



Religious Education
Network
Theology, Philosophy, Religion

ISRSA

Proposed Statutory Guidance for RE

**A Curriculum Framework for
Religious Education in England**

June 2025

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Curriculum Structure

Religious Education (RE) should equip pupils to understand and respond to religious ideas and religious experience of humankind.

This includes a strong focus on understanding religious traditions in their own terms. The academic study of religion is, by nature, pluralistic and inclusive. It involves careful engagement with different traditions and truth-claims that have shaped human identity, culture and moral vision across time. The inclusion of non-religious responses is appropriate where they offer meaningful insight into, or critical engagement with, religious belief and practice.

Legal guidance requires RE to reflect that the principal religious traditions in Great Britain are Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions (Education Act 1996, Section 375). The inclusion of non-Christian faiths and non-religious views, and the professional obligation for teachers not to promote or urge any particular view, is established in practice and supported by legislation (Education Act 1988, DfE 1994, Carrington 2016).

In line with this legal framework and the historical foundations of Religious Education in England, Christianity should be the principal religion studied in each Key Stage (1-4). Christianity should be firmly referenced and explored in depth across the RE curriculum to reflect its significant influence on British history, culture, ethics, and national identity.

At least one additional world religion should also be studied at each Key Stage to provide a broader understanding of religious diversity. Studying a range of world religions promotes religious literacy, social cohesion, and global awareness, all of which are essential in preparing pupils for life in a diverse society and interconnected world. However, there is no requirement in either domestic or human rights law to give ‘equal air time’ to all beliefs. Schools may select a religion appropriate to their context and community, ensuring that all teaching remains academically rigorous, respectful, and focused on fostering informed understanding.

ABOUT ISRSA

The ISRSA affirms that Religious Studies, Theology and Philosophy are academically rigorous subject of vital relevance with a challenging and timeless voice.

We exist to support RS teachers in British independent schools, to provide networking and training opportunities.

We are also the voice for our teachers. We vigorously defend the value of our subject and present our views to educational decision makers.

We carry out cutting-edge research into our subject

We hold a a national annual conference and other smaller regional conferences

We are always keen to welcome new members to our organisation or our Council. Please contact us at admin@isrsa.co.uk if you would like to join.

Our patron is Liam Gearon, Associate Professor in Religious Education at Oxford University.

What Should Be Taught in RE

Britain's religious landscape has changed significantly in recent decades.

A strong RE curriculum enables pupils to explore this with depth and clarity, developing religious literacy and the capacity for thoughtful, respectful engagement with different traditions and beliefs.

Yet RE is not simply about helping students navigate a diverse and changing society. At its heart it invites pupils to grapple with the deeper question of why we are here — the profound ontological question that underpins all human life. Its deeper purpose is to help young people explore the universal human search for meaning, purpose, and truth – a search that theology, philosophy, and religion have engaged with for millennia, offering disciplined, coherent, and time-tested frameworks for exploring. To fulfil this potential, the subject must be academically rigorous, coherently structured, and rooted in the disciplines that underpin it.

A Strong RE Curriculum Should:

- Build secure foundations in earlier Key Stages by focusing on the core, unifying beliefs and practices of major religious traditions
- Introduce diversity within traditions at more advanced levels (e.g. Key Stage 4), including denominational distinctions, schools of thought, and internal debates.
- Ensure that Christianity is studied in depth in every Key Stage. Pupils should also engage with at least one non-Christian world religion at each Key Stage, chosen appropriately for the context and community. These may include Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, or Sikhism.
- Include substantive study across three disciplines:
 - + **Theology** — interpretation of sacred texts and key doctrines/teachings
 - + **Philosophy** — ethical and metaphysical reasoning
 - + **Study of Religion** — beliefs & practices

- Foster understanding of how belief in the transcendent informs moral decision-making, personal identity, and social responsibility.
- Encourage critical engagement with theological, philosophical, and religious perspectives through academically recognised methods of enquiry and reflection.

1) Theology

Theology involves the disciplined study of sacred texts, beliefs and the nature of the divine or the transcendent in Christianity and other major world religions.

TOPICS:

- God's relationship with the world (eg. creation, revelation, covenant).
- Human responses to God (eg. faith, obedience, moral transformation).

SKILLS:

- Interpret religious texts through academically recognised approaches
- Practise exegesis — drawing meaning from texts rather than imposing it.
- Engage with traditional Christian interpretative frameworks:
 - + **Literal:** the narrative story, authorial intent and historical context
 - + **Symbolic:** Use of allegory and typology across scriptures
 - + **Moral:** Ethical guidance, behavioural expectations and practices
 - + **Analogical:** Deeper meanings related to signs, symbols, prophecy and future hopes
 - + **Self-reflection:** Personal engagement and response to theological content

2) Philosophy

Exploration of foundational questions about truth, reality, morality using reason and argument.

TOPICS:

- Arguments for and against the existence of God.
- The nature of truth, justice, and morality.
- Ethical decision-making frameworks.

SKILLS:

- Form, express, and critique arguments using sound logic
- Develop and apply critical reasoning
- Construct and evaluate coherent philosophical positions
- Make sound value judgements
- Reflect on one's own beliefs and assumptions
- Apply philosophical reasoning to contemporary moral and social issues

3) Study of Religion

This strand focuses on the systematic and scholarly study of specific religions and their traditions, (not personal narratives).

TOPICS:

- Core beliefs, rituals, ethical teachings, and historical development of major religions (e.g. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism)
- The diversity of belief and practice and experience within and between religious traditions
- Impact of religion on culture, society, and politics

SKILLS:

- Engage with religious content in an academically rigorous and respectful manner
- Develop religious literacy and critical awareness
- Cultivate a sympathetic understanding of religious traditions in England and globally
- Apply critical reasoning and evaluate claims appropriately
- Recognise the limits of knowledge and distinguish between facts and values
- Build social capital by understanding religion's influence on art literature, music and the development of government and institutions rooted in Christian foundations.
- Reflect personally and ethically in response to religious material, supporting character formation and ethical engagement



Content by Key Stage

The following outlines suggested content to guide curriculum planning. Local SACREs and schools may adapt or expand this structure, using the overarching themes of Theology, Philosophy, and Religion to shape their own coherent programmes of study.

Key Stage 1 (Ages 5–7)

In the early years, pupils encounter religious stories and symbols that introduce core beliefs and moral values in accessible ways.

THEOLOGY

Responses to God as creator:

- the world as good
- people as valuable and responsible
- the idea of prayer and thankfulness
- major scriptural stories about creation

PHILOSOPHY

Foundations of moral reasoning:

- right and wrong
- fairness and friendship
- human nature
- responsibility for the environment

RELIGION

Religious beliefs lived out through worship, festivals and daily practice:

- **Christianity:** God's love; Jesus' birth; resurrection stories; prayer; celebration of Christmas and Easter; simple church rituals
- **+ at least one other religion (as applicable):** Key beliefs about God/transcendent; main festivals and major practices.

Key Stage 2 (Ages 7–11)

THEOLOGY

Concepts of God:

- the nature of God through relevant scriptural passages or stories
- human failure to live well including relevant scriptural passages or stories
- forgiveness/reconciliation/ living wisely (including scriptural passages or stories)

PHILOSOPHY

Concepts of fairness and justice, truth, responsibility:

- what it means to live a good life
- different types of punishment, retribution and rehabilitation, prison, corporal punishment
- difference between civil and criminal law

RELIGION

Religious beliefs as expressed through the lives of key figures, moral teachings & rites of passage

- **Christianity:** The life and teachings of Jesus; Sermon on the Mount; parables and miracles
- **rites of passage:** baptism; confirmation; marriage; death
- **+ at least one other religion (as applicable):** Life and teaching of a founder or significant teacher and main moral teachings/wisdom. Rites of passage.

Key Stage 3 (Ages 11–14)

THEOLOGY

Exploration of sacred texts through historical and theological lenses; looking at a variety of different Christian interpretations of themes such as:

- divine action (miracles)
- prayer: types of prayer
- divine justice
- redemption
- human response to God

PHILOSOPHY

Critical investigation into questions such as these:

- does God exist?
- why is there suffering?
- how do I know what is real?
- where do right and wrong come from?
- what is the mind?
- do animals have rights?

RELIGION

The relationship between beliefs about life after death, morality and religious practices

- **Christianity:** concepts such as judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory. Theological responses to moral dilemmas. Sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, confession, ordination, anointing of the sick, in different denominations; the church year; private and public worship.
- + at least one other religion (as applicable): concepts of death and the afterlife (reward and punishments), religious responses to moral dilemmas. Private and public worship. The religious year/festivals.

Key Stage 4 (Ages 14–16)

If agreed by the school, pupils who are undertaking a full or short course GCSE in Religious Studies may be exempted from the compulsory RE detailed below, as the GCSE courses may fulfil the statutory requirement.

By this stage, pupils engage in critical examination of beliefs, ethical issues, and internal diversity within traditions.

THEOLOGY

Experience and practice of religious experience through the study of scripture and key historical figures:

- conversion
- mystical
- visions
- ordinary and extraordinary
- meditation

Belief in action: study of one influential religious thinker (eg. Martin Luther King) and their impact on society. Debates about authority and interpretation.

PHILOSOPHY

Exploration of key philosophical questions such as:

- what is meant by authority?
- do we have free will?
- what is personhood?
- do we have a conscience?
- does science answer all the questions?

RELIGION

Explore the nature of religious commitment:

- **Christianity:** living as a Christian (eg. living as a monk, nun, vicar, bishop, missionary etc.)
- **The Holy Spirit** – the work of the Spirit in the life of the individual; the fruit of the Spirit; the life of the Spirit in the Church; the Holy Spirit and conscience
- **Forgiveness:** should Christians always forgive or are there things that cannot be forgiven?
- Making sense of suffering
- Study of an influential theological thinker or activist, (eg Bonhoeffer)
- + at least one other religion (as applicable): living as a Buddhist, Hindu, Jew, Muslim or Sikh, through worship, moral action, religious practices



Opportunities for Reflection:

While Religious Education is a rigorous academic discipline, it also opens up vital space for pupils to engage in the human quest for meaning. Through careful study, pupils are given the opportunity to consider life's deepest questions, preparing them for life in a diverse and pluralistic world.

As pupils encounter theological, philosophical, and religious ideas, they are encouraged to consider their life, values and beliefs – but this existential engagement should be developed only in conjunction with a deep intellectual understanding of the subject matter. This ensures pupils are equipped with the intellectual tools necessary to relate content to their own experiences in a meaningful and responsible way. Teachers and pupils alike should reflect on when it is appropriate to connect new learning with prior assumptions. This stage of reflection supports both character formation and ethical engagement

- **Character formation:** through informed study of theology, philosophy, and religion, pupils are supported in developing their own considered view of the ultimate nature of reality. Encountering different religious expressions and the lived experiences of others fosters empathy, humility, and moral imagination. This reflective process contributes to the formation of character by enabling pupils to locate themselves meaningfully in relation to the big questions of life and the beliefs of others.
- **Ethical engagement:** pupils engage with real-world challenges by identifying issues, for example injustice, making reasoned value judgments, and taking informed responsible action. Through this process, pupils begin to develop practical wisdom: the capacity to think and act thoughtfully, ethically and effectively in complex situations.

Conclusion

This framework offers a coherent, balanced, and inclusive model for RE that honours its legal status, pedagogical aims, and academic character.

It equips pupils to engage thoughtfully and critically with the major religious and philosophical traditions that have shaped and continue to influence our world.



ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NETWORK

The Religious Education Network is committed to providing high-quality Religious Education in the UK. We include Faith leaders, theologians, independent organisations, teacher trainers, teachers, members of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education and school governors, drawn from both the maintained and the independent sectors.

Our aims in coming together are:

- To maintain the place of religion, and religions, at the heart of Religious Education
- To support the current legal status of the subject named 'Religious Education'
- To promote National Standards for the effective provision of Religious Education
- To identify, explore and share examples of excellent provision in schools and colleges
- To support the processes which ensure local determination for any RE syllabus
- To provide a forum that links providers, organisations and individuals who share these aims

At a time when there is much public debate about the place and importance of religion and spirituality in society, and in the world as a whole, we believe an exciting and well-grounded religious education is vital for our children's and young people's spiritual and social well-being, with religions themselves at the heart of this.



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