

Discovery RE[®]

The enquiry approach to
Religious Education



Information for Parents



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What are the aims of Religious Education?

RE aims to give children the knowledge, critical thinking skills, open minded and respectful attitude with which to investigate the world of religion and beliefs, and make their own decisions about what this means to them, whilst empathising with what it means to those who hold those beliefs. It also aims to enable children to grow spiritually by developing their awareness and skills of reflection, their experience of awe and wonder and their appreciation of stillness and silence.

Does my child have to attend RE lessons?

RE is a statutory subject in all schools in England, except for those children withdrawn at the request of their parents. (Education Act 2002, section 80). It is parents' legal right to withdraw their children from Religious Education.

What do schools have to teach in RE?

According to the latest guidance from the government, via the National Curriculum for England, every school needs to have a broad and balanced curriculum that:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, mental and physical development of pupils
- prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life
- promotes British values.

Schools also have statutory responsibility to promote community cohesion (Education Act, 2006), and have to demonstrate that they are “*Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation, from whatever source*” (The Prevent duty – departmental advice for schools and childcare providers”, June 2015). RE plays an important part in enabling these responsibilities.

RE is a statutory subject which sits alongside but not in the English National Curriculum and so there is no ‘official’ national agreement on what should be taught, rather a non-statutory national framework to guide syllabus-writing bodies.

Discovery RE recommends teaching Christianity plus one other principal religion / belief system in every year group, and enables all 6 principal religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism) to be considered by the end of Key Stage 2. It also suggests when it might be most appropriate to bring Humanism into RE learning.

What is Discovery RE?

Discovery RE is a comprehensive enquiry-based, teaching programme for Religious Education for Years F1-6 (4-11 year olds). Our belief is that using this model well, children's critical thinking skills can be developed, their motivation to learn increased, and their knowledge and understanding of, and empathy with people and their beliefs, religious or otherwise, will be enhanced. This approach takes very seriously the philosophy that children are free to make their own choices and decisions concerning religion and belief.



“Without exception they [the children] say they love RE. RE lessons are lively and challenging and pupils achieve the same high standards as those in other subjects.”

(SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspection report)

What is the enquiry approach to RE in Discovery RE?

The 2013 Ofsted report on RE, “Religious Education: realising the potential”, suggests

“using the approach of a philosophical enquiry can deepen and extend pupils’ investigation into religion”.

“In the most effective RE teaching, enquiry is based at the heart of the learning”.

Discovery RE promotes this enquiry approach because it had become evident from teachers and children’s work across hundreds of schools in England, that this motivates in-depth exploration of RE content/subject knowledge in order to answer the big enquiry question. Knowledge is no longer an end in itself, it is now important as the means with which to explore potential answers to the big questions posed in each Discovery RE enquiry e.g.

Is it true Jesus came back to life again?

Does joining a Khalsa make a person a better Sikh?

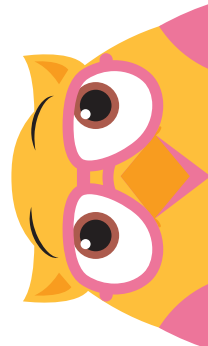
Does belief in Akhirah (life after death) help Muslims lead good lives?

“Pupils say they enjoy discussing ‘Big Questions’ such as ‘Is the Christmas story true?’ and ‘Is it good to fast on special occasions?’ and ‘Is Christianity still a strong religion 2000 years after Jesus was on earth?’”

(SIAMS Report)

The four steps are:

- **Step 1: Engagement:** the children’s own human experience is explored to act as bridge from their world (which may or may not include religion) into the world of the religion being studied.
- **Step 2: Investigation:** over approximately 3 lessons the teacher will guide the children to explore and investigate appropriate subject knowledge relevant to that question of enquiry.
- **Step 3: Evaluation:** An assessment activity enables each child to show their thinking and the depth of critical evaluation.
- **Step 4: Expression:** This refers the children back to the starting point of their own experience and allows them to reflect on whether their findings have influenced their own thinking.



“Using Discovery RE has provided a more structured approach to teaching in this subject. Within RE there is now a recognised progression of skills and attitudes relating to spirituality and moral understanding.”

(SIAMS Report)

How can I find out more information about Discovery RE in my child's school?

Talk to your child's teacher or the school RE leader about how Discovery RE is taught in school and which religions/ belief systems are studied. They will provide you with a curriculum overview and answer any questions you may have. Alternatively, you can talk to the school's head teacher, particularly if you are considering withdrawing your child from Religious Education. If there are some very specific questions that the head teacher or class teacher thinks would be answered best by the Discovery RE team, the school can contact the team directly. Parents and carers are very welcome to visit the Discovery RE website at www.discoveryschemeofwork.com where there is further information including video clips explaining in more detail the ethos and content of Discovery RE.

There you will also find “Success Stories” from schools already using Discovery RE and the impact on children, plus impartial comments from reports under the “Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools” framework (SIAMS). We have recently conducted an impact study analysing the inspection reports of 200 Church of England schools using Discovery RE, to discover what inspectors write about the impact of Discovery RE on teachers and learners. The quotations cited are from this research.

“Children are encouraged and motivated by RE, and therefore demonstrate a desire to find out more about themselves and their own feelings and beliefs.”

