

OFSTED Reports, Deep Dives, Lenses and Threads

Notes on OFSTED and RE for CW&C Agreed Syllabus 2024

This is a non-statutory part of the syllabus.

OFSTED may look at RE through Personal Development (SMSC, British Values) and Quality of Education which may include a deep dive.

RE Subject leaders need to be aware of two key documents for the planning, delivery and assessment of RE from OFSTED. One is a subject report which was published in 2024 and the other in 2021.

There is an additional document within the syllabus about Personal Development and SMSC.

1) OFSTED National Subject Report on RE (April 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-religious-education>

Factors that contributed to better quality RE in England included:

- Strong teacher subject knowledge
- Access to professional development
- Regular time for RE lessons
- A well organised curriculum containing knowledge chosen by leaders to enable pupils to deepen their understanding term by term

The main findings for RE included:

- The RE curriculum often lacked sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world.
- A superficially broad curriculum does not always provide pupils with the depth of knowledge they require for future study.....in cases where the curriculum prioritised depth of study, pupils learnt much more.
- The RE curriculum rarely enabled pupils to systematically build disciplinary knowledge or personal knowledge.
- The content of some secondary curriculums was restricted by what teachers considered pupils needed to know for public examinations at the end of key stage 4.
- In the secondary phase, most statutory non-examined RE was limited and of a poor quality.
- Where RE was weaker, the knowledge of traditions specified for pupils to learn was overly and uncritically compartmentalised.
- What schools taught was rarely enough for pupils to make sense of religious and non-religious traditions as they appear in the world.
- There was a profound misconception among some leaders and teachers that “teaching from a neutral stance” equates to teaching a non-religious worldview. This is simply not the case.
- In some schools, leaders were rightly focusing on developing the curriculum before considering assessment. However, even when leaders had systems of assessment

in place, these rarely gave them the requisite assurance that pupils were learning and remembering more and increasingly complex content over time.

- Long gaps between lessons hindered pupils' recall. When the timetable was organised so that pupils had regular RE lessons, they remembered more.
- Although a few teachers had received subject-based professional development in RE, the overwhelming majority had not.

The report provides key recommendations for RE in England.

Schools should:

- ensure that there is a distinct curriculum in place for teaching RE at all key stages. They should make sure that this is rigorous and challenging and that it demonstrably builds on what pupils already know.
- carefully select the knowledge they expect pupils to gain to make sense of a complex and diverse world. They should make sure that important content and concepts are clearly identified and sequenced. They should also make sure that curriculums do not contain oversimplifications of traditions, including, where appropriate, non-religious traditions.
- balance the breadth and depth of study of religious and non-religious traditions to ensure that these are collectively enough for pupils to make sense of a complex world.
- ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in RE over time. Leaders in secondary schools should make sure that the curriculum is designed to meet or exceed exam board specifications (rather than being driven by them).
- make sure that curriculums clearly identify how pupils will develop disciplinary and personal knowledge through the chosen substantive content.

We recommend you read this report to understand how OFSTED have found the development of substantive knowledge, ways of knowing and personal knowledge with useful examples. It also shows the importance of teaching the complexities and diversity within a religious and non-religious worldview.

2) OFSTED's RE Research Review (May 2021)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education>

The three different types of knowledge:

- 'substantive' knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions
- 'ways of knowing': pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion.
- 'Personal knowledge': pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study.

High quality RE may have the following:

- A consideration of the knowledge that pupils build through the RE curriculum, because accurate knowledge about religion and non-religion can be beneficial for achieving different purposes and aims for RE.
- High expectations about scholarship in the curriculum to guard against pupils' misconceptions. What is taught and learned in RE is grounded in

what is known about religion/non-religion from academic study (scholarship).

- Carefully selected and well-sequenced substantive content and concepts.
- ‘Ways of knowing’ are appropriately taught alongside the substantive content and are not isolated from the content and concepts that pupils learn.
- A consideration of when pupils should relate the content to their own personal knowledge (for example, prior assumptions).

Ways Of Knowing

The Cheshire West and Chester Optional Units of Work for Primary include a focus for each lesson which is adapted from a scholarly approach within ‘ways of knowing.’ Children maybe learning as sociologists, theologians or Philosophers.

The following styles of questions may help with class discussions.

Theologians	Sociologists	Philosophers
What does this religious concept mean?	How might this artefact be used?	What do I find puzzling about religion and belief?
Why is this sacred text important?	How is this festival celebrated?	How do people decide what is right and wrong?
What is the meaning behind this parable for a Christian?	What does it mean to belong to a church?	How do I think the universe was started?
How do people think the world was created?	What may happen in the daily life of a Hindu?	Why is there suffering in the world?
Why is Easter important for Christians?	How has a particular religious / non-religious group contributed to local or wider society?	How do people respond to issues of poverty and justice?
What is the Trinity?	How may a Sikh show views on equality in the Langar?	Are angels real?
Why do people within a tradition interpret things differently?	What happens at a Humanist naming ceremony?	What happens after death?
What do narratives in a sacred text reveal about the nature of God?	How can the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam be interpreted in different ways?	What does it mean to be ‘human’?
How would a member of the Baha’i explain the unity of God?	What happens in a Gurdwara?	What does freedom mean to me and others?
What did the prophet Muhammad pbuh teach?		What is meant by the ‘sanctity of life’?
		How do Jewish people make decisions based on teachings in the Torah or Talmud?

Personal Knowledge in RE

The RE curriculum does not induct pupils into any religious tradition (in settings where the EIF applies to RE).

- The curriculum helps pupils to become aware of their own assumptions and values.

- The curriculum is designed to include content that helps pupils to reflect upon and develop their own beliefs and values.

Examples of Deep Dive questions for RE

- Explain how you show progression through different year groups of a particular religious or non-religious worldview.
- How are you teaching diversity within a religious worldview?
- How have you decided on the sequencing of your curriculum? How is it ambitious?
- What opportunities have your pupils had for learning RE through visits or visitors?
- How do you explore the OFSTED categories of knowledge in RE through your curriculum delivery?
- How are you embedding substantive knowledge in long term memory?
- How are those in EYFS accessing RE and how are these initial steps built upon in Key Stage One?
- How do your activities in the classroom contribute to your curriculum intent for RE?
- How are you assessing in RE?
- What status does RE have in the school as viewed by different stakeholders?
- How do you develop a love of RE with your pupils?
- How does your RE content prepare your pupils for life in modern Britain?
- How do you inspire pupils to study RE?
- How are staff supported to develop their own subject knowledge?
- How does your RE policy show statutory obligations including the right to withdraw?
- Give an example of a pupil with SEND accessing an RE lessons with adaptations.
- How have your people discussed their own assumptions in RE?
- How are you supporting children to think critically in relation to RE?
- Give me an example of different teaching approaches which ensure children can recall and remember what you taught.
- What would your pupils say about RE when compared to other subjects?

Lenses and Threads

If following the optional units of work for Primary schools you will see lessons listed as learning as Theologians, Sociologists and Philosophers. These are our Disciplinary (Ways of knowing) Lenses as we are learning from that scholarly perspective. In our unit of work on Worldviews we will also be featuring our personal lens (personal knowledge) through some empathy glasses and how our own worldview has been influenced.

We will also have threads weaving through our units of work based around the following three areas.

- Belief and Authority

- Worship, Life Stages and Spirituality
- Equality and Diversity

These will be shown on Worldview Progression Maps which will be published later in the year.