

York Diocesan Board of Education



Religious Education in a Church of England School

An introduction for those involved in governance

September 2023, Version 2

- This guidance is intended to give an introduction to the framework for Religious Education in Church of England schools and to better equip those involved in Church of England school governance to fulfil their role.
- It should be supplemented by attendance at the Diocese's training sessions as appropriate to the individual.

If you have any queries relating to governance, please contact Claire Graham-Brown (claire.graham-brown@yorkdiocese.org). If you have any technical queries relating to RE, please contact Olivia Seymour (olivia.seymour@yorkdiocese.org).

A. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. Religious Education (RE) is a core subject in the curriculum in Church of England (CE) schools. It should be recognised in all such schools as a highly valued academic subject that enables pupils to know about and understand Christianity as a living and diverse world faith and develop a knowledge and understanding of other major world religions and worldviews.
2. The purpose of RE is to enable pupils to develop confident religious literacy, “[h]elping children and young people hold balanced and well-informed conversations about religion and belief.”¹ RE should be non-confessional and pupils should be able to reflect on their own religious, spiritual and philosophical convictions.
3. In line with the Church of England Education Office’s (CEEO) Statement of Entitlement for Religious Education in Church of England schools (Statement of Entitlement),² the aims and objectives of RE in a CE school are for pupils:

- ✓ To know about and understand Christianity as a diverse global living faith through the exploration of core beliefs using an approach that critically engages with biblical text.
- ✓ To gain knowledge and understanding of a range of religious and worldviews appreciating diversity, continuity and change within the religions and worldviews being studied.
- ✓ To engage with challenging questions of meaning and purpose raised by human existence and experience.
- ✓ To recognise the concept of religion and its continuing influence on Britain’s cultural heritage and in the lives of individuals and societies in different times, cultures and places.
- ✓ To explore their own religious, spiritual and philosophical ways of living, believing and thinking.

4. The Statement of Entitlement provides the expectation for RE in Church schools. All those involved in governance in a Church school should be aware of this key document.

B. DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION ROLE

5. The York Diocesan Board of Education (YDBE) has a responsibility to promote/assist in the promotion of religious education in the Diocese. To this end, our support includes:
 - Publication of guidance on RE³
 - Provision of a Diocesan syllabus for Voluntary Aided schools and (where applicable) Academies
 - RE training and networks⁴
 - Support from the Diocese’s RE Adviser, the school’s link advisers under the YDBE’s Service Level Agreement and supplementary support from other members of the YDBE education team as appropriate
 - Diocesan involvement in Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs).

¹ [balanced-re-key-principles.pdf \(dioceseofyork.org.uk\)](https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/balanced-re-key-principles.pdf)

² [re-statement-of-entitlement-for-church-schools-2019.pdf \(dioceseofyork.org.uk\)](https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/re-statement-of-entitlement-for-church-schools-2019.pdf)

³ In addition to this guidance, please also see <https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/schools-and-youth/schools-education-homepage/help-for-schools/religious-education-1/>

⁴ Please see <https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/schools-and-youth/schools-education-homepage/educationtraining/> for the latest training opportunities

C. ROLE OF GOVERNORS/LOCAL GOVERNORS

NB: For the purposes of this guidance, the term “Governing Bodies” will apply to governing bodies in maintained schools and local governing bodies in academies, and the term “governors” is used to refer to governors in maintained schools and local governors in academies.

6. Governing Bodies should be monitoring RE effectively. They should ensure that the quality of RE, and pupil’s progress and attainment in RE, is high. They should also ensure that the aims and objectives of RE as set out above are being met, as are the legal requirements relating to RE.

In this regard:

- **The Governing Body should ensure that they have approved an RE policy for the school, and that this is reviewed regularly.** We would recommend that it is reviewed as part of your regular policy review cycle and as a minimum every three years or if notable changes have been made to the provision. An example policy can be found here: [religious-education-policy-template.pdf \(dioceseofyork.org.uk\)](https://www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/religious-education-policy-template.pdf).
 - **We recommend that the Governing Body considers establishing a church school committee (or similar) which includes as part of its remit oversight and support of RE.** Such a committee should include Foundation governors, however it is recommended that other governors are also involved. Appropriate reporting should take place to the full Governing Body.
 - **We recommend that Governing Bodies consider whether it would be helpful to have a link governor for RE** who can support the wider Governing Body/Church school committee with their oversight.
 - **RE should be treated as a core subject, and this should be reflected in the way standards are monitored by the Governing Body.** In general, governors would want to ensure that standards in RE were at least as high as those in other core subjects, especially English/writing. This will include ensuring a school’s vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties, flourish academically in RE.
7. We’ve included in Appendix 1 some key questions which governors and (where the school is part of an academy trust) Directors/Trustees may wish to ask in relation to RE. These are not exhaustive but give a flavour of the kinds of things those involved in governance will want to ask.

D. ROLE OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS/TRUSTEES – (academies only)

8. In general, the support and oversight of Church school distinctiveness, including RE, should take place at local level, and we would recommend a high level of delegation to local governing bodies (LGBs) in relation to RE. However, there are some key points to bear in mind here:
 - ✓ **Appropriate delegations in relation to RE should be put in place in the Multi Academy Trust’s (MAT) Scheme of Delegation⁵** so it is clear who is responsible for what.
 - ✓ **We would anticipate that delegation would be based on the principle of earned autonomy, which would need to be revoked if necessary, and on the understanding that there remains appropriate oversight at MAT Board level.**
 - ✓ **We recommend that MAT Boards consider establishing a Church School Effectiveness Committee/Group or similar** (which includes Directors/Trustees) to help them with their oversight role, with appropriate reporting to the full Trust Board. Such a Group/Committee should also look to facilitate the sharing of best practice in RE through their collaborative structure.

⁵ Guidance is available to academies and Trusts in relation to the Scheme of Delegation.

E. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

(a) Curriculum requirements

9. Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based which:⁶
- Includes provision for RE for all pupils in all year groups (including those in reception and sixth form);
 - Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and
 - Prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

(b) Particular curriculum requirements by school type

	Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools	Voluntary Aided schools	Academies
General position	RE must be taught according to the locally agreed syllabus for RE. The RE curriculum is therefore determined by the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), which is responsible for producing the locally agreed syllabus for RE.	RE must be taught in accordance with any provisions of the school's trust deed or (where there is no such provision) in accordance with the tenets of the Church of England. Governors are ultimately responsible for adopting the relevant syllabus and must ensure that this is in accordance with 'the rites, practices and beliefs of the Church of England.' In practice schools follow the Diocesan syllabus which has been written to help Governors to fulfil their legal responsibilities.	RE must be provided in accordance with the academy's funding agreement. This will usually mirror the position prior to conversion (i.e. based on its former status). Former Voluntary Aided academies Former Voluntary Aided academies should continue to follow the approach outlined opposite for Voluntary Aided schools. Former Voluntary Controlled/Foundation academies In general, we would expect former Voluntary Controlled/Foundation schools to follow the approach outlined opposite for Voluntary Controlled/Foundation schools. The academy may choose to adopt a different syllabus or develop its own as long as it meets the requirements of a locally agreed syllabus i.e. it reflects 'that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religious traditions present in Great Britain.' This may include the ability for academies to adopt the Diocesan syllabus or another syllabus which meets this requirement. Diocesan advice should be obtained before you consider departing from your locally agreed syllabus.
Exception	Where parents request RE in accordance with the school's trust deed, this should be provided.	Where parents require their child to receive RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus, in certain circumstances the Governing Body will be required to make arrangements for such RE to be provided.	
Rights of withdrawal	Parents have an absolute right to withdraw their children, in whole or in part, from receiving religious education. There is no requirement to provide reasons and the request stands until the request is withdrawn. The school will need to ensure appropriate supervision for any such child. In certain circumstances there is the potential for a child to be withdrawn from school to receive alternative religious education.		

Please contact Olivia Seymour (olivia.seymour@yorkdiocese.org) in the event you need particular guidance on rights of withdrawal or where a request has been made for RE to be given in accordance with a different syllabus.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

F. CURRICULUM

10. In line with the Statement of Entitlement:

- Sufficient dedicated curriculum time, meeting explicitly RE objectives, however organised, should be committed to the delivery of RE. This should aim to be close to 10% but must be no less than 5% at key stages 1-4. *In practice, this means a starting point of 60 minutes per week for Key Stage 1, 75 minutes per week for Key Stages 2 -4.*
(Please note that RE is completely separate from Collective Worship. Collective Worship must not be considered curriculum time for RE.)
- Christianity should be the majority religion studied in each year group and should be at least 50% of RE curriculum time.

11. In addition, for secondary schools:

- All pupils should follow a recognised and appropriate qualification or course in Religious Education/Religious Studies at KS4 and the study of Christianity should be a significant part of any such qualification offered.
- Where the school has a sixth form, it should be possible for those students who achieve suitable grades at GCSE or equivalent to follow appropriate A level courses. This should be in addition to the provision of core RE entitlement provision for all students at KS5, which should continue to develop students' understanding of Christianity and other religious and worldviews.

12. In line with the Statement of Entitlement:

- *"In a Church school RE will have a high profile within the curriculum and will be a priority for senior leaders. The RE curriculum is intrinsic to the outworking of a Church school's Christian vision in enabling all pupils to flourish."*
- *"It should be a coherent curriculum that enables progress through ordered and sequential learning developing both knowledge and skills. There should be a clear curriculum vision and intent, a structure for implementation and provision and a process for evaluating impact."*

13. In practice, the curriculum should ensure a balance of:

- Theology - *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 one another.*
- Philosophy - *finding out how and whether things make sense, including consideration of questions of morality and ethics, reality knowledge and existence.*
- Social and human sciences - *exploring the diverse ways in which people practice their beliefs and the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies.⁷*

⁷ Please see [balanced-re-key-principles.pdf \(dioceseofyork.org.uk\)](#), which includes more detailed discussion.

G. STAFFING OF RE AND THE ROLE OF THE RE LEAD

14. In line with the Statement of Entitlement:

- There should be a named member of staff responsible for RE. Where that person is the headteacher, someone should shadow the role. RE leads should have opportunities to monitor RE lessons.
- Schools should be working towards having at least one member of staff having RE qualifications or receiving specialist training, with secondary schools employing specialist RE teachers and deploying them effectively to ensure pupils receive specialist training.
- All teaching staff should have an understanding of the distinctive role and purpose of RE within church schools and all staff teaching RE should have access to subject specific CPD.

We recommend that the RE Lead has a clear role description. An example of the kind of responsibilities that an RE Lead might be asked to undertake can be found at Appendix 2.

H. INSPECTION

a. SIAMS – all Church schools

15. All Church of England schools are inspected under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Framework. The Framework sets out the expectations for the conduct of statutory inspection under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections under this Framework will enable judgements to be made on RE, collective worship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education and an evaluation of how schools, through their theologically rooted Christian vision, are living up to their Church school foundation, enabling people to flourish.

16. The Framework requires inspectors to explore six - or in some cases seven - Inspection Questions as follows:

- IQ1** - How does the school's theologically rooted Christian vision enable pupils and adults to flourish?*
***IQ2** - How does the curriculum reflect the school's theologically rooted Christian vision?*
***IQ3** - How is collective worship enabling pupils and adults to flourish spiritually?*
***IQ4** - How does the school's theologically rooted Christian vision create a culture in which pupils and adults are treated well?*
***IQ5** - How does the school's theologically rooted Christian vision create an active culture of justice and responsibility?*
***IQ6** - Is the religious education curriculum effective (with reference to the expectations set out in the Church of England's Statement of Entitlement for Religious Education)?*

and where applicable:

- IQ7** - What is the quality of religious education in voluntary aided and former voluntary aided schools, and in former voluntary controlled schools in which denominational religious education is taught?*

17. Having evaluated the evidence made available under the Inspection Questions, the inspector will award the school one of the two following judgements:

- **Judgement 1 ("J1")** - The inspection findings indicate that the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school, and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish.
- **Judgement 2 ("J2")** - The inspection findings indicate that the school has strengths, but that there are also issues that leaders need to address as a matter of priority. These are listed in the areas for development.

18. You can review the full SIAMS Framework [here](#).

b. RE and SIAMS – all Church schools

19. In all schools, the provision for RE will be looked at within the specific question(s) relating to RE, however discussion relating to RE will likely contribute to answering other Inspection Questions.
20. All inspections will consider the following specific question relating to RE:

IQ6: Is the religious education curriculum effective (with reference to the expectations set out in the Church of England's Statement of Entitlement for Religious Education)?

21. When considering IQ6, inspectors may use the following sub-questions to explore this Inspection Question with leaders:

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| <p>a. How do school and trust leaders ensure that the provision, profile, and priority of religious education in all key stages reflect its place on the curriculum of a Church school?</p> <p>b. How do school and trust leaders ensure that the religious education curriculum is challenging, accurate, well sequenced, well-balanced, relevant, and diverse?</p> <p>c. How do school and trust leaders ensure that religious education is well resourced, and that continuing professional development for staff has an impact on the effectiveness of the curriculum?</p> |
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c. RE and SIAMS – Subject inspection for some Church schools

22. Inspectors of:

- Voluntary Aided maintained schools
- academies that were formerly Voluntary Aided schools
- academies that were formerly Voluntary Controlled schools in which denominational religious education is required to be taught

will also consider the following specific question relating to RE:

IQ7: What is the quality of religious education in voluntary aided and former voluntary aided schools, and in former voluntary controlled schools in which denominational religious education is taught?

23. When considering IQ7, inspectors may use the following sub-questions to explore this Inspection Question with leaders:

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|---|
| <p>a. What is the quality of teaching?</p> <p>b. How well do pupils make progress in their learning as a result of a balanced and well-structured religious education curriculum?</p> <p>c. How does assessment inform teaching and learning?</p> |
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d. RE and Ofsted

24. The Ofsted Handbook⁸ says as follows in relation to inspection of Religious Education:

“139. The Secretary of State designates certain schools as having a religious character. In schools without a religious character, we inspect religious education ... as part of our graded inspections. This is different in schools with a religious character. In most of these schools, denominational education and collective worship are inspected by a body appointed by the maintained school’s board of governors under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 or as provided in the academy’s funding agreement. In a voluntary controlled school designated as having a religious character, we inspect RE...

140. Inspectors may gather evidence from anywhere relevant (including RE lessons and assemblies) to evaluate pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, personal development and/or behaviour and attitudes.”

25. By way of summary, in general, Voluntary Controlled/Foundation schools and former Voluntary Controlled/Foundation academies may have religious education inspected under Quality of Education as part of the school’s Ofsted inspection, whereas in Voluntary Aided schools/academies required to follow a denominational syllabus in line with their funding agreement, religious education will not be inspected by Ofsted under Quality of Education, but as in any school Ofsted may still look at RE as part of a wider exploration of e.g. pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, personal development, behaviour and welfare, British values and diversity, equality and inclusion.

⁸ [School inspection handbook for September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114122/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023.pdf)

Appendix 1

Some key questions those involved in governance may wish to ask themselves and/or leaders in relation to RE.

NB. These are not exhaustive but give a flavour of the kinds of things those involved in governance will want to ask if taking a detailed look at RE.

A. For Governing Bodies/Local Governing Bodies

1. What mechanisms do we have in place for overseeing RE in our school? How do we as a governing body oversee RE? Is there a link governor for RE? Does a committee look at RE and how do they report back to the whole governing body? Is there anything we should be doing differently here?
2. Have we received and considered a copy of the Statement of Entitlement and the Diocesan RE guidance for those involved in governance? To what extent do we feel the school is currently meeting the benchmarks set in the Statement of Entitlement? What do we need to do to make improvements where it has been found lacking? Is this properly reflected within our school development plan?
3. What does attainment and progress in RE look like? How does this compare with other core subjects, and how does this compare locally/(if applicable) nationally? What do outcomes look like over time? How does attainment and progress of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils compare?
4. What is our process for evaluating impact of RE?
5. Have we adopted an RE policy, reflecting the relevant requirements and Diocesan guidance? Is this published on our website? Are we keeping this under review?
6. Are we complying with the legal requirements for adoption of our RE syllabus? Are we compliant with the other legal requirements for RE?
7. Is there sufficient dedicated curriculum time devoted to RE? Does the RE provision deliver a high quality, sequential religious education? Is there an appropriate balance of RE curriculum time devoted to Christianity and to other religions and worldviews? Are appropriate RE qualifications offered (where applicable)?
8. Is there a clear curriculum intent and a structure for implementation and provision? Do we know the impact of this?
9. How do we know the quality of teaching and learning in RE? Do we have a designated RE lead? Do they have a clear role description? In partnership with the headteacher, do they have opportunities to monitor RE lessons? What are their qualifications? What support and training do they receive? How do they share the benefit of that training with others responsible for teaching RE?
10. Do all pupils participate in RE or have there been any parental requests to withdraw their children from RE? Have there been any parental requests for alternative syllabus arrangements?
11. Are we resourcing RE sufficiently? Is there an appropriate budget for RE? Have we got sufficient teaching capability? Do we use high quality resources to supplement the RE syllabus?

B. For Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Boards

1. *What mechanisms are in place for overseeing RE in MAT schools? How does the local governing body oversee RE? Is there a link local governor for RE? Do they have a Church school committee/similar?*
2. *Have all local governing bodies received and considered a copy of The Statement of Entitlement and the Diocesan RE guidance for those involved in governance? What is their assessment of the extent to which the school is currently meeting the benchmarks set out in those documents and what plans are in place to make improvements where elements has been found lacking? Is this properly reflected within school development plans?*
3. *What does attainment and progress in RE look like across the schools? Are there notable differences between the schools? How do they compare with other subjects? How do they compare nationally (secondary only)? What do outcomes look like over time? How does attainment and progress of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils compare?*
4. *Can we see a copy of the parts of the SIAMS self-evaluation for the schools which relate to RE so that we can understand how each school is evaluating RE provision and performance?*
5. *Does each school have an RE policy, reflecting the relevant requirements and Diocesan guidance, published on its website? To what extent are and should RE policies in MAT schools be different or standardised?*
6. *How does the curriculum time allocated to RE differ across the MAT? What are the reasons for this?*
7. *What is the level of resourcing in RE for each school? Does this look different across the schools in our MAT? Why? Is there a way we can use the MAT structure to share resources?*
8. *What does the quality of teaching in RE look like across the MAT? Does each school have a designated RE Lead? How can MAT schools share best practice in RE and facilitate all staff development? Is there an individual who could take the lead on supporting local RE leads on a MAT wide basis and is this desirable? Is there an opportunity for joint CPD?*
9. *To what extent do parents withdraw their children from RE and how is this managed?*
10. *Have any schools had requests for alternative syllabus provision? How has this been managed?*

Appendix 2 – RE Lead example responsibilities⁹

Policy, knowledge and development

- Prepare a School Policy;
- Whole School Plan and Schemes of Work which cater for progression;
- Decide which religions are to be included at which key stage;
- Ensure that curriculum time is sufficient. The Statement of Entitlement says that this should aim to be close to 10% but must be no less than 5%;
- Devise appropriate procedures for planning, assessment, recording and reporting pupils' work in line with whole school policy;
- Ensure SEN, EAL and gifted and talented school policies are promoted in RE;
- Promote RE with staff, pupils, parents and governors;
- Promote display of pupils' work in RE;
- Audit available resources, buy new ones and deploy appropriately;
- Keep up-to-date with local and national developments.

Monitoring

- Review, monitor and evaluate provision and the practice of RE;
- Identify trends, make comparisons and know about different groups;
- Monitor planning, checking for clarity of outcomes and aspects of differentiation;
- Provide observation feedback and report on findings;
- Sample pupil's work;
- Evaluate outcomes for pupils in RE for progress and attainment;
- Set overall school targets for improvement.

Supporting and Advising

- Prepare a subject action plan, including short and long term targets and a funding policy, which builds on existing practice and strives for continuous improvement;
- Lead curriculum development and ensure staff development through courses, in-school meetings and training;
- Keep up-to-date with new developments and resources;
- Support non-specialist teachers and staff;
- Work alongside colleagues to demonstrate good practice;
- Prepare statements about RE for parents and governors, as required;
- Ensure parents and children are involved in the process.

⁹ Taken from © *Diocesan Syllabus for Religious Education in the Dioceses of Leeds and York*