

How to use the primary exemplar material

The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education is radically different to the previous Agreed Syllabus. The main difference is the introduction of 24 dispositions. Each of the 9 faith groups in Birmingham have agreed that these dispositions are the attributes they would like to see encouraged and developed in their children. In Primary schools particularly, the emphasis is now on “learning from religion” rather than the more phenomenological (facts, figures and worksheets) approach previously adopted. (Ref p. 4) The range of faiths to be taught is to be decided by each individual school on the basis of the guidelines set out in the syllabus. (Ref p. 7) Pupils are always to be given an opportunity to study their own faith tradition and also to study Christianity as the historic faith tradition of both nation and city. Pupils are also to be given opportunity to explore the beliefs of the other religious traditions represented in Birmingham, which both reflects the syllabus requirements and the statutory duty to promote social cohesion.

When creating the primary exemplar material the above considerations were taken into account. As the exemplar material could not be written for each unique school situation three models were constructed. Model One represents a scheme of work suitable for a school for which the majority of pupils come from a Christian or nominal Christian background. Model Two represents a scheme of work suitable for a school where the majority of pupils come from a Muslim faith tradition. Model Three has imagined a school in which there are a significant percentage of children from the four largest faith groups in Birmingham. **ALL of the models include teaching from a wide variety of religious traditions.**

When creating the exemplar material, due note was taken of the need to teach the statutory elements of the syllabus. (Ref. p. 10 and 14) We also took the view that the

youngest children benefit from first being introduced to just one or two faith traditions. Therefore the number of faith traditions to be taught increases incrementally across the primary age range. Within each exemplar we have aimed to build in progression by use of the key questions. (Ref Programmes of Study) ¹

When designing the exemplar material we deliberately used a variety of teaching approaches. This is reflected in the activities that are suggested, but also in the planning. The majority of dispositions have been addressed in a three lesson model. In these cases often the first lesson will have a “PSHE” flavour as the intention is to begin with what the children already know. The second lesson will often introduce a religious way of looking at the topic without giving specific teaching from any one religious tradition. The third lesson will then address the topic using the teaching of one or more religious traditions as support/source material. Whilst many of the dispositions have been addressed as three lesson modules; others have been combined (ie two dispositions taught together); or given a shorter or longer treatment.

The important thing to remember when using the exemplar material is that these schemes of work are not statutory, simply suggestions. Whilst you may choose to take on a model completely in the first instance; it is anticipated that over time each school will personalise the scheme of work to reflect their pupil composition. For example you may decide to use predominately the “mainly Christian” model but exchange some of the lesson for those offered in the “mainly Muslim” model. Or you may decide to use the “mainly Muslim” model but substitute some of the Sikh and Hindu material from Model Three. It is worth comparing the detail of a lesson series across the 3 models as you will note that in some instances differences are minor, whereas in others they are significant. Also, you have the freedom to write your own

¹ The syllabus employees Key Questions in the place of Learning Objectives to reflect the explorative nature of the subject.

material providing that it meets the criteria laid down by the syllabus. We would be delighted to share any ideas that you have via the website. Please submit lesson plans or ideas to the Curriculum Group.

Up until now the exemplar material has only been available in copy-protected PDF format. This has made it impossible to copy and paste the material into your school's planning format. From Easter, it will be possible to copy the text and therefore integrate into your usual format. One brief word of caution is that the material currently reflects a spiral curriculum and a progression of faith knowledge. We have particularly sought to avoid repeating the same stories year on year apart from in one or two specific instances. Should you make radical changes to the schemes of yourselves, it will also be important to ensure that you have not omitted the statutory elements of the Syllabus, nor failed in your duty to teach the appropriate balance of faith traditions.

The new syllabus has been carefully designed to give freedom to teachers. There are a number of people involved in the development of the syllabus who would be happy to provide support and answer questions. Please contact either the Curriculum Group or Simone Whitehouse at BASS via the website (www.birmingham-asc.org.uk) in the first instance.