



milton keynes council

RE for NQTs in Milton Keynes

Information to support Newly Qualified Teachers
who are required to teach RE in Milton Keynes



RE for NQTs in Milton Keynes

This information sheet will answer the following frequently asked questions:

- What is RE and why is it taught?
- What do I need to teach?
- What's the best way to teach RE?
- How much RE should I teach?
- What about Secondary school RE?
- Where do I go if I need help?
- Do I have to teach RE?

What is RE and why is it taught?

RE is religious education. RE today is an academic, non-confessional subject. This means that it is not about encouraging pupils or their teachers to be religious or follow any religious tradition or belief. Instead, RE aims to enable pupils to learn about the religious traditions they will encounter in the world around them, while allowing them to ask big philosophical questions and consider their own response. RE is about developing religious literacy – that is the ability to hold balanced and informed conversations about religions and beliefs. All schools have a statutory duty to teach RE to all pupils unless they are withdrawn by their parents.

What do I need to teach?

In maintained and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, RE must be taught according to the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Academies, unless they are former Voluntary Aided (VA) schools, must also teach according to the requirements of a locally agreed syllabus, to 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Education Act 1996). In Milton Keynes, academies are recommended to follow the Milton Keynes Agreed Syllabus. This syllabus for all schools can be found by following this link:

<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/schools-and-lifelong-learning/information-for-schools/sacre/primary-school-religious-education>

The syllabus sets out the expectations for RE across the local authority area for all pupils from EYFS through to KS5. Although it is statutory, the syllabus allows schools quite a lot of freedom in exactly what needs to be taught, and most schools will already have a scheme of work, either purchased or homegrown and that should be a new teacher's first guide.

The syllabus sets out recommended religions to be covered at various key stages.

KS1 – Christianity and Judaism (36 hours per year)

KS2 – Christianity, Hinduism and Islam (45 hours per year)

KS3 – Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism (45 Hours per year)

Additional religious and non-religious world views can be included as appropriate. KS4 and 5 should be following examination courses where possible.

The syllabus does not dictate content, but has key questions for pupils to explore that cover a range of topics. The questions are grouped into three strands: belonging, believing and behaving. These cannot be treated in isolation, and the recommended planning model (p19-20 of the Locally Agreed Syllabus) suggests that questions should be combined and focused onto a topic or concept. The new guidance material (September 2018) gives some examples of these questions.

What's the best way to teach RE?

The Milton Keynes Agreed Syllabus Supplementary Guidance material contains a range of information about how to teach RE. It is available following the same link as the syllabus. An enquiry led way of teaching, starting with a 'Big Question' encourages pupils to direct their own learning, to employ higher order thinking and research skills and encounter a variety of answers. Although it is important to make sure that information shared is accurate, there is such diversity within any one religious tradition that many different answers will be possible. This also means that as a teacher you will not be able to know everything about any faith or tradition. Interpretation, practice and teaching within a faith tradition are not static; individual responses to issues will vary. So, where pupils are bringing their own traditions and interpretations to the classroom allow them to have a voice. Historic positions will also be worth exploring with older pupils.

It is important to use inclusive and open language; for example: some, many, most, sometimes, frequently, rarely and occasionally. Avoid reinforcing stereotypes and allow for diversity.

Effective teaching in RE is no different from any other subject. There need to be clearly defined learning objectives, and activities and tasks should enable pupils to achieve them. All the activities need to link to whichever key concept is being covered.

VA and VC schools will be inspected on their RE and will need to be able to show that they know how well the pupils are achieving, backed up by evidence of pupils' work.

Collecting evidence of pupils' moderated work is important. Although a school's own system for assessment and moderation should be followed, some teachers collate examples of RE work in a large scrapbook that has space for larger pieces of work. Planning the learning through the scrapbook will ensure that there is adequate progression in learning. There needs to be a chance for pupils to return to the 'Big Question' at the end of a unit, so that they can show how their thinking has changed.

The syllabus also contains age-related outcomes (p 30 – 31). These are designed to ensure that the work is sufficiently challenging and will help teachers keep focused on the core ideas and concepts to be covered. Use these to plan the 'big picture' of learning for each year group and ensure that there is progress between year groups.

Assessment needs to be against these age-related outcomes as well as short term learning objectives. How the school tracks achievement is a matter of choice and there are several commercial packages that schools use. It is important that tracking of RE aligns with tracking across the curriculum.

How much RE should I teach?

The Locally Agreed Syllabus recommends that in KS1 pupils should receive 36 hours of teaching a year (about 1 hour a week); KS2 and KS3 pupils should receive 45 hours a year (about 1 ¼ hours a week); and KS4 should have about 40 hours per year even if they are not taking GCSE. In KS5 pupils should receive 6 hours per year.

Lessons can be weekly or RE can be taught in blocks; covering the requirements of the syllabus is the most important thing. When teaching in a block or on a drop-down day at secondary school, it is essential that the RE learning is paramount. Including lots of creative ideas – art, DT, cooking, music or dance etc. is a good thing, but all the activities need to further the learning in RE as well as allowing students to achieve objectives in the other curriculum areas.

Cross-curricular learning can be highly beneficial in RE. A religious text or story can be used as the basis for English work; a discussion on a religious topic can be written up as an English essay; a religious story can be illustrated in art and annotated in the RE lesson, or could form the basis of a composition in music. Retelling a Hindu story in dance, for example, allows pupils to engage with the culture as well.

What about Secondary Schools RE?

The legal requirement is for all pupils at all key stages to have regular RE lessons. The requirements of the Milton Keynes syllabus are that as many pupils as possible should follow an examination course in religious studies (RS), but where this is not possible pupils in KS4 should still be receiving at least an hour a week of dedicated RE (about 40 hours per year).

Likewise, pupils in KS5 in schools, not FE colleges, should also have some continuing religious education. This is most likely to be delivered in day or half-day conferences. The most effective way to ensure that pupils see the relevance of the religious material on offer is by finding religious topics with links to the other qualifications being studied, or to the national and international news.

It is important for pupils at this key stage to continue to learn about the religious traditions that make up British and international society, as they will continue to encounter this diversity in the world of work or at university. The ability to dialogue and debate successfully are skills that need to be refined at this key stage.

Where do I go if I need help?

In addition to the syllabus and the guidance material, there are many organisations to support RE teaching. NATRE and RE Today (www.natre.org.uk and www.retoday.org.uk) are the providers of many good materials and they run training courses. The BBC 'My Life, My Religion' series is an excellent source of information, featuring British pupils talking about their beliefs and practices.

Milton Keynes SACRE and the EMA (ethnic minority achievement) Network can be contacted for local support. A range of places of worship in Milton Keynes welcoming school visits and a list with contact details is available from the EMA Network. SACRE also runs termly RE network meetings for subject leaders and other teachers. They cover a variety of topics and often include visits to local places of worship to meet with faith representatives. Milton Keynes SACRE can be contacted through the Chair, Rev Paul Smith (paul.a.smith.mk@btinternet.com), the Vice-chair, Talvinder Kaur Virdee-Basra (virdeebasra@hotmail.co.uk) or the adviser, Anne Andrews (anne.andrews@oxford.anglican.org)

The Diocese of Oxford also has a website (<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/schools/religious-education/>) containing links to many other resources as well as information about training courses. The diocese has a dedicated RE adviser who can offer support to schools, at a cost, unless they are signed up to the diocesan service level agreement.

Do I have to teach RE?

Legally, unless a teacher has been taken on specifically for the purposes of teaching RE, they can refuse to teach RE. Hopefully, this situation need not arise, as the syllabus doesn't require any personal commitment to a religion, and non-religious worldviews should be referred to as part of the teaching. Please seek advice from SACRE if there are any questions about this.

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