt any concerns parents might have.

### **Before the visit to a place of worship**

is important to have a very clear rationale available to all parents and others about visits to places of worship. Reasons for arranging such visits include:

- Education is about extending pupils' knowledge, understanding and experience of the world and a visit to a place of worship can help do this
- Religion is a very important factor in society and it is essential that children have opportunities to explore religious practice and belief
- The experience of visiting a place of worship can help children to learn about religions but is NEVER about indoctrination or persuading children and young people to agree with the beliefs of the religion being studied
- Pupils enjoy their visits and learning is enhanced and the experience is also shared with parents/carers and other family members
- A visit to a place of worship also provides opportunities for pupils' cultural development by enabling them to experience new or different forms of art, architecture and music
- The atmosphere of many places of worship can provide an opportunity for pupils to consider questions about life, religion and spirituality in ways that are impossible in classrooms
- Visits are usually part of a planned curriculum and are integral to the learning that will take place: to miss out on the visit would seriously impact on pupils' progress and understanding.
- There are always opportunities for cross-curricular learning and many aspects of the school curriculum can be studied through a religious building including the arts, literacy, history, mathematics and design
- The visit is often led by an experienced guide who is able to answer the children's questions and thus they have the benefits of meeting an adherent of a faith that might be different from their own

A pre-visit is suggested. It is important that teachers are familiar with the location and with the members of the faith community who will be welcoming the visit. During this visit teachers can note items of specific interest so that activities or trails can be prepared for the pupils. They can also conduct a risk assessment.

- Dress code and formal greetings? - pupils should be prepared beforehand that some places of worship may require a dress code e.g. wearing of a head covering and the removal of shoes.
- Behaviour - pupils need to be aware that it would be considered disrespectful to chew or wander around or touch things without invitation. Moving quietly and respectfully is essential in a place of worship especially where people may be coming in and out for private prayer.
- whether food will be offered to pupils during the visit, and how this will be managed in accordance with school policies
- food requirements (that might, out of respect, restrict what is packed into lunch boxes) and safe storage of any packed lunches
- what pupils can and cannot do at the place of worship
- whether photos / video may be taken and if there are any restrictions for use

Checklist to support schools addressing the question, 'Are RE visits and visitors organised imaginatively, effectively and efficiently so that they make a significant contribution to RE's learning objectives?'

[https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Guidance%20on%20Resources/7\)%20Visits%20and%20visitors/\(8.2\)%20Checklist.pdf](https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Guidance%20on%20Resources/7)%20Visits%20and%20visitors/(8.2)%20Checklist.pdf)

### **During the visit to a place of worship**

To help pupils to realise that the building is about people in the present, as well as the past, they will have an opportunity to meet and talk to people who worship in the building.

They will spend some time sitting in silence to appreciate the atmosphere, the splendour or simplicity of the building.

The children will be encouraged to consider key questions in order to encourage respect, empathy and understanding for example:

- What interests you? What puzzles you? What questions do you want to ask? How does it feel to sit here? What helps to give it this atmosphere? How might this building help people worship? What clues are there about how people worship? What is similar here to other places of worship? What is different here?

Children may be asked to observe design, symbols, colours and objects and to consider their importance:

- Where are objects situated? Why? What is this for? Who uses it? What books are used? Why? When? Who uses this building? Why? What posters and notices are there? What do they tell us about this worshipping community?

They may: listen to music; listen to a speaker from the faith community; take photographs or video footage – if permission has been granted; draw things that interests them; follow a religious objects trail and make notes and sketch things of interest to them.

**Booking a trip to a place of worship for the first time and concerned about parental responses?**

**Try this:**

1. Book a smaller coach than you need and advise parents that it is unlikely that you will be able to take everyone so they need to book quickly – if necessary re-book a larger coach later. This can have remarkable effect on reluctant parents!
2. Combining a visit to a place of worship with other activities can help to avoid the issue of parents withdrawing their children from the visit and broadens the pupils experiences.
3. Ensure children are really well-prepared and have a key question they know they are going to investigate. This needs to be communicated to parents. It is not just a 'visit'; they are going to find out certain things and they will report back.
4. Be very clear that the purpose of the trip is educational. The children have a role: to be investigators and observers.
5. Make sure children know how to say 'no' politely and with a smile.
6. Ensure that you visit the website of the place of worship and encourage others including parents too as well.
7. Be careful what children buy at the shop – it may be better to suggest that you spend a few pounds for the schools' artefact boxes and that children come and make suggestions to you. You probably don't want them buying Hindu prayer cards etc to take home though postcards of the building are great.
8. Visits to places of worship do not involve any worship - they provide an opportunity to find out about what goes on, and why, but not to take part. The religious integrity of the children and adults taking part is never compromised or threatened. Some parents raise concerns about their child having to cover their head or take off their shoes when entering a place of worship. It is helpful to anticipate this concern and make it clear to parents that such actions are signs of respect not a prelude to or part of any act of worship. The school has been invited in to someone else's private space and it is entirely appropriate that children and staff are respectful to their traditions and etiquettes.
9. All children should understand that if they are present at an act of worship; they are still observers and their role is to observe patiently and quietly – what can they learn? Children may be offered food; they need to know that they can say: Yes please or No thank you.

**Handling parental concerns**

Parents have the right to know what is happening in school, and on visits, and clarity and transparency of information from school to home needs to be maintained at all times. In accordance with the 1998 School Standards & Framework Act, it is the right of any parent to withdraw their child from Religious Education (either all, or part). If a request is made concerning withdrawal from a visit, alternative provision must be made available for such children at school. This being said, it is hoped that schools will take steps to reassure parents of the educational purpose of the visit, sharing with them how it will enhance their child's learning in RE, so that parents can make informed decisions about withdrawal. It is usually better to pre-empt any worries by letting parents know in advance exactly what is and is not going to happen, e.g.

- pupils will not be taking part in worship, but may be observing it;
- there will be no form of proselytising or evangelising;
- the teacher is leading the visit and working in partnership with the host community;
- any requirements to wear a head covering or remove shoes is an outward token of respect for others' beliefs and sensitivities.

There are some particular elements of visits that may cause concern for parents of pupils participating in the visit, and if you know from your liaison with the host community that your visit will include the following elements, then it's important to make this clear to parents in the trip consent letter and give them the opportunity for their child to opt out of any of these aspects of the visit. In all cases the teacher should ensure that it is made clear to pupils that participation in certain activities is optional.

**Dressing up and acting out:** Particular care should be taken over certain elements such as 'dressing up' or 'acting out', and teachers should be aware that for some people (pupils and/or their parents), this may cross the line (in worship terms) between observing and participating. It may be safer to ask for a volunteer to demonstrate e.g. wearing clothing, prayer positions, rather than suggesting that 'everyone does it', or at the very least, making it clear that such actions are voluntary.

**Food:** If children are taking a snack or packed lunch with them, then there may be restrictions on the types of food and drink that can be taken onto the premises. Out of courtesy to the hosts, please establish during the pre-visit what these restrictions may be. Visits to places of worship are one of the few places where children may be offered food as part of their visit, so it's vital that schools talk through the issues as part of their pre-visit. Parents may also have concerns about any food offered to pupils by the host community during the visit, as it is the practice in some religions for food to be offered to their god(s) first, which is then distributed to the community. Again, the pre-visit liaison is crucial, as is communication with parents beforehand, giving them the opportunity to opt their child out.

It may also help to invite any cautious parents (or even interested parents – and governors!) to accompany pupils on their visit, so that they can see what takes place: it would be beneficial to agree in advance what actions may be taken by them during the visit, and perhaps also to either ask parents for feedback or to arrange a specific feedback session after the visit.

## **Visitors**

Inviting visitors to school can be a valuable experience for pupils. Like visits, arranging for visitors to contribute to Religious Education needs careful planning.

Visitors could include:

- Leaders of faith communities
- Members of faith communities
- Members of local organisations
- Aid agencies
- People who have recently visited a country which has religious or moral significance
- Overseas visitors who are visiting a local faith community



Ensure the visitor is briefed on the following:

- the purpose of the visit
- the age and ability of the pupils
- the time allocated for the visit and what you hope will be achieved in the given time
- travelling instructions

**Ensure that the visitor is aware that the school visit must not be used in order to impose their personal views upon pupils. The speaker must not denigrate other faiths or organisations in an attempt to promote their own.** It is your responsibility to do what you can to ensure that the visitor is highly likely to offer the quality of experience that you and the pupils expect. Ideally, you should meet the visitor in person prior to the visit. If in doubt, seek advice.

**Other preparation:**

- Pupils should be encouraged to prepare questions to ask the visitor.
- Inform the class about behaving respectfully towards visitors and any artefacts they might use.
- The teacher should remain in the classroom during the lesson. The teacher needs to be in control of the session and can prompt pupils or the speaker to ensure that the discussion is relevant and that the objectives of the visit are achieved.
- At the end of the lesson, thank the visitor and ensure that they can leave the premises safely.
- A follow up letter from teacher and pupils would be appreciated.

**The NATRE code of conduct:**

***Members of belief communities taking part in the life of the school, including visits to places of worship, should:***

- be willing to share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid:
  - i. criticising the experience and insights of others and
  - ii. imposing their views on pupils in any way
- be familiar with the school's aims, ethos and policies and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum at the school;
- seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods that involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age group(s) concerned;
- be willing to respect and value the beliefs of any pupils and adults in the school when they are different from their own;
- develop ways of speaking to pupils that communicate their open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to 'convert' or proselytise;
- seek to uphold the principle of the 'Golden Rule' e.g. *'If a member of another religion or belief visited my child's school and contributed in the same way that I have done, would I, as a parent, be happy with the education given?'*

## 10. Resources and Grants

Articles of faith used to be the go to place as the largest supplier but their website has now shut down. Try out the following sites for purchasing resources:



The second biggest supplier is now <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/primary/re/>



RE today also have a shop <https://shop.retoday.org.uk/> They produce teaching resources some of which are freely available to download. They are a particularly good place for resourcing persona dolls.



You could also borrow resources from 'open the box' through the East of England Faith Agency. £10 per half term but I am not sure if they deliver or if you have to pick up from a central place like Ipswich.

[http://www.eefa.net/index\\_b.htm](http://www.eefa.net/index_b.htm)

Supported by  
**The Jerusalem Trust**

The Jerusalem Trust also provides grants for schools purchasing resources (Christianity only) of up to £600.

<http://regrants.org.uk/>



# 11. Joining the RE Community



**Local network groups** – try to join a local group. It is invaluable to work with others and these groups are free of charge.

**RE Quality Mark** is an excellent tool for improving RE leadership skills. Many RE networks use this as the basis of improvement, whether they apply for an award or not. <http://www.reqm.org/>



**NATRE** is the subject teacher association for RE professionals. It works to support those who teach and lead in all schools and institutions and at all stages of their career. You can join the organisation yourself or at least make good use of their website.

<https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/about-natre/>

**RE:Online:** A useful online community for all involved in RE, with resources, background and helpful materials for leaders.

Includes online CPD opportunities.



Farmington  
**Scholarships**  
for Teachers of Religious Education



date each year is mid-January.

Application forms from <http://www.farmington.ac.uk/index.php/farmington-scholarships/>

**Farmington Institute** supports teachers of RE in schools, and Headteachers working on values and standards. It awards grants of up to 30 days' supply to research or develop any aspect of RE as long as it is practical! Awards can be made to individuals or small groups of teachers sharing the 30 days. An ideal way to take your new ideas about RE forward. The closing

**REC:** A useful place to keep abreast of national news on RE:

<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/>



**RESEARCH  
FOR RE**

### **ResearchforRE**

A research website which brings together teachers with research reports. There are over 1000 users.

<https://researchforre.reonline.org.uk>

### **Teach:RE Courses**



**TEACH:RE**  
TO ENTHUSE. TO EDUCATE. TO INSPIRE.

The Teach:RE courses have had a makeover. The Primary Introduction course is FREE. The Tailormade course is designed to support teachers in all stages of their career with modules ranging

from subject knowledge to policy to curriculum to research. [www.teachre.co.uk](http://www.teachre.co.uk)