

Advice to schools on Issues that may arise in the teaching of Religious Education, Collective Worship or queries to do with religions and beliefs

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Portsmouth SACRE and Religious Education

Portsmouth SACRE Advice document for schools

Portsmouth SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) provides advice to Portsmouth Local Authority on Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship for schools in the area.

This document aims to provide advice for schools to be used with the school's own policies and in partnership with families and local communities. Portsmouth SACRE offers this advice to share good practice across schools and to support them when questions and queries are raised within Portsmouth.

It begins with an overview of the legal requirements for teaching Religious Education and then looks at the issues that schools have sought advice on. The advice is not intended to be a definitive list of all situations, but rather reflects current issues. It is intended that the advice document is reviewed on a regular basis and updated or amended when necessary.

Portsmouth SACRE members have contributed to the information included in this advice document and recommend it to Portsmouth schools. We uphold the right of all children to consider and explore their own beliefs, while being respected by others and being respectful of other beliefs themselves.

The Legal Requirements for teaching Religious Education:

Living Difference III, as the Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, is the legal document to be followed for the teaching of religious education in Portsmouth schools.

It is the statutory framework which defines the matters, skills and processes to guide individual schools developing their curriculum for religious education.

The Education Act 1996, School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Education Act 2002 require that:
□ religious education should be taught to all children and young people other than those in nursery classes and except for those withdrawn at the wish of their parents. Teachers' rights are safeguarded, should they wish to withdraw from the teaching of religious education.
$\hfill \square$ religious education in all community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools should be taught in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus.
□ an Agreed Syllabus should reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions in Great Britain. An Agreed Syllabus must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular
religion or religious belief on pupils

□ an Agreed Syllabus Conference must be convened every five years to review the existing syllabus.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (now the Department for Education) guidance, *Religious Education in English Schools: Non-statutory Guidance 2010*, states that:

"Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. The key document in determining the teaching of RE is the locally Agreed Syllabus within the Local Authority concerned. ... Schools designated as having a religious character are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses. Local Authorities must, however, ensure that the Agreed Syllabus for their area is consistent with Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996, which requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain."

www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010

Schools must also take into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the implications of this for the school. A link to the Act can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf

Time needed for RE in schools:

It is recommended that the following minimum hours should be devoted to religious education and *Living Difference III* planning has been designed with these time recommendations in mind:

□ Reception classes: approximately 36 hours per year	
□ Key Stage 1: 36 hours per year	
□ Key Stage 2: 45 hours per year	
□ Key Stage 3: 45 hours per year	
□ Key Stage 4: 45 hours per year	
☐ Key Stage 5: there is no recommended minimum time allocation.	

The requirement to teach religious education does not apply to nursery classes but it does apply to children in Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Collective worship is not part of the taught day and cannot be considered as part of the recommended time for teaching the Agreed Syllabus.

PSHE should be taught in a distinct way from RE.

For further information on the requirements of the Living Difference III syllabus, including planning and assessment, the syllabus can be found here:

https://re.hias.hants.gov.uk/pluginfile.php/2464/mod_resource/content/1/Living%20Difference%20III%20pdf.pdf

Issues that may arise in schools concerning Religion or Belief

In the first instance it is very important to communicate effectively with parents/carers about Collective Worship and RE. By doing so, many concerns will be prevented. It is also vital for schools to communicate with governors about RE and Collective Worship and to discuss the school's approach on Religious Education (R.E.) and Collective Worship with them.

Where issues arise, Portsmouth SACRE's advice for all schools to consider each query carefully and to recognise that there is variety in how people follow their religious practices or beliefs. Therefore, a school should consult local faith communities where appropriate, Portsmouth EMTAS and legal advice if necessary so that all information is obtained before a decision is made.

In all cases, the first approach should be to check whether there is an established policy in school and to gain information on the relevant religious practice. It is recommended that after having given the issue careful consideration and taken further advice a conversation with the parents/carers takes place and a solution reached.

Dress: clothing and	Examples	Wider considerations
Jewellery	•	
Schools may receive requests from parents/carers asking for their child to wear a particular item of clothing or for adjustment of the school uniform because of religious reasons, cultural traditions or modesty.	Can my child wear a crucifix in school? Can my child wear a Kara to school? Requests may cover the wearing of headscarves or head coverings, religious jewellery, or bracelets connected to religious festivals.	The Equality Act 2010 has some useful advice on uniform which should be considered here. This states that schools need to be careful that they do not discriminate against students because of their religion or belief, among other areas. The act states that "Schools should be sensitive to the needs of different cultures, races and religions and act reasonably in accommodating these needs, without compromising important school policies, such as school safety or discipline". Therefore, it is very important, before anything is done, to hold a meeting with the parents to learn

more about the situation including the reasons for the request and to discuss its impact on school life (for example, safety and discipline. A solution should be sought that is agreed by both sides.

It may sometimes be necessary to seek further advice from the SACRE if it is an area the school is unfamiliar with.

If the meeting is with parents who are Muslim, there is further support and advice in the EMAS' guidance 'Working with Muslim families in Portsmouth'. This is on your school's shared area, if you have membership of EMAS.

EMAS can also provide support for schools working with families speaking other languages and for help in understanding cultural practices.

Visits to places of worship

Portsmouth SACRE recognise that religious communities are able to provide excellent support for RE, particularly for *Group C concepts* in the **Contextualise** step, and for

collective worship.

Examples

Why is my child visiting the local church?
What will they do on such a visit?

Many schools visit places of worship in their local area, such as the mosque, cathedral or Hindu temple which can add

Wider Considerations

The school should decide when a visit will be most beneficial, planning the visit well in advance. It is necessary to check whether the school's policy requirements for visits, including those for safeguarding pupils, have been met for the visit. Not every visitor may be Disclosure

depth to the learning about that religion.

and Barring Service (DBS) checked and, therefore. staffing arrangements should be considered for the visit. The school should give the place of worship a clear explanation of the educational purpose of the visit. the nature and size of the group, and ways in which it is proposed to involve the children. The teacher will also need to provide some explanation about the concept in focus, the unit of work and the place in the conceptual enquiry where the visit fits. If there is any doubt about the response of parents/carers to the visit, the school should inform them in advance of the purpose and nature of the visit and its curriculum context. It is good practice to put your RE policy and Long Term Plan on your school's website, together with your plans for visits for the This year. allows parents/carers to see the educational purpose of such visits well in

It is also good practice to highlight the links to the school's approach to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC) and British Values, as such visits underpin a school's

advance.

		commitment to respect and tolerance of other religions.
Guidance on discussing religions or beliefs	Examples	Wider Considerations
Schools may sometimes need to think about the language children use to address each other and in the wider community to avoid stereotyping taking place. It may need to challenge such language and model the right use of language in school.	Children may say for example "all Christians" or "all Muslims", without appreciating the variety within a religion, or the fact that such comments are rarely true.	A school will need to consider its ethos and whole school approach and consider how it embeds SMSC and Rights Respecting Education right across the school day and afterwards (such as after school clubs).
	Children may also perceive people from a religion as looking similar (for example, assuming someone who is white must be a Christian).	Further information on ways to prevent stereotyping can be gained from the RE network training in Portsmouth.
PE	Examples	Wider Considerations
PE is an area of the curriculum that parents/carers who hold religious beliefs may wish to discuss with a school.	Can my child wear a cross in PE? Can my child adapt the PE uniform so that it covers more of the body? Parents/carers may want to talk about the arrangements for changing or making adjustments to the uniform for example. Schools may also want to consider the arrangements for confect, if a child in	Arrangements for PE need to be discussed with parents/carers and safety concerns talked through. For example if the parents wish a child to wear jewellery relating to their religion (such as a Kara bracelet for a child who is Sikh), the jewellery might need to be taken off or substituted for the activity or covered up with a sweat band. Alternatives may already be available within the school or from the family.
	safety if a child is wearing religious jewellery or giving thought to PE activities if children are fasting for a	Clothing may also need to be removed or adapted to be safe for exercise. If a child wishes to fast (for example for Ramadan)

	religious reason, for example.	then a meeting with the parents/carers is also recommended in order to look at the whole of school life, including PE, lunchtimes and visits outside of school, to consider what to do if the child is not coping well with fasting at any time. EMAS' guidance is sent to all schools annually regarding Ramadan. This and the more general 'Working with Muslim families in Portsmouth' document" will provide further information.
Swimming	Examples	Wider Considerations
	several queries from parents/carers who are concerned about the arrangements for swimming with the school. This particularly covers changing arrangements and swimming with mixed classes of boys and girls.	from it is not allowed. The Portsmouth EMAS team have provided further guidelines on swimming and these can be found on your school's shared area if you have membership of EMAS.
Curriculum	Examples	Wider Considerations
This covers concerns about subjects studied and books read in schools.	Can my child be withdrawn from a science lesson about evolution?	The Equality Act 2010 is very useful here for providing further useful advice for schools. The act

Schools may receive queries from parents/carers regarding a section of the curriculum that they have concerns over.

Typical examples include books with magic or fantasy creatures in them and the study of evolution in year 6 as part of science curriculum.

states that the content of the curriculum is **not** covered by discrimination law, but the way the curriculum is delivered is covered. Therefore fundamentalist Christian who objects to the teaching of evolution in year 6 would not be able to change the curriculum to suit their beliefs. However the teacher must sensitive to such beliefs and not teach in a way that such beliefs are belittled or laughed at.

Absence requests

For example for taking part in a pilgrimage, religious convention or attending an important family occasion (such as in the Roma traditions).

Examples

Can my child have two weeks absence from school to attend a religious pilgrimage?

Such requests may be a part of the religion, such as celebrating Eid-al-Adha, Diwali or celebrating Vaisakhi for Sikhs.

Wider Considerations

Careful consideration needs to be given here as any response from the school must take into consideration the advice from the Portsmouth Attendance Team before responding to any request.

Schools may authorise an absence if it is exceptional and relates to religious observance.

Schools should mark absence, when it is due, to religious observance. The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. Where necessary, schools should seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

It is important to discuss these requests with the

Portsmouth SACRE if you are in any doubt.

It is also important to share with other schools in a local cluster or academy chain what your school proposes to do, as a child's sibling may have been offered something different by another school.

Portsmouth EMAS have further information regarding the Roma tradition in their guidance documents on your school's shared area (with membership of EMAS).

Dietary Requirements

A parent/carer may wish for their child to follow certain dietary requirements because of religious or other reasons.

A parent/carer may wish their child to try to fast or to fast completely during the school day if the child is considered old enough. This may also be the wish of the child.

Examples

Can my child follow a vegetarian diet at lunch time?

This can be a request in several religions, depending on the beliefs of the parents/carers. For example, following a vegetarian diet for many Hindus and a Kosher diet for many Jewish families.

Wider Considerations

It is important to recognise here that every family is different and it should not be assumed that in a particular religion, everyone will request the same considerations from a school. Every religious person will vary in their practice, so some families mav request several things to do with dietary needs, while others may not ask at all.

A discussion is advised as soon as possible to find out what the family is requesting and to consider what is possible for the school. The hot school meal providers and logistics of the school lunch time should also be considered before a decision is made.

Schools in Portsmouth make their own decisions menus. includina whether to offer pork or halal meat. Schools take into account the range of backgrounds their pupils have, and whether a high number have religious food requirements. small minority of schools are pork-free. They may take this decision because to offer pork and non-pork menus would present huge challenges in terms organisation, administration and time, and risk possible errors. It would most likely also add to the cost of providing meals, which would most likely have to be passed on to parents and carers. Some schools offer halal chicken or turkey. Our school catering contractor assures us that it sources all its halal meat from a safe. accredited supply chain which is UK Farm Assured and uses birds that are stunned unconscious before slaughter so they feel no pain.

A meeting with the family is advised and it is recommended that EMTAS attend the meeting if possible to provide further support.

For further support, please see EMAS' guidance 'Working with Muslim families in Portsmouth', on

		your school's shared area if you have membership of EMAS
Collective Worship	Examples	Wider Considerations
Parents/carers who want to withdraw their child from collective worship either selectively or from all worship.	Can my child be withdrawn from the prayer said at the end of worship? A parent/carer might be concerned about their child saying a prayer or singing a hymn or concerned about the content of the collective worship.	
		meditation or joining in a prayer.

The structure of а Collective Worship will also need to be considered as the focus of some Collective Worship may be more of an issue for a parent/carer than others (for example, one that focuses on the Bible rather than one that focuses on school values alone).

Schools may want to consider inviting parents/carers to observe a Collective Worship (not just a celebratory assembly at the end of the week) so that parents/carers can see the structure of a typical Collective Worship.

A church school will also need to consult the Diocesan policy for worship as well as Portsmouth guidelines.

It is also worth reminding teachers that their RE teaching should not involve worship for children – for example, asking them to write a prayer as if they were a member of a particular religion. Children should be invited to respond in a manner that suits them, such as music, writing, art or prayer, while being respectful of a family's beliefs about these activities (for example, some families may not wish their children to draw

		people or animals in their art.
Religious Education	Examples	Wider Considerations
A parent/carer may wish their child to be removed from RE, either selectively or from all of RE.	Can my child be withdrawn from teaching about Easter?	Parents/carers can withdraw children from a part of or all of RE in the school. The school does not need to provide
	This can happen for a variety of reasons, such as concern over a small part of the teaching or a visit or a	additional teaching for this but it does need to supervise children appropriately.
	wish to teach the subject themselves if they have particular religious views.	In these cases, it is always advisable to arrange a meeting with the parents to find out the reasons for the withdrawal. Very often, it is because parents/carers may be unclear about how RE is taught and an explanation of the enquiry nature of RE in the Living Difference III syllabus will help with this.
		It is also recommended that the RE policy, Long Term Plan and plans for visits/visitors are placed on the school's website and talked through with parents on curriculum evening. This has shown to be a very effective way of helping to reduce misunderstandings with parents over the purpose of RE.
		Portsmouth SACRE recommends schools consider as much use of visits and visitors as possible to really enhance the child's learning experience.

Appendix: Beliefs

The following brief summaries are examples of religions that schools may come across. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but a starting point to help schools know something more about a family's religion before meeting with them. There are many training materials available to help inform teachers about the main religions and these are available from the Hampshire RE centre (the contact number is given at the end).

Jewish traditions and beliefs

Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic faiths (the other two being Christianity and Islam) and dates back around 4000 years. It traces its roots back to Abraham and to Moses. Jews believe that there is only one G-d and that all authority comes from the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. The Torah was given to Moses by God. Many Jews will observe the Sabbath laws, which require all work to stop at sunset and the Saturday to be set aside for worship of G-d until sunset again.

Judaism has many festivals and many regard the weekly observation of the Sabbath as the most important. The next most important for many Jews is the period of Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, which are known as the High Holy Days. Schools may also study the festivals of Sukkot, Hanukkah and Pesach (Passover) in their Religious Education lessons.

Christian beliefs

Christianity is founded on the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus Christ, who lived about 2000 years ago in Palestine. Christians believe that God is revealed through Jesus Christ, who is one with the father. Christians believe that the church has passed on the teachings of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. For Roman Catholics, the authority of the church lies with the Pope, for Protestants, the authority lies with the Bible guided by an individual's conscience.

Christianity may attend church each week where Bible readings are a key focus as a guide for how a Christian should live their lives. Christians may attend church at Harvest time, during the period of Advent, Christmas day, Epiphany (celebrated 12 days after Christmas day), during the period of Lent, Easter and on many other occasions during the church year.

Jehovah's Witness beliefs

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in God and believe that Jesus was the son of God, but not God Himself. Therefore, they do not believe in the Trinity. They read the Bible and meet in Kingdom Halls locally. The Kingdom Halls do not have icons, religious pictures or crucifixes on display and children will not want to interact with these in school. They

do not have priests, but have a body of elders who supervise the congregation. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas because they do not believe there is sufficient basis for the celebration of Christmas in the Bible. Therefore, they may request a child is withdrawn from taught RE lessons about Christmas and does not take part in a nativity. At Easter, Witnesses will commemorate Jesus's death, but not his resurrection, so they may not attend all the Easter activities organised by schools. Jehovah's Witness families do not celebrate birthdays, but will give gifts on different occasions throughout the year. They are required to be politically neutral, but to respect the rights and beliefs of others in all areas, including religious beliefs. Part of this may involve a refusal to take part in a national anthem or saluting a flag, as they believe this may have religious connotations.

Muslim beliefs

The foundation of Muslim beliefs are the Five Pillars which bind together all in a worldwide community (the Umma). The pillars are as follows:

- **the Shahadah:** this is the Muslim declaration of faith and is as follows: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (pbuh) is his messenger"
- **Salah:** the requirement to pray five times a day wherever you are at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening. Prayer is always directed in towards the Ka'ba shrine in Makkah and a prayer mat is used commonly. Muslims may pray at home or at the Mosque and the focus for prayer in the community is the noonday prayers on a Friday
- **Zakah:** Muslims give 2.5% of their surplus income to charity and are also urged to donate additional voluntary payments (Sadaqah)
- **Hajj:** Muslims are required to complete a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime, if they have the money and health to do so. This is completed in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar
- **Sawm:** this is the requirement to fast during the Holy month of Ramadan from just before dawn until sunset. The requirement extends to not eating and drinking anything during this time and extends to all Muslims from the age of puberty (unless ill health prevents this).

Muslim religious festivals

The two major Muslim festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha. Eid-ul-Fitr occurs at the end of Ramadan and this celebration marks the end of fasting and involves the first meal eaten in daylight for a month, as well as thanking Allah for providing the strength to fast for such a long period of time. Muslim families may wish to attend a special celebration to celebrate this. It is also seen as a time of forgiveness. Eid-al-Adha is the festival of sacrifice and is the second most important festival for Muslims. It remembers the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)'s

willingness to sacrifice his son when asked to by God. Among Shia Muslims, Ashura is a major religious festival and it is of central importance to them. It commemorates the death of Hussein, son of Imam Ali and grandson of Muhammad (pbuh).

Sikh beliefs and practices

Sikhism is founded upon the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and nine successive Gurus. The 11th Guru is the Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which Sikhs consider the supreme spiritual authority and head of the religion. Practising Sikhs visit the Gurdwara often and they may choose to wear the five Ks of the Khalsa. These are Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb), Kacheera (undergarments), Kara (bracelet) and Kirpan (sword). Sikh families may request that their child wears these when attending school as it is an important part of Sikh identity for some families.

Hindu beliefs and practices

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and is a vast collection of beliefs and practices. There is not one founder or one key religious book, but rather several of these. A key belief is the belief in Brahman, the spirit which is the universe and is present in all living things. Religion for a Hindu is a search for unity in diversity and that each individual can interpret this in many different ways. The principle of Ahimsa (non violence) is a key concept as in the belief in reincarnation, which is a cycle that only ends when an individual discovers his or her essential nature as spirit.

Hindus may celebrate many different festivals and these may vary from family to family. Key festivals include Diwali (the festival of Lights), Holi (the festival of colour and Spring, Raksha Bandhan (celebrating the protection of siblings for each other and the wearing of bracelets to commemorate this) and Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday).

Humanism

Humanists aim to bring non-religious people together in order to help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world. They are people who, therefore, do not believe in God and an afterlife, but instead seem to make the most of the life people have. Logic and evidence are very important in shaping Humanist attitudes, as well as treating others with respect whatever beliefs they may have. Information on Humanist concepts can be found in the *Living Difference III* syllabus and further information on the Understanding Humanism website.

Roma culture and practices

Roma culture is extremely diverse with different groups of Roma having different traditions, beliefs and customs. However, there are attributes common to all Roma, including: loyalty to family; standards and rules; and adaptability to changing conditions.

The Roma do not have an official faith and in the past they typically disdained organised religion. Today, they often adopt the predominant religion of the country where they are living and may describe themselves as "many stars scattered in the sight of God". Some Roma groups are Catholic, Muslim, Pentecostal, Protestant, Anglican or Baptist.

However, Roma do live by a complex set of rules that govern things such as cleanliness, purity, respect, honour and justice. These rules are referred to as what is 'Romano'. Romano means to behave with dignity and respect as a Roma person. Ritual purity rules apply when a mother gives birth to a baby, at puberty and during menstruation. There are many customs around cleanliness, washing of clothes and so on. Young women often live with their mothers-in-law after marriage to ensure that the bride follows the purity laws satisfactorily.

Further Information

There are many teaching materials available from the Hampshire RE Team and these will help add detail to all of the religions and world views mentioned here, as well as other religions.

For further advice, please contact either Dr Patricia Hannam, County Inspector/Adviser for RE, History and Philosophy (Email:patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk) or

Justine Ball, General Inspector/ Adviser for Primary RE (Email: justine.ball@hants.gov,uk).

For further information on planning and teaching packs to supplement your knowledge, please contact Lydia Revett at the County RE Centre (Email: re.centre@hants.gov.uk).

For further information, advice and practical curriculum resources please contact Karen Thomas, Portsmouth EMAS Manager and Lead Adviser Email: karen.thomas.emas@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

For Portsmouth Legal Services please contact: Email: