

# Intent and Curriculum Rationale: Religious Education

## Introduction

Our children live in a very different world to that of 1944 when the Education Act enshrined in law a duty for all schools to teach Religious Education (RE) which primarily focussed on the teachings of the Church of England (Anglican Protestant Christianity).

The over-arching aim of our RE curriculum is to prepare pupils for adult life and to learn and respond to the local, national and global landscape of religion and belief diversity. Our curriculum, located in the context of today's world, will help our young people hold balanced and well-informed views, opinions and conversations about religion, belief and identity.

Our aim is for pupils to be able to access a high quality RE curriculum that engenders an interest in exploring, improving understanding of and showing respect for different faiths and cultural diversity. Indeed, our pupils live in a multi-faith and multicultural society which is reflected in our RE curriculum. For example, our own academy has a large number of Muslim and Sikh pupils, and it is important that they have their own beliefs represented in their curriculum. This will enable all pupils to develop a knowledge and acceptance of religions and world-views, with the skill to understand and debate differing opinions.

Our curriculum for RE is also a vehicle for delivering many aspects of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC), and SMSC permeates throughout and underpins the academy's wider curriculum.

## Curriculum design and organisation: content & sequencing, composites & components

**The aim of the RE curriculum is to help pupils develop into curious individuals**, who are able to understand, question and explain the different world beliefs, and how these are represented in the area in which we live and how these have helped to shape the world we live in.

**We provide a knowledge-rich curriculum** that develops philosophical skills that can be applied across all curricular through argument, reason and debate. The curriculum **builds on the 'big ideas'** found within traditional RE Curricula, many of which originally focused on Anglican Christian practices and beliefs, but has developed and is no longer focussed solely on Protestant beliefs and teachings.

**Our curriculum includes the study of several religions**, such as Sikhism and Islam and recognises the multi-cultural society Britain has become and so our curriculum now includes units on Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. This allows pupils to make links between religious beliefs, their similarities and differences and their place in modern Britain.

We have organised the curriculum in order to place the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in sequence **so that the similarities between these religions can be stressed and explored**. An example of this can be illustrated as follows: Many scholars recognise that features of the Jewish Torah are similar to the Christian Old Testament, but the new testament being different as the Jews did not recognise Jesus as God incarnate (human form). Muslims believe Mohammad is the final messenger of God (prophet) and that the Quran is the word of God perfectly recollecting by him, whereas they see the Bible and the Torah as the word of God but written by man and thus falsely interpreted and imperfect. But of course Judaism and Christianity do not recognise Muhammad as a prophet. As these are all monotheism (the belief in one God), pupils then study Sikhism as a way of comparing the Abrahamic religions with a polytheism (the belief in more than one God).

**We have designed our curriculum to be built around a series of composites, and underpinning component knowledge.** Composites and components alike are a careful choice of topics that relate to each other, both supporting core knowledge and helping stretch pupils with in-depth knowledge, selected from Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and many other religions and non-religions, with challenging components from atheistic views.

**Components are tied together by a composite 'Big Question'.** For example, 'How was the world created?' which is investigated in our Year 7 topic 'Religious Beliefs'. Where a composite 'Big Question' for a unit is what are the core beliefs and practices of Judaism? For example, the components the pupils will study will be chunked in to more manageable areas, such as the holy book/s, branches of Judaism, the origins of Judaism, religious festivals, ceremonies and the significance of the synagogue to name a few components that will help the pupils understand the most crucial beliefs of this religion. Of course each religion will also be compared and contrasted with the other religions studied.

### **Building on pupils' prior knowledge and experiences**

At Key Stage 2, many pupils will most likely have primarily focussed on Christian beliefs and practices, such as festivals. By following our key stage 3 curriculum we **develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding over time**, we are able to link topics based on common themes. In year 7, we introduce **core religious beliefs**. This approach helps build pupils' long term memory as, for example, teachings such as the Ten Commandments can be seen to apply other religions and are introduced and expanded on in more detail when we look at Christianity, Islam and Judaism and their **religious holy books and beliefs and practices**. This exploration of morality is further expanded on in Year 9 when the pupils study an expanded group of religions, such as Scientology and non-religions, such as humanism and apply this bank of knowledge to topics such as the nature of God and if God is all loving why does suffering and evil exist?

A further of core concept is that of 'What happens when we die?' In Year 7 this is introduced in the religious beliefs unit, in Year 8 this concept is extended in a focus on 'afterlife', which covers the different world beliefs as well as building on the pupil's own beliefs and views. Pupils knowledge is developed further in Year 9 where they study 'Good and Evil' where the focus changes to how different religions interpret the impact of choices made during our lives on the afterlife.

Pupils have knowledge organisers for each unit studied and these will be used for quizzing and homework and will cover the key features of that unit on one side of A4 and will be used for **interleaving and revising areas studied previously** and to simplify components pupils may be struggling with.

### **The broader reach of our RE Curriculum**

Of course, RE plays a central role in developing pupils' **interpretation and social skills**. Our choice of 'hinterland knowledge' is designed to **inspire pupils' curiosity beyond the classroom** and out into their wider lives. A range of **extended learning and extra circular opportunities allow us to provide a wealth of encounters and opportunities** outside of the classroom that promote not only RE but the Humanities, PSHE and Citizenship, subjects as viable, interesting, engaging possibilities for future study and beyond.

Utilising the **interleaved model for our curriculum** means that key themes build across the KS3 and are revisited to embed key facts as well as provide great opportunities for stretch and strengthen cross-curricular links. The RE curriculum is designed to create critical thinkers who can respect and debate individuals with differing opinions as our pupils live in a multicultural society. Indeed, we have a Gurdwara very close to the academy, so it important that our pupils understand both how religion influences our own identity and beliefs and the identities and beliefs of others and this will create an atmosphere of tolerance

and celebration, understanding and respect for their fellow citizens that will stay with them throughout their lives.

**The RE curriculum also encourages pupils to develop high aspirations** and consider careers in roles that include working with a wide variety of people with differing opinions and faiths, while highlighting the cross curricular nature of philosophy so preparing pupils to be an active and well-rounded member of society. Our curriculum also leaves pupils with a breath of attributes such as problem solving, creativity, resilience and independence. A high-quality philosophical education prepares our pupils for life outside of the academy. We aim to guide learners so they become culturally knowledgeable, religiously literate and methodical problem solvers, by fostering a spirit of independent inquiry, nurturing curiosity and bringing current, relevant, real world issues present in our multicultural society, beliefs and faiths into the classroom.

### **Summary: Ambition – what do we want to achieve?**

A balanced RE curriculum with the aim of producing religiously literate pupils that includes aspects of the following disciplines: Theology (this is about believing): looking at where beliefs come from - how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other; Philosophy (this is about thinking): finding out how and whether things make sense; dealing with questions of morality and ethics; taking seriously the nature of reality, knowledge and existence; Social Sciences (this is about living): exploring the diverse ways in which people practise their beliefs; engaging with the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies. To create a safe and stimulating environment in which children are entitled to question, evaluate and express themselves through debate and discussion. To empower our teachers through strong subject knowledge to have the skills to challenge conceptions, preconceptions and misconceptions.

### **Children and young people will have a knowledge and understanding of:**

Major world religions and non-religious worldviews: Theology: key texts and traditions; beliefs, teachings/doctrines and sources; practices and ways of life; forms of expression; identity and belonging; Philosophy: how religion has influenced humanities' search for meaning and purpose; Social Sciences: investigate and observe lived religious practices within local, national and international contexts; and consider how they have shaped and continue to shape society and the historical, geographical and scientific contexts in which they occurred.

### **Children and young people will be able have the skills to:**

As theologians: analyse a range of primary and secondary sources; understand symbolic language; use technical terminology effectively. As philosophers: interpret meaning and significance; evaluate and reflect upon beliefs and ethics and how they impact upon the lives of others and themselves; refine the way they think about the world and their place in it; consider moral principles, including the nature of good and evil. As social scientists: respectfully critique and value the wide range of beliefs and cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage and that of others, considering both differences and commonalities; recognise bias and stereotype; represent a range of views, other than one's own, with accuracy. A moral compass - recognise the difference between right and wrong and readily apply this; the pupils to reflect upon their own beliefs and cultural practices and make informed personal choices whilst being able to empathise with and understanding the beliefs of others.

This document has been written using content from the following sources: Ofsted (May 2019) School Inspection Handbook • Chipperton, Georgiou, Seymour and Wright (March 2018) Key Principles of a Balanced Curriculum in RE • Hall, J (Sept 2018) Religion and Worldviews: The way forward. A National Plan for RE.