

The Basic Curriculum in Birmingham

Summary of the 2007 Birmingham Religious Education Syllabus

Aims:

The Birmingham Religious Education syllabus takes seriously the overarching aims set out for education as a whole in 1988 Education Reform Act. These are as follows:

The curriculum for a maintained school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

1. Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and
2. Prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life.

In other words, the Religious Education syllabus primarily develops (a) pupils and (b) society. This takes the main focus away from religious traditions as such and sees these traditions more as a means to realising the overarching aims, i.e. **Religious Education develops pupils/society and is not Religious Studies.**

The requirement that the curriculum be 'balanced and broadly based' is addressed by the self-conscious use of faith and religious traditions in complementing other subjects to address the overarching educational aims. Religious Education does not claim an exclusive responsibility for any aspect of the overarching aims of the basic curriculum, i.e. **Religious Education recognises that other subjects also have a responsibility for all of these aims.** A consequence is that Religious Education confines itself to the contribution that faith and religious traditions alone may bring, i.e. **Religious Education does not seek to represent secular humanism and atheism.**

Pupils:

Pupils are seen holistically and as being more than intellects. Five aspects are kept in mind:

1. cognitive (thinking)
2. affective (feeling)
3. conative (willing)
4. Skills
5. social/communal

Society:

A positive view of society and responsibility for the quality of its communal life is to be encouraged.

Key social aspects are:

1. partnership with parents and religious communities
2. reflecting key social values
3. responsibility for social cohesion

Focus:

The delivery of the religious subject matter is designed to cultivate 24 dispositions taught by way of a spiral curriculum over two year cycles. The dispositions have been defined by agreement amongst all religious traditions to be:

- Being Imaginative and Explorative
- Appreciating Beauty
- Expressing Joy
- Being Thankful
- Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment
- Sharing and Being Generous
- Being Regardful of Suffering
- Being Merciful and Forgiving
- Being Fair and Just
- Living by Rules
- Being Accountable and Living with Integrity
- Being Temperate, Exercising Self-Discipline and Cultivating Serene Contentment
- Being Modest and Listening to Others
- Cultivating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging
- Creating Unity and Harmony
- Participating and Willing to Lead
- Remembering Roots
- Being Loyal and Steadfast
- Being Hopeful and Visionary
- Being Courageous and Confident
- Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge
- Being Open, Honest and Truthful
- Being Reflective and Self-Critical
- Being Silent and Attentive to, and Cultivating a Sense for, the Sacred and Transcendence

All religious traditions attempt to show how and where they might contribute to the development of these dispositions.

Teachers:

Teachers are encouraged to take professional responsibility and therefore, within certain statutory limits, are freed to select and use the material from the various religious traditions. This means that whilst they must communicate the Christian tradition they will select other material on the basis of certain principles to reflect the family background of the children, their ages, aptitudes and interests, and use whatever will deepen and broaden their horizons, or whatever will contribute to social solidarity and cohesion in a religiously plural community, i.e. **there is no tick list approach to religious traditions.**

Assessment:

Guidance is provided but there is no statutory requirement to assess pupils according to set levels.

GCSE and A-Levels:

Schools may offer half, whole GCSEs or A-Level courses at the relevant key stages instead of the statutory syllabus provided these reflect the spirit of the Birmingham Syllabus.

Support:

The Agreed Syllabus is supported by:

1. a website - www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk is an active teaching tool, incorporating non-statutory schemes of work and lesson plans, available to all, including religious communities.
2. DVDs - *Faith makes a difference*, with:
 - (a) 48 short films to illustrate how religious communities exhibit or support the dispositions, directed at two levels: 1. initial and 2. advanced,
 - (b) two continuing professional development films, one for primary and one for secondary school teachers.
 - (c) materials specific to Key Stage One.
3. films devised to inform and educate (a) parents and (b) religious communities about the nature and character of religious education to be offered in schools.