

A SUMMARY OF Ofsted's RE Research Review



AMBITION FOR ALL

A high-quality RE curriculum prepares pupils for success in later life. The ambition for what pupils will be learned needs to be high for all learners - especially the most disadvantaged and those pupils with SEND. Precise and considered curriculum planning will enable leaders to articulate the building blocks that pupils will be taught so they can achieve ambitious end goals.

PILLARS OF PROGRESSION

The three pillars of the curriculum are: substantive knowledge, ways of knowing, and personal knowledge. Whilst each of these areas need considering in their own right, it is not advised to treat them separately in terms of organising content as there is significant interplay between them throughout the curriculum. Collectively, progression in these areas constitute what it means to 'get better at RE': to 'know more, and remember more'. Leaders must be aware of the different types of knowledge so that their planning does not lead to pupils developing misconceptions.

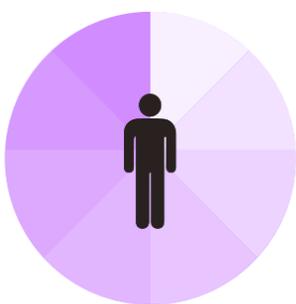


SUBSTANTIVE KNOWLEDGE

This is the knowledge about religious and non-religious traditions. It includes: the different ways people express their beliefs; the artefacts and rituals associated with religious and non-religious traditions; and concepts which relate to religious and non-religious traditions. When planning the precise detail of the curriculum, leaders should include both the rich knowledge components and the connections between these components, as both need to be taught to pupils.

WAYS OF KNOWING

Pupils also need to be taught how to know about religious and non-religious traditions: the scholarship of RE. This is the disciplinary knowledge of RE. Pupils should be taught how to understand how the substantive knowledge came to be, how to interpret the accuracy and validity of claims being made, the differences between conceptions and misconceptions, and the types of methods used in enquiries, including the suitability of these methods.



PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

This is the growing knowledge of how pupils' own values and beliefs connect with religious and non-religious traditions. It is important not to conflate this with citizenship or PSHE. Pupils will build this knowledge through reflection of how their own viewpoints relate to the 'life worlds' or religious and non-religious traditions. When leaders select content to provoke this, they should choose concepts which are highly relevant, such as meaning and purpose, justice, and values.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

It would be impossible to try to teach everything, and so what is taught needs to be understood as a representation or reconstruction of a religion or non-religion. This means that representations need to be considered carefully, as they will shape the learners' perceptions of religions based on the content that it taught. The content should progressively lead pupils to develop a mental model of religions and non-religions which enables them to grapple with their global and complex nature. Content should not be excessive, but should be cumulatively sufficient for pupils to achieve the ambitious end goals of the curriculum.



ACCURATE REPRESENTATIONS

Leaders must plan for precise and accurate representations of religions and non-religions to avoid pupils developing misconceptions.

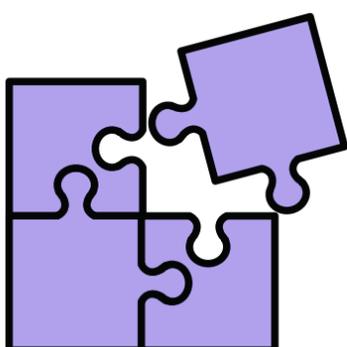
Representations should enable teachers to teach without promoting a particular tradition or avoiding less pleasant aspects of traditions.

Generalisations can be problematic as they can portray traditions inaccurately. Conversely, generalisations might be a useful teaching approach in primary so that pupils can then build on these ideas to understand the nuance of traditions and beliefs. Modifiers such as 'many' and 'some' are important to avoid developing stereotypes.



DEPTH VS BREADTH

Although curriculum content should teach the variation and diversity in religions, breadth in itself is not enough. Leaders should plan for pupils to learn in-depth content as this helps them understand the bigger picture of religion and non-religion. Pupils may achieve deep understanding through having multiple encounters with examples of complex concepts, and by building their knowledge cumulatively so that they have sufficient understanding to learn about some of the more in-depth content. A focus on themes - such as 'traditions' - can be problematic, as it can fail to provide learners with sufficient knowledge, leading to superficial understanding and stereotyping.

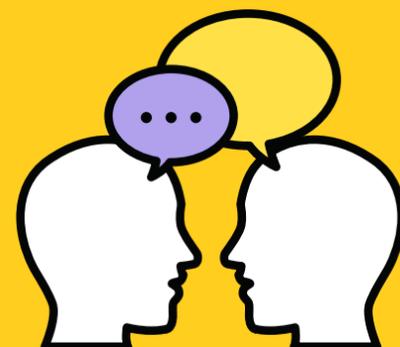


SEQUENCING AND CONNECTIONS

High-quality curricula are **coherently planned** and **well-sequenced**. The curriculum should prepare pupils for what they are going to learn next, as well as build on what they have previously learned. Secure prior knowledge is important so that pupils can integrate new content with their existing schema. Leaders should also detail the connections between components of knowledge that pupils should also be taught. Sequencing is also important for teaching about sensitive and controversial topics. Pupils should have wider conceptualisations of religions and concepts before address controversial ideas. This learning might come from other subjects, too.

PEDAGOGY

There are different definitions of pedagogy. The Education Inspection Framework considers the pedagogy of RE to be the classroom procedures, methods, and strategies that are used to implement the curriculum. The successful implementation of the curriculum depends on selecting appropriate methods for pupils to learn the intended content.

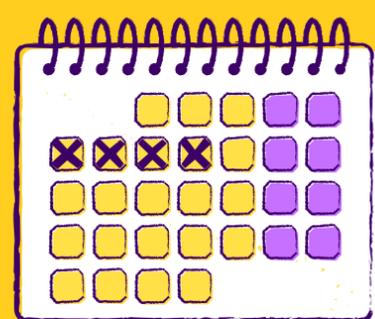


TEACHING METHODS & ACTIVITIES

Teaching methods are effective when they enable pupils to 'know more and remember more'. Learning activities are suitable when they reinforce learning of the curriculum 'object'. It is important for teachers to be clear about the 'object' of the curriculum that they want pupils to learn about. By being clear and precise with their expectations of what pupils will learn, leaders can enable teaching to link with the curriculum goals successfully.

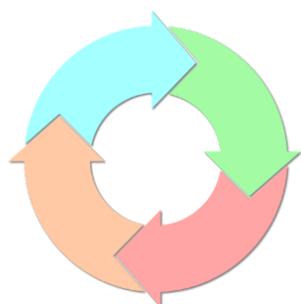
RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

Retention of crucial knowledge - such as particular concepts and vocabulary - is an important consideration. Retrieval practice, in its many shapes and forms, is an effective way of achieving this. It is important that the right tools for retrieval practice are chosen based on the type of knowledge being retrieved. Some methods are suitable in some contexts and inappropriate in others. Sometimes, activities themselves enable recall, such as when pupils draw on prior understanding to make comparisons.



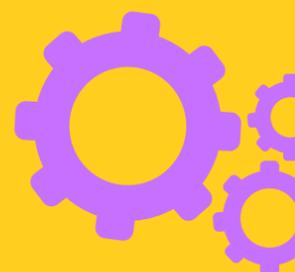
ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be used **sufficiently** but **not excessively**. **Formative** assessment allows for adaptive teaching and benefits the pupil in terms of the feedback they receive. AfL provides a very clear feedback loop for teachers. **Summative** assessment often ties to whole-school monitoring of pupil progress. When treating the curriculum as a progression model, summative assessment seeks to determine how much of the curriculum a pupil knows and can remember.



SCHOOL SYSTEMS

If a school classifies RE as a discrete subject in its own right, it is likely this will prevent the content being diluted or receiving less attention than necessary. It is important for schools to consider whether the time they allocate to RE is sufficient to deliver a curriculum with an ambitious scope. Schools should also ensure that teaching staff are well-prepared to teach RE as those with a secure subject knowledge, who can foster a love for RE with pupils, and can address misconceptions, are the teachers who should be teaching RE lessons.



CPD

It would be beneficial for teachers at both primary and secondary to develop in 4 key areas: RE policy, RE content knowledge, RE pedagogical content knowledge, and research in RE. Learning and development in these areas is likely to benefit the quality of teaching and learning in RE across a school.

This is a very condensed summary of the research review conducted by Ofsted into high-quality RE curriculums. I have provided a more detailed summary on my website which explores these themes in more detail, though I would definitely recommend reading the entire review and accessing some of the materials on Ofsted's YouTube channel. All links are on my website.