



RE Policy

Adopted by the Board of Directors: June 2023

School Mission Statement

“To create and sustain, with God’s help, a learning, caring and serving community where all people are valued for who they are and who they may become in the light of Jesus Christ.”

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

We call our lessons “Theology” rather than “RE” at St. Bede’s, as we prefer to stress the academic rigour of the subject. As a Christian school, our Christian distinctiveness aims to deliver a “religious education” to all the students in our care. So the whole school delivers “RE”. A distinctively Christian education is not confined to Theology lessons alone. That being said, the subject of Theology stands at the heart of the mission of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church by being in the position to offer Christ to young people so that “they might have life, and have it to the full” (*John 10:10*). Theology seeks to support the school in its mission to develop its young people spiritually and morally, provide them with a basis for choice about Christian commitment, and nurture them in their understanding and respect of the beliefs and practices of other faiths. We engage students in some of the deepest of life’s questions, which means that many of our lessons are discussion-based. One of the wonderful things about Theology is when students come up with startling and perceptive insights into the mysteries of existence. In Theology, students are also very much teachers.

Aims

The aim of RE at St. Bede’s is to provide opportunities for students to:

- develop their religious literacy of the concepts, beliefs, practices, and values of religious worldviews so that they might understand, appreciate, and respect those belonging to other faiths to help form them as global citizens sensitive to beliefs and cultures different from their own;
- develop their Christian religious literacy by exploring the origins, development and diversity of Christian concepts, beliefs, practices, and values as derived from Scripture, tradition, reason and experience enabling them to give a well-informed account of, and response to, the Christian faith;
- appreciate and assess the impact religions can have on individuals and society in the contemporary world; in particular, appreciating how Christianity has shaped the heritage and culture of Britain;
- practise skills of interpreting, analysing, and appraising religious texts, values, beliefs, concepts, and practices to enable them to respond to religious worldviews in an informed, rational, and insightful way;
- engage in theological and philosophical discussion and debate so that they might express, explore, critique, and reflect on their own – and others’ – beliefs, opinions, and values in a safe and mutually respectful environment;
- encounter religious worldviews as lived out by individuals and communities locally and nationally through visiting speakers and visits to places of worship;
- encounter Christian virtues and attitudes such as love for all, justice, forgiveness, self-awareness, and appreciation and wonder to help nourish and sustain them into adult life as confident and flourishing individuals;

- enquire into, and explore, ultimate questions of human identity, truth, God, life after death, moral values, and the meaning and purpose of existence.

The RE Curriculum

Given the unique status of St Bede's as an inter-church school, the KS3 curriculum draws upon the Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus, the 2012 RE Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools, and the Church of England's guidance *Excellence and Distinctiveness*.

Almost all students at Key Stage 4 follow a course leading to a Religious Studies GCSE.

The Theology Faculty makes a significant contribution to the delivery of SMSC in the school, and works closely with the school chaplain and pastoral teams in promoting the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of students.

The Law and Rationale for RE

Ever since the 1944 Education Act, Religious Education has been a compulsory subject in state-funded schools in the UK. This legal entitlement was maintained in the 1988 Education Reform Act which established the National Curriculum (but which excluded RE, classing it neither as a 'core' nor a 'foundation' subject but one which constitutes what is termed the 'basic curriculum'). The latest revision of the National Curriculum (2013) states that it is a legal requirement that:

Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and*
- *prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life*

and

*All state schools... must teach religious education... All schools must publish their curriculum by subject and academic year online.*¹

Nevertheless, parents do have a legal right to withdraw their children from RE lessons or any part of the RE curriculum and the school has a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Where the pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parents want the pupil to receive. These arrangements will be made by the parents; the school is not expected to make these arrangements. RE could be provided at the school in question, or by another school in the locality. If neither approach is practicable, the pupil may receive external RE teaching as long as the withdrawal does not significantly impact on the child's attendance.²

In the case of a request for withdrawal from all or part of the RE curriculum at St. Bede's, the school will wish to discuss the matter with the parents (a) to make sure that their request is based on a clear understanding of what Theology lessons involve, and (b) to make practical arrangements for the supervision of the child. In the first instance parents/carers must put their request in writing to the Head Teacher and Governing Body.

Teachers may also withdraw from the teaching of RE unless they have been specifically employed to teach or lead and manage RE. An application to withdraw must be given in writing to the Head Teacher

¹ *The National Curriculum in England: Framework document, 2013, p.4*

² <http://www.reonline.org.uk/leading/policy/withdrawal/>

and Chair of Directors. Pupils must not miss out on RE lessons because a teacher has withdrawn from teaching RE. The school must make alternative provision for the pupils to be taught RE.³

The rationale for teaching RE at St. Bede's is not solely because the law requires RE to be taught, but is primarily because we are a school with a Christian foundation: therefore, our rationale is neither solely academic. The understanding, appreciation, proclamation, and nurturing of the Christian faith is integral in supporting and confirming the whole school's ethos and mission

to create and sustain, with God's help, a learning, caring and serving community where all people are valued for who they are and who they may become in the light of Jesus Christ.

And so this mission is fully supported – and finds its clearest pedagogical expression – within RE where we make explicit the Christian understanding of life whilst not neglecting all that is true and good in other religions, cultures, and in our own contemporary society. While it is wholly appropriate that Christianity is the main focus in the RE curriculum at a church school, it is also appropriate that we teach other world religions that constitute multi-faith Britain.

The rationale for the Theology Faculty at St. Bede's is essentially a brief summary of the rationale for RE as they are set out in a range of documents: specifically, *Religious Education in Catholic Schools, a statement by the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales* (2000), *The Dearing Report* (2001), *The Non-Statutory Framework for RE* (2004), *Excellence and Distinctiveness* (2005), the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic schools and colleges in England and Wales* (2012), *The Chadwick Report* (2012), the Church of England's *Statement of Entitlement* (2012), and *The National Curriculum Framework for RE* (2013).

The rationale for RE at St. Bede's is to:

1. **create a favourable climate for faith** and “work towards every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ”⁴ by supporting the whole school to provide a distinctive Christian education⁵ through a Christ-centred curriculum;
2. **foster Christian virtues and attitudes** such as love for all, justice, forgiveness, self-awareness, and appreciation and wonder to help nourish the whole child and sustain them into adult life as confident and flourishing individuals⁶;
3. **provide stimulating and challenging learning opportunities** where all students develop the skills, knowledge and understanding required to become successful learners⁷ achieving their academic potential and to engage with religious faith as the search and expression of truth⁸;
4. **present an authentic vision of the Church's moral and social teaching** to challenge, inspire and equip students to become responsible citizens and transform society for the common good by striving for peace, justice and freedom for all, working to build the kingdom of God on earth⁹;
5. **develop respect, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of other faiths** through the study of the major world religions and worldviews to form them as global citizens sensitive to beliefs and cultures different from their own.¹⁰

In spite of recent criticism, RE is a rigorous academic subject in its own right and has its own rationale as set out in the *Non-Statutory National Framework* (2004) and its revision, the *National Curriculum*

³ <http://www.reonline.org.uk/leading/policy/withdrawal/>

⁴ *Going for Growth: Transformation for children, young people and the Church, 2010*

⁵ *The Chadwick Report, 2012*

⁶ *National Framework for RE, 2004*

⁷ *National Framework for RE, 2004*

⁸ *Statement of Entitlement, 2012*

⁹ *Religious Education Directory for Catholic Schools and Colleges in England and Wales, 2012; Going for Growth: Transformation for children, young people and the Church, 2010*

¹⁰ *The National Curriculum Framework for RE, 2013, p.11*

Framework for RE (2013), which complement the distinct rationales for RE in faith schools as evinced by episcopal conferences and synods whose aim is to support and secure the Roman Catholic and Anglican identities of its students. The *National Curriculum Framework for RE* sets out the purpose of RE as follows:

Religious education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education in schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. In RE they learn about and from religions and worldviews in local, national and global contexts, to discover, explore and consider different answers to these questions. They learn to weigh up the value of wisdom from different sources, to develop and express their insights in response, and to agree or disagree respectfully. Teaching therefore should equip pupils with systematic knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews, enabling them to develop their ideas, values and identities. It should develop in pupils an aptitude for dialogue so that they can participate positively in our society with its diverse religions and worldviews. Pupils should gain and deploy the skills needed to understand, interpret and evaluate texts, sources of wisdom and authority and other evidence. They learn to articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ.

In *Excellence and Distinctiveness*, the Church of England's guidance document to the *Non-Statutory National Framework for RE*, the purpose of RE as understood for all schools was set alongside a distinctively Christian interpretation. Although this framework has since been replaced the guidance's comments are still a useful guidance and opportunity for reflection for teachers of RE in Christian schools:¹¹

Lastly, the Roman Catholic Church understands RE as "the comprehensive and systematic study of God, of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the teachings of his Church, the central belief that Catholics hold, the basis for them and the relationship between faith and life; in a manner which encourages investigation and reflection by the students, develops the appropriate skills and attitudes, and promotes free, informed and full response to God's call in everyday life."¹²

¹¹ *Excellence and Distinctiveness*, 2005, p.8

¹² *Religious Education in Catholic Schools, a statement by the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales*, 2000