



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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INSPECTING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of religious education (RE), you need to find out how good the pupils are at the subject, to what extent they understand what lies at its heart, and whether it captures their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating the rate at which they progress and judging how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

WHEN TO INSPECT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

You must distinguish between RE which leads to GCSE or GCE accreditation, and that which is taught according to the agreed syllabus to all pupils. **These preliminary notes relate to the latter provision.**

RE must be included in all section 10 inspections unless the school teaches denominational RE. This will be shown on Form S. In these cases, RE, including examination courses, is inspected under section 23 of the 1996 Act.

It is possible, but unlikely, that some pupils in a school will be taught denominational RE and some from the agreed syllabus. In these cases, you should inspect only the non-denominational RE. You will not inspect RE in a voluntary aided school, except on the rare occasions when parents have requested that their children be taught from the agreed syllabus. You can tell this from Form S. You will almost always inspect RE in voluntary controlled schools and in most grant maintained (GM) schools, except those which were formerly voluntary aided and teach denominational RE (see the following section on the changing status of GM schools).

The principle to remember is that you must never inspect denominational RE.

Statutory religious education

- In local education authority (LEA) schools and others providing non-denominational RE, the following principles apply.
- The subject should be taught to all pupils, including those in the sixth form and under-fives in reception classes (but not children in nursery classes).
 - RE must follow the LEA agreed syllabus. Most voluntary controlled schools also follow it. GM schools which are not teaching denominational RE may follow any agreed syllabus which meets the requirements of the 1988 Education Reform Act. However, within a period yet to be decided, they will be required to revert to the agreed syllabus of the LEA.
 - Special schools can be expected to be using the agreed syllabus as the starting point of their RE teaching. It is not mandatory, but they will usually include elements of it.
 - Parents have a right to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship. Schools may **not** put any pressure on parents to withdraw their children, or indeed to ask them to opt in. *Such practices contravene statutory requirements.*

Religious education and collective worship

- RE and **collective worship** are separate and distinct, and should be reported separately. Collective worship may be planned to reinforce learning in RE or National Curriculum subjects. Evidence from observations of collective worship is not adequate to reach judgements about RE for a range of reasons:
 - RE is normally taught according to an agreed syllabus, whereas collective worship does not have to take account of the agreed syllabus;
 - RE has to include the teaching of religions other than Christianity, whereas collective worship does not;
 - worship has to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' in county and equivalent grant maintained schools; this is not the requirement for RE;
 - in voluntary controlled schools, you must not make judgements on the content of collective worship, although you will inspect RE (unless it is denominational);
 - in some schools, more pupils are withdrawn from collective worship than from RE;
 - the law on RE and collective worship is different - for example, collective worship must be daily;
 - you should report on the quality of collective worship in the section on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; whereas most of your reporting on RE will be in the subject section and the sections concerned with attainment and progress, teaching, curriculum and assessment.

The changing status of grant maintained schools

- The nature of RE and collective worship in GM schools, as they undergo transition, depends on the school's status before it became GM. Under the new 'framework' for schools, the following arrangements will apply.
 - **A GM school which does not have a religious character and becomes a 'foundation' school** will (a) normally teach RE in accordance with the agreed syllabus of the LEA, and (b) provide collective worship which is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.

The current entitlement for GM schools to follow any locally agreed syllabus will be removed. An ex-GM school following another locally agreed syllabus will be required, in time, to revert to the syllabus of its home LEA.
 - **A GM school with a religious character which becomes a 'foundation' school** will (a) provide RE in accordance with the agreed syllabus of its LEA or in accordance with the trust deed where requested by parents, and (b) be responsible for the collective worship which it provides.

- **A GM school without a religious character which becomes a voluntary school** will (a) provide RE in accordance with the agreed syllabus of its LEA, and (b) be responsible for the collective worship which it provides.
- **A GM school with a religious character which becomes a voluntary controlled school** will (a) provide RE in accordance with the agreed syllabus of its LEA, and (b) provide collective worship which is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
- **A GM school with a religious character which becomes a voluntary aided school** will (a) provide RE in accordance with the trust deed, or in accordance with the agreed syllabus of its LEA where parents request it, and (b) be responsible for the collective worship which it provides.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in RE, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well is RE taught?

Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Make sure you are familiar with the agreed syllabus, course objectives and examination syllabuses used by the school.
- Where RE is taken as a GCSE or GCE subject, analyse the performance data for recent years.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of the statutory and agreed syllabus requirements. Where RE it is taught as a GCSE or GCE subject, look also for evidence showing how well the course requirements are met.

When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what the current pupils are like at the subject, what they do well, and where they could do better. Focus on the year groups in which the pupils become 14, 16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Assess what progress pupils are making through the school - how rapid it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.
- Observe teaching, talk with teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning, progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.

- Take stock of any other factors which affect the teaching of RE and the standards achieved. In particular, assess how effectively the subject is led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

Literacy and information technology

- Judge the contribution of RE to pupils' reading and writing.
- Evaluate any contribution which RE makes to pupils' capability in information technology.
- Where information and communications technology is used to support pupils' learning in RE, evaluate the extent to which it enhances the pupils' standards of work. Whilst the pupils may be working well below their competence in information technology, this may still be appropriate to the RE task.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

Feeding back your inspection findings

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of RE and to the individual teachers by:
 - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
 - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
 - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
 - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

Writing the subject section

The RE section of the report should tell a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, you should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the teaching. You must distinguish between RE taught as part of the basic curriculum, where this is inspected, and RE taught to GCSE and GCE syllabuses. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.

- For courses taught to GCSE and GCE syllabuses, are examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained, to show how they compare with other subjects in the school, and to identify any trends over time?

- Are there clear judgements of what is achieved by the pupils in the years in which they become 14, 16 and 18, in RE taught according to the agreed syllabus and GCSE and GCE courses? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
- Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences between what is seen and what results indicate, where courses lead to external accreditation?
- Are variations in the progress of different groups or in different years evaluated and explained?
- Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects the pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are not? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
- Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
- Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
- Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in RE?

ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Your judgements on attainment and progress in RE will be based on **performance data** (where RE is taught as an examination subject) and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between the judgements based on them **must be explained convincingly**.

Interpreting data (where RE is taught as an examination subject)

- For pupils aged 16, compare the school's GCSE results with:
 - the results achieved in schools nationally;
 - the results for schools of 'similar type' (comprehensive, selective or modern);
 - the results achieved in other subjects in the school.

The comparisons with other subjects are indications whether standards are as high as they should be. You will need to consider the size and nature of the entry. For example, does the school enter a self-selecting group or the whole year group? You will need to explore whether 'option groups' have attracted the full range of ability and also comment on gender issues in the choice of RE and in examination results. In addition, you should note evidence of boys' preference for specific options within RE syllabuses such as 'philosophy of religion'. For pupils of 14 and above, there is a trend for girls to perform much better than boys, and you should be able to comment on this issue in the school. You will need to find out whether the school enters candidates for the GCSE short course.

- Evaluate the A-level and AS results, comparing them with the national results, including those for schools of similar type. Look at results over several years.

*In making judgements, you will need to **exercise caution** because of the various factors at play, such as the numbers involved and the nature of the students and courses.*

Using evidence from observations (for RE taught according to the agreed syllabus and where it is an examination subject)

- Evaluate the attainment of pupils on non-accredited courses in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18. Also judge those who follow examination courses.

*For most of the time, you will be making judgements on the standards of pupils' work in non-accredited courses. When inspecting 'non-examination' RE from 11 to 14, 14 to 16, and in the sixth form, you must make judgements **against the relevant assessment objectives in the agreed syllabus**. Where these do not exist, you should use the 'end of key stage expectations' in the non-statutory model syllabuses for RE, obtainable from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)¹, and explain in the report why this has been done. The attainment of pupils following examination courses is judged according to the assessment objectives and level or grade descriptions contained in the relevant syllabus.*

- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as able pupils, those with special educational needs, and boys and girls.

The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?

For pupils with special educational needs, including those in special schools, judgements on standards, particularly progress, should be made taking into account their best means of communicating - for example, by computer or other form of technology. There may be a need for pupils to do work pitched at levels lower than is normally associated with their age.

- When you **look at** pupils' work and **talk** with them, concentrate on the extent to which they meet the expectations of the agreed syllabus or the examination course requirements. Typically, these would include pupils' ability to:
 - demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religions and of what is distinctive to each;
 - give clear explanations of religious beliefs and explain in some depth what it means to be, for example, a Christian, a Muslim, or a Hindu;
 - show understanding of what religions have in common and how and why they differ;
 - show an understanding of the diversity of belief and practice within individual religions;
 - show understanding of faith communities and their teachings and evaluate their contribution to personal, local, national and international life;

¹ QCA intends to publish non-statutory 'level descriptions' for RE alongside the review of the National Curriculum.

- interpret religious concepts and symbolism, and the meaning of external appearances of religion;
- use the correct terminology to describe matters of belief and the practice of faith;
- demonstrate ability to form their own views of religious issues through an exploration of questions about life's meaning and purpose;
- reflect on what they have learnt in developing their own beliefs and values;
- express and argue a position on moral issues, recognising strengths and weaknesses in the argument and sharing an understanding of religious perspectives upon these issues;
- recognise the experiences which they share with people of different faiths (for example, suffering and death), and use this information to further their understanding of how other people try to make sense of these experiences.

The aims, objectives and expectations of the agreed syllabus, and the examination course requirements, will help you to shape your analysis of strengths and weaknesses in RE as well as the overall judgements about attainment and progress. Remember that in your reporting you need to go further than citing the above attributes; draw on the most telling evidence which exemplifies them.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING

- Judge pupils' attitudes to learning in RE by focusing on their willingness to:
 - be open to the possibility of a spiritual dimension to life, and search for meaning and purpose in life;
 - consider the importance of commitment to a set of values by which to live one's life;
 - listen to the views of others without pre-judging one's response, and respect the right of others to have different beliefs and customs to one's own;
 - consider the personal relevance of religious questions and reflect on their own beliefs and values in the light of their learning in RE;
 - value insight and imagination as ways of perceiving reality.

TEACHING

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses according to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **impact on educational standards**. Effective teaching in RE is founded on a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject.

Teaching cannot be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, do not learn as well as they should considering what they already knew. The same is true where they do not firmly consolidate their learning.

- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective RE teaching, in which the teacher:
 - has a genuine interest in religion, ethics and philosophy and the ability to enthuse the pupils (*subject knowledge*);
 - recognises the pupils' potential and gives them work to do which challenges them intellectually and personally (*match to need, expectations*);
 - has a good understanding of all the concepts, religions, and aspects of religions specified in the agreed syllabus and examination syllabuses being taught (*subject knowledge*);
 - promotes a coherent understanding of religions by organising a range of activities which enable pupils to make associations between aspects of the same religions (*subject knowledge, planning, method*);
 - encourages pupils to seek meanings and interpretations of texts, artefacts and symbols (*expectations*);
 - balances the study of religions and pupils' spiritual and moral development, successfully relating the teaching of religions to the questions and interests which pupils have in the moral and spiritual issues in their own lives (*planning, subject knowledge*);
 - leads discussion of religious issues with confidence and authority and establishes an ethos of mutual respect (*subject knowledge, methods*);
 - establishes a working environment in which teacher and pupils feel confident to draw upon their own faiths to support the learning of the class (*methods, management of pupils*);
 - is aware of the sensitive nature of the subject and of how to deal with controversial and delicate issues when they arise (*subject knowledge, methods*);
 - is skilled in the use of class teaching, group activity and individual work to serve different purposes. For example, class teaching might be used to explain aspects of a religion or raise important questions, while group work might be the best way of preparing presentations to the class or producing display work (*subject knowledge, planning, methods*).

- Be alert to weaknesses in teaching, such as:
 - dependence on the use of a single textbook;
 - setting tasks for pupils which do nothing to develop a conceptual framework or to promote an understanding of religion and an interest in it (for example, closed comprehension exercises, drawing, word searches or 'filling in spaces' with one or two word answers);
 - placing an undue emphasis on learning about the phenomena of religion rather than the beliefs and values behind the phenomena;

- giving few opportunities for pupils to learn from religion by asking fundamental religious and philosophical questions;
- failing to build upon pupils' previous knowledge, understanding and skills in RE, offering little that is new or challenging to pupils and generally providing activities more suited to primary school pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION OR MANAGEMENT

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

RE should make a distinctive and significant contribution in this area, particularly pupils' spiritual and moral development.

- Ensure that you fully evaluate and report the contribution of RE, in particular the extent to which it provides opportunities for pupils to:
 - learn about beliefs, values and the concept of spirituality;
 - reflect on the relevance of religious teachings in their own lives;
 - learn about and evaluate the teachings of religions on right and wrong;
 - evaluate a range of moral and religious issues with reference to the teachings of religions;
 - understand the inter-relationship between religion, culture and society;
 - develop respect for the right of others to hold beliefs different from their own.

Staffing

A particular issue in RE is the use of non-specialists.

- Investigate carefully the qualifications, experience and training of RE teachers to judge the **impact** which the use of non-specialists has on the educational standards achieved. Do this by exploring:
 - how many non-specialists teach RE, and whether the same non-specialists are used every year, or whether the department's staffing changes annually;
 - whether the non-specialists have sufficient subject knowledge to teach RE, and whether they show commitment and enthusiasm;
 - how much training non-specialists have received, and the nature and content of this training.

SPECIFIC REPORTING AND SCHOOL PROFILE ISSUES

- Note that there has been clarification on the two questions about non-compliance with legislation on RE and collective worship in the *School profile*. The interpretation is:
 - "Is there any recorded evidence of non-compliance with the **requirement to teach religious education** to all pupils except those withdrawn by their parents?" (Part B, p4, question P6)

- "Is there any recorded evidence of non-compliance with the **requirement to provide daily collective worship** for all pupils except those withdrawn by their parents?" (Part B, p4, question P8)

*These questions are simply about non-compliance. A 'yes' answer means that comment about non-compliance is included in the report. **You should report any breaches of statutory requirements in the section of the report on leadership and management, and also, in relation to RE, in the subject section.***

- Use the section on curriculum and assessment for reporting on the extent to which the curriculum for RE teaching meets agreed syllabus requirements and whether sufficient time is allowed for this to be done.
- Use the section on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for reporting on the quality of collective worship, including the extent to which it is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.

OBSERVATION FORMS

There follow two sample observation forms for RE. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these religious education lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION YEAR 10 MIXED ABILITY - Very good teaching**CONTEXT:**

Role of John the Baptist in the Synoptic Gospels. Followed by discussion of baptism. Objectives to compare/contrast accounts of John's ministry in the Gospels; and to develop understanding of baptism, association with John and importance for Christianity today. Use of video extracts depicting baptism in three denominations.

TEACHING:

Considerable strength in subject knowledge evident in fluency with Gospel accounts and their relevance to Christian baptism today; baptism and some difficult concepts like 'worthiness', 'remission' and 'repentance' explained and illustrated v effectively. Expectations v high - demanding qs, abstract concepts tackled - eg 'redemption', 'sin' - much independent thinking encouraged. Well balanced range of strategies - explanation, questioning, textual research, ps' contributions well used and valued. Good use of video to illustrate. Good working atmosphere created. Grade 2

RESPONSE:

Ps motivated well by the teaching: listened attentively, answered qs enthusiastically, persevered with difficult concepts. Good discussion - ps showing respect for each other's views. Well behaved. Grade 3

ATTAINMENT:

Majority are attaining well in relation to the GCSE syllabus and objectives - mostly higher grade standard. They demonstrated good knowledge of John's ministry and of the meaning of Christian baptism. Good understanding of theological concepts behind baptism - redemption, rebirth, etc. Grade 3

PROGRESS:

Ps showed good standards in their initial responses and built on this well - they were challenged and productive throughout. Knowledge of John's ministry improved quickly and, for many ps, the meaning of their own baptism was enhanced. The more able, especially, were developing a quite sophisticated understanding of the concept of baptism and related concepts. Grade 3

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION YEAR 7 MIXED ABILITY - Satisfactory teaching**CONTEXT:**

Unit of work on Islam from the agreed syllabus. Story of the life of Muhammad and his importance to Muslims. Creating a timeline of events in his life and comparing and contrasting the importance of M to Muslims with that of J to Christians.

TEACHING:

CT's exposition shows good knowledge of M's life and an understanding of the sensitivities in comparing the lives of J and M. Expectations sound with intended tasks well matched to pupils' abilities. But time not managed well with too little spent on the more important comparing/contrasting element and failure to maintain work rate of some pupils. Class well controlled with relaxed relationships. Grade 4

RESPONSE:

Fairly muted response to story - only a few keen to answer qs and offer explanations. But all settle to w/s tasks quickly. Behaviour good. More able start to research answers to comparison task, showing good independence. Grade 4

ATTAINMENT:

Ps show sound knowledge of wider aspects of Islam eg about forms of worship and the Mosque, Muslim family life. Many could give suitably detailed explanation of how decoration in a mosque differs from cathedral and why. But ps had difficulty in relating what they knew to their own experiences. Grade 4

PROGRESS:

All ps challenged reasonably well by relevant content. More able gained understanding through answering qs and articulating their ideas and were productive throughout. Less able developed timeline reasonably well and gained most in acquiring knowledge of M's life, but their workrate slackened considerably towards the end of the lesson. Grade 4

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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