

(The examples cited in this document are for illustrative purposes only. It is hoped that every religious tradition and those with an intimate knowledge of Birmingham will be able to provide other or further examples. The document enlarges the views set out in the statutory syllabus.)

## Forming a view: The Agreed Syllabus for Birmingham

### 1. Entitlement

#### **Introduction –Law and education**

Politics and religion are both deemed to be contentious, but they are properly so. It is in these spheres that we try to articulate the differing purposes of life and negotiate with each other about shaping the character of our community, which would help us to realise the goal[s] of life, individually and collectively. In a democratic society a careful balance is struck between the will of the majority and the rights of minorities. The law will reflect that balance as it was properly judged to be the case at the time. Educational statute cannot, therefore, be lightly set aside or ignored by any one person or group since such statutes represent the will of our society.

Education is one of the important means by which a society conserves and transforms itself. Through school education with its planned curriculum the young come to share the existing cultural and other resources of society and are prepared for the future. Every child, but also every other individual and social institution, has a stake in the educational enterprise. These varying interests normally comport but sometimes compete, so legal prescription is particularly pertinent in setting the parameters of the enterprise, defining the various duties and entitlements.

## **Summary**

By law all maintained schools must provide religious education for all registered pupils, including those in the sixth form and sixth form colleges. The requirement does not apply to nursery classes. Whilst it is the duty of head teachers under the oversight of the LEA and governors to ensure there is a provision of religious education for all registered pupils at the school, both teachers and pupils may withdraw from RE without incurring any penalty. Only parents may withdraw their children from all or part of the RE curriculum on the grounds of seriously held convictions.

Religious education is then a component of the BASIC CURRICULUM. Schools are legally required to teach RE alongside the National Curriculum with such subjects as English, Mathematics and Science. The main difference between it and the subjects of the National Curriculum is that Religious Education must be taught according to a *locally* Agreed Syllabus, or, in the case of voluntary aided schools with a religious foundation, according to a Syllabus which is in accordance with their trust deeds. In status the RE Syllabus is parallel to the government's subject orders for the subjects of the National Curriculum. By law the Agreed Syllabus for community schools must also reflect that the religious traditions in the country are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

Religious education as a component of the BASIC CURRICULUM is expected to contribute to the balance and broadly based character of all teaching in school. It does not need to do so on its own. However, it achieves this end by putting more emphasis on the religious dimension than might otherwise be acknowledged in subjects of the National Curriculum and, in particular, in its own way strengthening the spiritual, moral, cultural and social expectations from education in school.

Finally, the School Inspections Act 1996 requires inspectors to report on the standards attained, the progress of pupils and on the quality of teaching in RE. All inspections

of RE in community schools and in foundation schools not designated as religious will be based on the requirements set out below.

## 2. A Definition of Aims

### **The overarching purposes of formal education**

The aims of formal education in school are set out in statute and include:

(Extract from the Education Reform Act 1988 section 2)

*(2) The curriculum for a maintained school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broadly based curriculum which –*

- *Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and*
- *Prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life.*

There is here an educational philosophy permeating the conception of teaching and learning that historically has close affinities with religious life. The governing principle is that formal education aims at purposeful development and this development is holistically conceived [e.g. not merely academic] and applied to **both** pupils **and** society. For the curriculum as a whole, the key terms are ‘balance’ and being ‘broadly based’. Finally, this education is explicitly expected to be future oriented and focussed on the acquisition of responsibility.

In Birmingham, religious education is also intended to fit in with the City strategy of encouraging and supporting ‘voluntary, community and faith organisations in Birmingham’. The Council recognises that ‘faith communities are sources of values and commitment, and have substantial constituencies, and therefore ... could make a valuable contribution, alongside other organisations and individuals, in building a sense of local community and renewing civil society, in addition to developing community cohesion.’

### 3. The Aims of RE

Religious Education aims at spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development and prepares pupils for a future in society by:

1. learning from faith<sup>1</sup> and
2. learning about religious traditions.

#### **The Whole Child and Society**

The development is focussed on:

##### **A. Pupils**

In order to develop the whole child as a spiritual, moral, social and cultured being, the pupil needs

- to be challenged intellectually,
- to have their feelings deepened
- to be encouraged to act responsibly

all in ways that are socially constructive.

##### **B. Society**

In order to develop and build society, the RE curriculum requires an approach in which teachers and schools are:

- working in partnership with parents, faith communities and the wider society,
- being responsive to the needs of people living in Birmingham and elsewhere, and
- cultivating social cohesion and solidarity.

It is intended that by these means children will be prepared to live, flourish and work in a global community and that Birmingham will become an enriched and more harmonious society.

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between faith and religion is made consciously here. By 'faith' we mean to refer to the dimension of self-involving engagement to be found in religious life and which constitutes the 'inner life'; by religion or religious tradition we refer to phenomena that may be observed. Pupils are encouraged to 'learn from' how religiously minded people engage with life, and they 'learn about' what is observably accessible.

[Knowledge, Skills and Understanding – a temporary insertion for reasons of comparison with the National Curriculum only]

## Learning from faith

**Using the resources of faith and religious traditions** pupils should be taught to:

(primarily with a personal focus)

- Engage reflectively and actively with matters that relate to the fundamental sense, purpose and meaning of life.
- Give close attention to what religious traditions treasure as inspiring, good, beautiful, true, and sacred.
- Express and respond to shared human experiences, such as joy, thankfulness, grief, hope, pity, care and humility.
- Develop the important dispositions of
  1. being attentive to and caring for the world in which we live, the physical environment, its plant and animal life, its people, as something ‘sacred’ and ‘given in trust’.
  2. taking responsibility for actions and their consequences, learning to accept appropriate blame and the need for a change of heart.
  3. being forgiving for offence.
  4. being open to the future and creative with human talents and resources in view of religious encouragement to that end. ‘Restlessness is one root of all religious life.’<sup>2</sup>
- Develop informed judgement
- Discern and cultivate a range of widely recognised values, and virtues, e.g. of being just and reasonable, temperate, self-critical, hopeful, honest, courageous.
- Employ and enhance recognised skills, e.g. 1. collaborating with others for the benefit of all; 2. hearing/reading and interpreting texts produced by others,

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<sup>2</sup> See W. Pannenberg, *What is Man*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1970, p.

sometimes from very different times and cultures. Such *skills* require active learning through their application in life.

(primarily with a social focus)

- Value and critically sustain key social institutions, such as, the family, voluntary activity and organisations, religious institutions, the rule of law and democratic processes.

[Note: Some of these aims, or aspects of them, require the personal agency of pupils and can therefore be realised only through a form of ‘indirect communication’. Through this means, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and make inward choices and decisions for themselves in full cognisance of the claims and rights of others. The teacher is not responsible for the choices made except in so far as the teacher provides or fails to provide pupils with an occasion for learning within this social context.]

This religious education will have **cognitive** [to do with knowing], **affective** [to do with feelings], and **conative** [to do with willing] dimensions, develop **abilities/skills**, and consider the **outcomes** of teaching and learning on interpersonal relationships and social institutions.

## Learning about religious traditions

Pupils should be taught to develop their knowledge, their affections, their dispositions, their skills and relationships with others in society by:

- Reflecting and meditating on the deeper issues of life as defined by religious traditions.
- Mastering<sup>3</sup> religious discourse and concepts.
- Recollecting<sup>4</sup> key religious practices, scriptures, narratives, events, places, actions, beliefs, and persons.

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<sup>3</sup> Mastery involves both knowing the words/concepts and understanding how they are or should be applied (their logical grammar).

<sup>4</sup> Recollecting is not just an individual learning information about the past. It is essentially a social event. The production of a film about an historical event, seeing it, discussing its historical accuracy and its implications are all part of a societal act of recollecting.

- Studying<sup>5</sup> culturally important, and appropriate, religious expressions (for example, in art, music, literature, film, artefacts, architecture, dance, commemoration, scientific and business activities).
- Studying religious aspirations and commitments to personal and social well-being, and religious involvement in socio-political life e.g. in the foundation of St. Basil's for the homeless, in Islamic Relief, or in Jewish organisations for the care of the elderly in Birmingham.
- Entering into serious dialogue<sup>6</sup> with others and learning how faith traditions have encountered and engaged with each other.

In so doing they will have dealt with the key areas of religious studies: religious practices, beliefs, scriptures, ethics, institutions, cultural expressions, geography, history and experience.

(An elaboration of the contribution that RE can make to the wider curriculum is set out below.)

## Factors to be used in identifying and selecting the religions to be studied

Potentially, the religious resources available to address the overarching aims of formal education are enormous. Religious faith and traditions have been central to the cultures and civilisations of the world and for the vast majority of people this is still the case. Some factors in the selection of religions and their resources must be considered.

In selecting the religions to be used to achieve the development of pupils and society, the following factors must be considered. Whilst all the identified factors are applicable throughout the key stages they are separated into the two distinct phases of education to acknowledge the differences of approach and emphasis in each phase, therefore:

### **In primary schools:**

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<sup>5</sup> Note that a studying is not just to observe or to act as a spectator. A study in art or music involves creating a work of art or a piece of music.

<sup>6</sup> Dialogue here means participating in a self-involving conversation with others and being aware of such conversations in the religious traditions, e.g. of inter-religious dialogue or in the view taken by one tradition of another and the way in which they have engaged with each other.

- *The family background of **all** the children in the classroom.* Attention to this consideration will help satisfy the European Convention of Human Rights which entitles parents to have their children educated ‘in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.’ This consideration will also serve the educational requirement of ‘inclusion’ and make connections with the family environment.
- *The historic and cultural background of Birmingham and Britain in **Christianity**.* Attention to this consideration will help satisfy the legal requirement for the syllabus to be ‘in the main Christian’. Educationally it will develop the relevance and immediacy of what is learned by making connections with the local cultural environment.
- *The need to **deepen** the spiritual and moral dimension.* Resources within and between religious traditions should be selected to show the richness and complexity of the spiritual and moral concerns and to reinforce what may be learned from them.
- *The need to **broaden** the spiritual and moral dimension.* Resources from a variety of religious traditions will help to broaden the pupils’ horizons. The purposeful selection of material from traditions less immediate will complement and reinforce the spiritual and moral interest<sup>7</sup> of traditions nearer to hand. One should seek to balance the insights of traditions within and between religions which give an overriding emphasis to the ethical with those which place the emphasis on the reflective and meditative dimension.
- *The societal concern to build **social cohesion** and solidarity.* Religions can be socially destructive as well as constructive. Without disguising serious differences, one should approach differences in a spirit of dialogue and avoid material which is likely to reinforce prejudices and stereotyping or to lead to misrepresentation. To avoid the latter all material requires a proper context.
- *The need to engage pupils and to take note of their **ages, aptitudes, and daily experience**.* It will always be important to select material from religious

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<sup>7</sup> This could have the beneficial consequence of demonstrating the universality/catholicity of key spiritual and moral values, undermine notions of spiritual and moral cynicism and relativism that may follow from seeing these as merely being based on ‘how one feels’. Within a wider context of agreements, disagreements become serious matters that need to be thought through and discussed to discover where the truth and the good lie.

traditions that will be **both** spiritually and morally challenging **and** engage the interest of pupils in a way that is relevant to their lives. Education is an act of communication and as such must take into account the world of the child and the whole of the child, cognitively, affectively and conatively [intellectually, emotionally and actively; heart, mind and body]. Note should be taken of the nature of development in children. This is seldom at an even pace on a broad front, some children at one age might develop quickly in area A but more slowly in area B, and this may change at another age. Moreover, development seldom follows the same set pattern in all children during their time at school. Further note should be taken of the multiple nature of intelligence and the learning styles of pupils. There is a clear need for differentiation to ensure that all pupils are engaged and challenged. Finally, it is important to remember that spiritual and moral depth does not depend on intelligence, e.g. honesty, loyalty and trust are not correlates either of the intellectually astute or the intellectually obtuse.

#### **Additional and main considerations for secondary schools:**

In **secondary schools** all the above considerations apply but the desire to understand religious traditions with some depth and rigour will require more systematic and narrowly focussed study. Limitations of time will inevitably circumscribe the number of religious traditions that can be studied. For systematic study an investigation into **fewer** traditions may be more appropriate than **many** [whilst reference to a greater number may well be required by the subject matter and audience]. Choices from a range of traditions must be made purposefully with a view to enhancing and deepening religious understanding. The following additional considerations should have a bearing on the selection of religious traditions to be employed in secondary schools:

- A pupil should be able to study his or her own tradition.
- A pupil should study Christianity.
- The presence of the tradition in Birmingham.
- Range and complementarity of the traditions.
- The potential for cross-curricular links.

- Pupil interest and choice.

### **RE as an Accredited Subject**

In secondary school at **Key Stage 4** pupils may follow a GCSE course, or another accredited course, in RE provided the course enables pupils to realise the aims of RE set out above and options are elected according to the above criteria of selection.

Similarly at **Post 16** pupils may follow a GCSE course, an AS level or A-level course, or another accredited course, in RE provided the course enables pupils to realise the aims of RE set out above and options are elected according to the above criteria of selection.

### **A Concluding Summary of What the RE Syllabus Does**

The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus sets out:

1. **An entitlement.** The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus defines the entitlement *all* pupils in Birmingham schools have *in law* to religious education. Such education is intended therefore to be accessible to pupils irrespective of their social background, cultural or ethnic origin, religious heritage, gender, ability or disability.
2. **A definition of content.** The Syllabus defines the aims, the scope, the approach, the subject matter, the expectations from the curriculum in a manner that recognises differences between young people, their developmental stages and the consequent educational phases [Key Stages], together with some of the resources accessible in Birmingham. This is intended to secure an overall coherence in programmes of study and a proper progression and continuity in and between Birmingham schools.
3. **Standards and Assessment.** The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus sets out the reasonable expectations from education in religious life within a religiously plural society. It states what can and cannot be assessed in religious education and how teaching and learning in this field of study can be judged and evaluated.

4. **Opportunities.** Education is a function of society. Hence the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Birmingham seeks to clarify in this sphere of the basic curriculum what it demands from, and offers to, the wider society. The Syllabus encourages links with the various religious communities to be found in Birmingham and in return offers these communities opportunities to share their life and work with young people in order to create greater social cohesion and solidarity. Pupils may thus come to enjoy their contribution to the common good.

The syllabus also seeks to enable the forthcoming generation of our society (otherwise dominated by secular and consumerist world-views and bombarded with media impressions of a shallow religiosity or of religions in conflict) to have the intellectual and linguistic means and confidence to grasp and reflect on matters of faith, fostering empathy and a more wholesome and informed criticism. Opportunities will be created for pupils to achieve a greater degree of self-awareness and mutual understanding, within and between faith traditions, and to give a better context to faith and faiths in human society at the local and global level.

The developments in school education ultimately have an impact on the shape of higher education, which in turn influences pedagogic discourses. A visionary syllabus can give scope for a new generation of thinkers (from a spectrum of religious or cultural backgrounds) to make an impact on school education, higher education and the media and through these processes significantly to shape mainstream culture and thought.

5. **Connections.** Connections are drawn between this syllabus and the city's other faith-interests and initiatives. The City seeks to encourage and empower faith-based communities to make a positive contribution to the society that is Birmingham today, enriching social life and enhancing social cohesion and solidarity, cultivating the common good. Understanding and developing the constructive social implications of religious life is an important dimension of school education.

## Religious Education and the General Teaching Requirements

The religious education envisaged in this syllabus is part of the Basic Curriculum required by law and is designed to reinforce and complement the aims of the general teaching requirements<sup>8</sup> of the National Curriculum. It is possible for RE to do so in the following ways:

### **Religious Education and Inclusion**

A key feature of many religious traditions is the affirmation of the dignity of human beings in which all participate. This is variously expressed, for example, by figurative claims that ‘human beings were created in the image of God’ or that ‘God calls each one by name’<sup>9</sup>. The RE teacher, therefore, cannot act from ignorance and has a special responsibility for ensuring that the dignity and interests of every pupil is safeguarded and that the educational needs of every pupil is met. Specifically, education in and about religious life like other areas of the curriculum requires differentiation, acknowledgement of the different needs and capacities of pupils. The RE teacher will seek to overcome any and every disability a pupil may happen to have which could obstruct effective learning. Similarly the RE teacher will seek to engage any and every ability a pupil may have which could enhance deeper learning. It is recognised that some abilities are innate; others derive from the environment and family background of pupils e.g. fluency in two or more languages. Since the syllabus encourages close links between the school and the local community the RE teacher is well placed to take advantage of those benefits which derive from the diverse religious heritage and culture of the City. In these respects the RE syllabus seeks to be inclusive and for all.

Methodologically teachers are encouraged to deploy the full range of teaching strategies so long as the freedom and dignity of the pupils and the nature of the religious tradition are respected. The diversity in teaching methods acknowledges the

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix xxx

<sup>9</sup> In the Judeo-Christian scriptures see Isaiah 43:1 and John 10:3

multiple make-up of intelligence, the pupils' styles of learning and the character of religious life in permeating every aspect of human culture. Since religion has expressed itself so diversely, all forms of communication, whether of an oral/aural, visual, or dramatic nature and so forth, may be used in the conversation between teacher and pupil to express and develop their understanding of religious life provided this does not transgress specific religious prohibitions of the religious tradition under consideration. For example, one should not ask children to depict their vision of 'the divine' in art work whilst studying Judaism and Islam in the manner in which these religious traditions specifically prohibit it.

All good education, including RE, challenges stereotypes and subverts prejudices. It will develop critical and reasoned judgment, including the capacity to be self-critical and the ability to appreciate the contributions of others. The common dignity of all human beings will not allow anyone to be dismissed or 'written-off'. The fundamental commitment to education within religious life is to enhance and deepen the share that every single person has in a universal human dignity.

### **Withdrawal**

The RE syllabus is designed to be of use and service to *all* pupils and communities in the city. However, it is also recognised that some parents may have deeply held convictions which may lead them to withdraw their children from RE and that they have the right to do so in law. In such a case RE teachers and schools are encouraged to meet with parents to discuss their reservations and objections to explore whether their fears can be allayed or whether their objections can be met within the rubrics of the syllabus. It is important that no stigma attaches to parents, children or teachers who do choose to withdraw from RE.

### **RE and the National Curriculum**

The key aims and attainment targets of religious education are set out above. This section sets out in general terms how religious education may reinforce and complement the teaching and learning in the National Curriculum to achieve the overarching goals set out in law of promoting *'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental*

*and physical development of pupils at the school and of society’ and preparing ‘ such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life’.*

### **Promoting spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development**

Religious education can contribute to the *spiritual development* of the pupil through:

- Attending to what is inspiring, good, beautiful, true, and sacred and how these are acknowledged, treasured and expressed in religious traditions; their concepts and practices through a de-centring from self; e.g. through meditation or through a close examination of the Burne-Jones’ windows in the context of St. Phillip’s Cathedral.
- Developing in pupils the important disposition of caring for others and the environment, and examining the social means that religious traditions devised for caring in this way; e.g. Betel.
- Cultivating a sense of inwardness by means of acquainting pupils with religious practices of reflection, self-examination, discipline, prayer, penitence, forgiveness and expectation; e.g. in the liturgical services of a community or in private devotion.
- Engaging pupils in matters pertaining the fundamental purpose, sense and meaning of life in view of religious conceptions and practices: the beginning and end - both personally and universally, senselessness and wickedness, human striving for knowledge, justice, and beauty however fleeting; e.g. through references to selected passages from the Book of Common Prayer, the book of Job and others scriptures.
- Valuing creativity and order by studying how this is expressed in religious narrative and ritual, space and time, the arts, music, literature, drama, dance and architecture; e.g. the religiously inspired art to be found in the Birmingham Art gallery or the Barber Institute (website: [barber.org.uk](http://barber.org.uk)), Indian dance traditions.
- Orienting pupils to the future through reflections on purpose and goals as mediated by a study of religious expectations, ‘dreams and visions’, and eschatological doctrines/teachings; e.g. M. Chagall’s artwork and stained glass

windows, Hieronymus Bosch's art, Apocalyptic literature and their modern counterparts in literature and film.

Religious education can contribute to the *moral development* of the pupil through:

- Attending to what is inspiring, good, beautiful, true, and sacred and how this is reflected in religious guidance, exhortations, admonitions and codes of behaviour; e.g. The Ten Commandments, the sermon on the mount, the household codes, 1 Corinthians 13, The Eightfold Path, the Bhagavad Gita.
- Developing in pupils the important dispositions of:
  1. being attentive to and caring for the world in which we live, the physical environment, its plant and animal life, its people, as something 'sacred' and 'given in trust'.
  2. taking responsibility for actions and their consequences, learning to accept where we may be blameworthy with the need for a change of heart.
  3. being forgiving for offence.
  4. being open to the future and creative with human talents and resources in view of religious encouragement to that end. 'Restlessness is one root of all religious life.'<sup>10</sup>
- Cultivating a range of widely recognised values, virtues, and informed judgements; e.g. of being just and reasonable, compassionate, temperate, self-critical, hopeful, on the basis of religious insights and practices, discussions and ethical theory.
- The examination of rights and duties as these are religiously conceived; e.g. in discussions surrounding pacifism.
- Debating and discussing key moral issues; e.g. animal rights, euthanasia, foetal rights, human rights, human equality, the treatment of the 'other', slavery, pornography, freedoms, treatment of the rich and poor, the third world, men and women, all with reference to the contributions of religious traditions.

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<sup>10</sup> See W. Pannenberg, *What is Man*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1970, p.

- Acknowledging the dignity of human beings and how this is conceived and cultivated in religious traditions; e.g. in rituals of naming.
- Modelling, with a study of religious narrative, parables, paradigms, prophets, saints and heroes; e.g. Gautama Buddha, St. Francis of Assisi, Mohammed.
- Its methods of ‘indirect communication’<sup>11</sup>, which nurtures human subjectivity and the value of human freedom.

Religious education can contribute to the *cultural development* of the pupil through:

- Studying culturally important religious expressions, for example, in art, music, literature (including novels, poetry, dramas etc.), film, architecture, dance. E.g. Handel’s *Messiah*, Bach’s *St. Matthew’s Passion*, or Verdi’s/Faure’s *Requiem*, Corbusier’s Chapel, Coventry Cathedral, Alhambra palace, Rothko’s art (Texas chapel).
- Noting and evaluating the role of religious faith in the evolution and expression of society’s political institutions, social infrastructure [e.g. family life, education and health care] and voluntary organisations. E.g. Sikh sewa and Langar, Gurdwaras, Almshouses in Birmingham, the establishment of faith-based schools and colleges.
- Studying the historical contribution of religious traditions to the evolution of modern science and valuing the spirituality of the scientific enterprise; e.g. the Puritans in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the scientific discipline, perseverance and values.
- Studying the historical contribution of religious traditions to business life, to the trade union movement, vocations and professional life, and the way these traditions continue to impinge on business life and ethics in the contemporary period; e.g. Quakers, George Cadbury’s Bournville Village Trust, Fircroft College in Birmingham.
- Encouraging inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue with its presuppositions of respect, attentiveness to the other and the integrity of the self.

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<sup>11</sup> See the writings of S. Kierkegaard.

Religious education can contribute to the *mental development* of the pupil through:

- Rigorous intellectual enquiry into diverse features of religious life; e.g. Cardinal J. H. Newman.
- Cultivating a sense of time and historical development, and widening horizons to a universal scale.
- Encouraging a close attention to language and language use; e.g. St. Augustine's *Teaching Christianity*.
- Requiring a sympathetic consideration of the contribution of others.
- Developing interpretative skills to access meaning in texts and behaviour across history and cultures; e.g. F. D. E. Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutics*.
- Cultivating an appreciation of diverse intellectual expressions together with the religious advocacy of learning and of values underpinning intellectual life; e.g. faith based schools, madrassas, colleges and universities.
- Remembering the religious past, events and texts, for example, the Holocaust and other genocides and mass killings; e.g. Rwanda, Armenia, Darfur, Cambodia, the Chinese cultural revolution, the writings of Primo Levi.

Religious education can contribute to the *physical development* of the pupil through:

- Consideration of religious attitudes to the body with the importance of self-mastery and discipline through choice and use of food, fasting, exercise and work.
- Consideration of religious attitudes to the body and developing religious views of human sexuality [e.g. abstinence, celibacy, contraception, marriage], drug use and abuse, alcohol, [e.g. the A.A.'s *Twelve Steps*] and overeating.
- Acknowledging different stages of human development in various 'rites of passage'.
- Attention to health, healing and well-being in religious traditions; e.g. Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation.

Religious education can contribute to the *development of society* through:

- The teaching of religious ethics and individual responsibility for the common good.
- The teaching of respect for, and acceptance of, the dignity of the ‘other’.
- Consideration of religious institutions, their governance and accountability, and of religious efforts to support community life.
- Its emphasis on charitable work through the study of religious injunctions and establishments created to meet the needs of society; e.g. hospitality for the stranger and pilgrim, prevention of cruelty to children, the probation service, the need for learning.
- The recognition of authority, of law and mechanisms of social change and the place of religious institutions and values in such ordering.
- An appreciation of the family and the religious cultivation of family values in religious injunctions and the establishment of the institution of marriage.
- Promoting inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue.

### **Promoting citizenship through religious education**

Religious education can contribute to the pupil’s sense of *citizenship* by:

- Recollecting religious teaching about the dignity of all human beings and the value of diversity.
- Recollecting religious teaching on the foundations of law and authority.
- The exploration of rights and duties, religiously conceived; e.g. in theories of a ‘just’ war.
- Recollecting religious teachings and practices expressing a duty of care for animals, the environment and future generations.
- The emphasis on sociality within religious life and practice; e.g. R.W. Dale and civil society, the teaching on the Common Good.
- The challenges and vocations issued within the framework of religious faith.

- The teaching of religious ethics and individual responsibility for the common good.

### **Promoting personal and social and health education through religious education**

Religious education can contribute to the *personal, social and health education* of pupils by:

- Attending to the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils as outlined above using the resources and traditions of Christianity and other faiths.
- Attending to the religious contribution to the development of society as outlined above.
- Clearly communicating the religious valuing of the individual and the dignity of all people, supporting self-esteem without being self-centred.
- Working and teaching within a framework of freedom and responsibility, which is central to religious and moral life; e.g. the Young People's Parliament.
- Considering the religious basis for directly challenging 'religiously' motivated discrimination, racism, prejudice and unfair discrimination, and offensive, misanthropic behaviour; e.g. 'Bringing Hope' project.
- Considering religious attitudes to family relationships, community and societal relationships, the source of happiness, sex, the use of money, and marriage.

### **Promoting key skills through religious education**

Religious education can contribute to the development of various key skills.

#### *Communication:*

The communication skills of pupils are enhanced in RE by:

- Enlarging their vocabulary with a range of words and concepts from the religious sphere.

- Familiarising pupils with influential religious texts [e.g. scripture, literature, poetry, prayers, liturgy], particularly those to which reference is made, directly or indirectly, in current written/oral discourse and any other expressive forms of communication; e.g. songs and music, C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Cycle*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, P. Pulmann's books.
- Encouraging discussion and presentations by pupils of material from religious traditions.
- Encouraging pupils to write critical essays and texts expressive of religious perceptions.
- Acquainting pupils with rhetorical devices to be found in religious texts and with exegetical and interpretative skills.
- Familiarising pupils with expressive religious communication in art, music, sculpture, architecture and other art forms.

*Application of number:*

The application of number can be enhanced in RE by:

- Collecting, recording, presenting and interpreting data pertaining to the study of religious adherence or religious attitudes, involving graphs, charts and statistical analysis.
- The value and use of numbers and mathematics within religious life.
- The use of geometry, shape and observational astronomy; e.g. in the Vedas
- The use of shape and geometry in Islamic art.

*Information technology:*

The access to information technology can be enhanced in RE by:

- The use of the computer to write and to create data bases and spreadsheets.
- The use of CD-ROM's and the internet to investigate religious resources and current expressions of religious faith in that medium.
- The use of e-mail to relate to pupils of other faiths, possibly in different schools, or to make acquaintance with pupils in a different culture.
- The use of Web-CT to teach and learn.

*Working with others:*

Working with others can be enhanced in RE by:

- The recognition in religious life of the dignity of others and a duty of care to others.
- Discussing and debating issues that are often central to one's own and another person's whole sense of life.
- Pupils collaborating on joint projects investigating religious life.
- The acknowledgement of cultural and religious differences and the awareness that a worldview different from one's own may be central to another person's life.
- Encouraging inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue.

*Improving learning and performance:*

Enhancing the pupil's learning processes and deepening understanding, together with the capacity to demonstrate this, can be achieved in RE by:

- Providing a basic overarching framework or context for living and understanding.
- Stimulating a commitment to study and the desire to understand others and whatever is not immediately accessible but transcendent.
- Developing the pupil's capacity to appreciate and empathise with people from other cultures and other times.
- Encouraging mastery of a greater vocabulary.
- Developing a pupil's interpretative and exegetical skills.
- Developing a pupil's communication skills.

*Problem solving:*

Problem solving can be enhanced in RE by:

- Recognition of the importance of context, especially to the interpretation of texts and the moral challenges that confront human beings.
- Recognition of the importance of attentiveness and listening when appreciating the nature and character of a problem with which one may be faced.

- Being able to identify and articulate the nature of a problem and entering into reasoned discussion with those who may view matters very differently.
- Recognition that problems and differences a pupil may have with others could be multi-dimensional and inter-related with apparently extraneous matters.
- Discussing with others key issues central to the sense and meaning of life and understanding that problems may be deep rooted.

### **Promoting other aspects of the curriculum**

Religious education can contribute to a range of other educational concerns.

#### *Thinking skills:*

As in all other subjects, thinking skills are required and enhanced in RE by:

- Encouraging pupils to research, to make connections, and to differentiate between various religious conceptions and practices.
- Encouraging pupils to reason logically, making warranted inductions and deductions from the available evidence pertaining to religious life.
- Employing narratives and examples from religious traditions to make conceptual distinctions.
- Encouraging pupils to deploy their imaginations to conceive how things might be otherwise, in particular using metaphor and analogy to express otherwise elusive conceptions.
- Considering the possibilities of paradigm shifts, category mistakes, and other means that have led to intellectual clarification and confusion.

#### *Financial capability:*

RE can contribute to financial capability by:

- Investigating the responsible use of money as this is religiously conceived and through religious practices, such as, tithing and almsgiving, the prohibition of usury, nishkan seva (selfless service).
- Discussions of business ethics.

- Considering religious concerns raised by lending and debt, poverty and wealth, gambling, work and unemployment, dependence and interdependence in economic life.
- Its presumption of responsibility for how one lives and its investigations into the religious hierarchy of values.
- Considering virtues and vices, such as, magnanimity and envy.

*Creativity and culture:*

Religious education can contribute to creativity and culture by:

- Investigating and considering the scope of human nature.
- Reflecting on the sources of inspiration, revelation and discovery.
- Investigating connections between beliefs, values, and forms of artistic expression.
- Appreciating the value of cultural distinctiveness.
- Reflecting on truth, goodness and beauty manifested in the creative and expressive arts.

*Education for racial equality and community cohesion:*

Religious education can contribute to the education for racial equality and community cohesion by:

- Considering religious perceptions of the unity and inalienable dignity of all human beings.
- Cultivating spiritual and moral values.
- Studying religious processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Valuing communal rituals and communal life.
- Encouraging inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue; e.g. Ladywood Interfaith Education Project.
- Combating racism and ‘religiously’ motivated discrimination, such as, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and related denigrations of the other.
- Considering religious impulses for hospitality and the offering of asylum.

*Promoting an effective contribution to scientific, medical and health issues:*

Religious education can contribute to the promotion of scientific, medical and health concerns by:

- Taking up religious considerations concerning the origin, destiny and purpose of life and the universe and the implications this has for scientific understanding and scientific activity.
- Studying religion and the rise of modern science.
- Investigating the spirituality of science and the basic moral and professional values which sustain the scientific enterprise.
- Considering the religious interest in health and healing.
- Considering the religious presumption of the inalienable dignity of all human life and the implications for genetic and medical research, as well as for medical practice more generally.
- Discussing relevant moral issues surrounding current topics, such as, ‘medically assisted dying’; abortion; the rights of: religious/racial minorities, children and women; testing on animals and vivisection.

*Links to employment, vocations and work-related learning:*

Religious education can make links with employment, vocations, and work-related learning by:

- Discussing religious attitudes to work; e.g. in work as a divine calling [vocation], as a duty, karma, punishment or as a means of redemption.
- Studying religion and the rise of capitalism.
- Considering the moral issues generated by business.
- Cultivating the values that sustain the business enterprise and to note the deleterious effects of corruption.

- Considering the understanding that emerges from a relationship of theory to practice.
- Investigating the connections between religious life, the caring professions and voluntary organisations.

*Education for sustainable development:*

Religious education can contribute to education for sustainable development by:

- Considering religious conceptions of the relationship between human beings, animal life and the world in which people live; e.g. in animal rights, concepts of ‘stewardship’ and ‘dominion’ and human answerability to the transcendent/God.
- Examining religious evaluations of the natural world; e.g. as possibly evocative of the divine or as a threat to human life.
- The cultivation of values which treasures the sanctity of all life and human flourishing; considering spiritual and moral issues generated by human [over]population, birth control, the principle of plenitude, wealth, poverty and human consumption.
- Testing the sources of happiness and human satisfaction; e.g. of materialism.

## **RE and School Worship**

There is a philosophy permeating the conception of formal education found in educational statute that historically has close affinities with religious life. Knowledge, whatever is morally good and right, the recognition and creation of beauty are all something to be worked at and worked for. They require the effort of the individual, but as part of a collective and shared enterprise. Cognitive, moral and aesthetic understanding requires interaction with others, the presupposition of a shared life<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>12</sup> This is key point of Archbishop Vincent’s address to the National Conference of Catholic Secondary Heads, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006 where he states “To be human is, of course, to be part of a society of other

language and of developing concepts. Collectively the human community struggles to understand what is true, good and beautiful. The shared struggle is rooted in a devotion to its purposed end. The expression of that devotion is found in the seriousness with which the whole community commits itself to its task. But because its final end is ultimately beyond its grasp and transcends the immediacy of more limited and accessible objectives, the devotion to the transcendent goal of human life is not unnaturally and communally expressed in ritual. It is in and through the ritual of worship that also within schools the transcendent goal of education is acknowledged and celebrated. In the school context collective worship is a constant reminder of the purpose of education and of the ultimate goal that constantly beckons and sustains all learners in their enterprise. Religiously, the fulfilment of human life with its quest for knowledge and understanding is found in the beatific vision i.e. the vision of God/the Eternal as the transcendent goal of all. Educationally this self same goal, conceived now as the Unity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, is the ultimate purpose of all teaching and learning, though in this life always an incomplete and unfinished task.

If worship is the culmination of *all* learning in the educational community, it can be seen to be a proper expression of religious education alongside all other subjects. Yet Religious Education is not the same as collective worship; along with Mathematics, English, the Sciences, RE is concerned *with more immediate objectives* and is in that respect no different from other subjects in its relationship to the transcendent goal of learning and to the related ritual of collective worship. Nevertheless, collective worship in schools is traditionally (and in law) religiously conceived and is not only an educational but also a religious practice. As such, religious education has a special interest in it. In so far as religious education is concerned with a proper understanding and appreciation of religious life, the RE teacher must be concerned that collective worship in school is properly conceived and practiced. To that extent only, collective worship falls within the domain of the RE teacher, for confused practice is likely to lead to religious *misunderstanding*. Collective worship and RE, therefore, are not

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human beings. Society is not the product of the individual. On the contrary, as is quite evident, individuals are the product of society.” The most evident warrant for the rejection of treating persons as if they were isolated monads and what illustrates the relationship between the individual and society most clearly “is that key human characteristic, language, which is of its essence, societal, shared, communitarian. There is no such thing as an ‘individual language’, one that is proper to me alone. It is a contradiction in terms. Language, with its rational discourse and symbolic meaning, is the defining characteristic of the person.”

interchangeable so that the distinction between them is lost. They each have a characteristic role and function to perform within the learning community.

## **RE and the Contribution to The Development of Society**

*'And [the development] of society'* is a phrase used in defining the purpose of education in the critical guiding paragraph of the '88 Act. It is often neglected or else it is transmuted into *'the social development of pupils'* but these are evidently not the same in meaning. The school authorities might ask themselves what they are doing not only to develop *pupils* but what steps are they taking to develop *society*. The easy way out is to rely on the development of pupils as a means of indirectly affecting the development of society. The more challenging way is to tackle the requirement of developing society head on.

There are in fact good educational reasons for doing so. Some sociologists speak of the *'social construction of reality'*, a conception that may raise some questions, but it makes the point that human understanding and learning is a social activity and product. Learning will require the application of individuals but only by making use of the language and conceptual endowment of others and by working with others on the transformation and development of knowledge<sup>13</sup>. Education is a function of the school community but it is one that is firmly embedded in the educational aspirations of the wider community. Without a disinterested love for learning in the wider community, schools cannot flourish and the work they do will not be effective or gain its proper recognition. Moreover, it is well known that the interests and attitudes of parents to formal learning can have a decisive impact on the achievements of their offspring. Schools, therefore, neglect the role of informing and enthusing parents or of inviting parental contributions at their peril.

The wider community with which the schools might engage goes far beyond the parents of the pupils in the school. The local business community can make its

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<sup>13</sup> A similar position is set out more fully in Archbishop Vincent's address to the National Conference of Catholic Secondary Heads, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006. See xxx

contributions to, and learn from, formal education, by establishing links between learning and work. There are other educating institutions and organisations [museums, libraries, universities, the media], all of which contribute to the total learning environment. Faith-based communities and voluntary organisations need similarly to be effectively engaged with schools; they have much to give and to receive in motivation, in experience and in vision. Constructive links can be a fruitful two-way process, bringing an extra-mural dimension to schools with classes visiting institutions and voluntary organisations in the wider community or intra-murally, with presentations from visitors or through access by means of the internet to material prepared by these organisations.

Only through an active community-orientated teaching and learning programme can schools hope to fulfil the expectation in law of contributing to the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development *of society*. Within such a wider programme of policy-making, planning, and activities, Religious Education teachers should **initiate contacts with faith communities and faith-based voluntary organisations** to create a condition of mutuality in learning. The goal is not just for pupils to experience faith-based communities at worship or their place of worship but to see these communities at work, enriching society and sustaining its most vulnerable members. Specific efforts in RE aimed at social cohesion and social solidarity within schools will come to grief unless this is joined to efforts targeted at the wider society and also reflected there.

## **The Underachieving Boys in RE**

There is some evidence that boys do not achieve the same results in accredited courses of RE. For example the comparative GCSE results for 2004 reported in *RE Today*<sup>14</sup> were as follows:

Gender	A* - C	A*	A
Girls	68.35%	8.85%	18.65%
Boys	54%	4.1%	12.3%

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<sup>14</sup> Autumn, 2005

Given the predominantly patriarchal character of most, if not all, religious traditions (a feature about which many feminist theologians complain), these results are surprising since one would expect an intrinsic affinity between such religious traditions and boys. Barbara Wintersgill, the HMI for RE, reported that ‘with a few exceptions in specific schools, boys interviewed did not dislike RE as a subject, although many had strong dislikes for particular topics: e.g. at upper secondary they preferred war and peace to abortion and euthanasia.’ It was found that boys also reacted to the learning environment and the teaching and learning style, preferring visual and kinaesthetic approaches to learning.

From these early results, it is evident that the learning environment cannot be ignored and that RE topics and themes, together with the learning and teaching styles, must be chosen with care if the underachievement among boys in accredited courses is to be corrected. Religions are essentially forms of life and in this respect active learning strategies are particularly appropriate.

Marius Felderhof,  
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