

Hillingdon Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2026

Hillingdon Locally Agreed RE Syllabus

A. Who are we in Hillingdon?

Hillingdon is proud to be culturally diverse, celebrating being represented within our communities by a wide range of traditions and belief systems, both religious and non-religious, as reflected in our schools.

We are aware that everyone has an individual worldview, and these are influenced and impacted by organised and/or institutional worldviews, and for some, this includes a religion [\[1\]](#).

For example, similar to the national picture according to the 2021 census [\[2\]](#), of those who responded, 43% of our community identifies as Christian, and 10% as Muslim. We also have representation of Buddhist and Hindu religions (1%) as well as Jewish, Sikh and others (<1%).

Meanwhile, again reflecting the national picture [\[2\]](#), we also have an increasing proportion of residents who do not identify with any religion at all.

We are keen to celebrate our diversity and positive coexistence and empower our future generations to positively contribute to this cultural synthesis.

B. Why is there a Hillingdon Locally Agreed Syllabus?

By law, each Local Authority (LA) must convene a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). This council is made up of four groups, including representation of teachers from our schools, as well as members of various religious and non-religious groups in our community.

One of the duties of Hillingdon SACRE [\[3\]](#) is to determine how Religious Education (RE) is taught in the borough's schools, and to advise the Department for Education (DFE) and the LA about its provision.

We have therefore outlined our expectations for high-quality Religious Education in this Locally Agreed Syllabus. It remains a legal requirement for Hillingdon SACRE to review the contents of this Locally Agreed Syllabus within a maximum of 5 years from the date of publishing.

It is a statutory requirement [\[4\]](#) for schools (other than voluntary controlled schools of a religious character, or academies where specifically stated in their funding agreements) to provide a curriculum that is 'broad and balanced' and consist of: a) religious education and b) the National Curriculum. The curriculum provided must 'promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, mental, and physical development of pupils' and 'prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life'.

It is, therefore, the duty of the Head teacher or school leader to ensure RE be taught according to this Syllabus for all their pupils on roll from reception classes up to and including sixth form, except when withdrawn by their parents.

RE remains a legal requirement [\[4\]](#) for pupils in KS4 and KS5, and special schools are also required to provide RE 'so far as is practicable' (section 71(7) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998).

This Syllabus has been designed with the expectation that RE should account for a minimum of 5% of annual curriculum time, broadly equivalent to:

36 hours at Key Stage 1

45 hours at Key Stage 2

45 hours at Key Stage 3

40-48 hours at Key Stage 4

At Post 16, there should be a minimum of 15 hours a year of RE.

It is imperative that RE specific curriculum time is not confused or conflated with other subjects, although it is acknowledged that its content may support and contribute towards other areas, such as Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC), any Personal Development Programme and Character Education, as well as other curriculum subjects such as Personal Social and Health Education and Citizenship (PSHE). In addition, when timetabling lessons consideration should be given to ensure regular RE lessons so pupils can remember more [\[5\]](#).

Collective Worship is also a separate statutory requirement, and therefore time used for this should not be included in RE allocation.

Schools are required to report to parents on pupils' progress in RE annually and in accordance with the structure in this Syllabus. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE as per the School and Standards and Framework Act 1988. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from RE under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. They may also request that their child be excused from attendance at collective worship. Schools should not incur additional costs as a result of such requests, and parents are responsible for making appropriate alternative arrangements for their child during the time they are withdrawn.

Teachers also have the right to withdraw from collective worship on the grounds of their religious conscience.

These provisions do not apply in the same way to voluntary aided schools, academies and free schools with a religious character, where RE may not be governed by the locally agreed Syllabus. Nevertheless, such schools are encouraged to provide a broad and balanced programme of learning of religions and worldviews, drawing on the locally agreed Syllabus to ensure consistency. This approach is supported by guidance such as the Statement of Entitlement to Religious Education published by the Church of England Education Office [\[6\]](#).

It is also SACRE's intention that this Locally Agreed Syllabus will:

Establish entitlement:

This Syllabus sets out the entitlement to learning RE for all pupils in community and voluntary controlled schools in the borough, whatever their background, culture, race, religion or belief, gender, academic or learning ability.

Establish standards:

This syllabus clearly sets out the expectations for learning and standards of attainment in Religious Education and Worldviews for the benefit of parents, teachers, governors, employers and the wider public. These standards should be used to plan, sequence and monitor learning, to support assessment for learning and to set targets for improvement and evaluate the progress towards them.

Promote continuity and coherence:

This syllabus has been designed to provide continuous and consistent learning in the subject, ensuring coherent transition of pupils between phases and stages of education and between schools and can provide a foundation for further study and lifelong learning.

Promote public understanding:

The Syllabus aims to increase public understanding of, and confidence in, the work of schools in the subject of RE. It recognises the extent to which local stakeholders (religion and belief communities, teachers, local Councillors and the LA) are already involved in defining, monitoring and advising the RE curriculum in schools through Hillingdon SACRE and the Hillingdon Agreed Syllabus Conference. It also encourages those who are interested to participate in enriching the provision of RE, for example through contributing to visits to places of worship and providing speakers from a range of belief and faith communities that reflect the broad cultural demographic of the borough.

With Teachers, For Teachers

Our SACRE is well supported by Hillingdon Council and particularly the Education & Lifelong Learning Education Improvement & Partnerships, Children's Services, London Borough of Hillingdon, who reflect our desire to include more teachers' voices and experiences for the revision of the Syllabus to be in our schools. Further to this, we are also determined to respect the privilege for each borough to devise a bespoke Syllabus that meets the needs and reflects the make-up of their individual community whilst empowering the teaching staff in its schools.

Therefore, an additional intention of this Syllabus has been to work in collaboration with more schools in the development of this statutory Syllabus and has led to continuous professional development in RE for many of our Subject Leaders. In turn, this will support the effective implementation of any new RE curriculum, and lead to a continued improvement in the quality of delivery of this subject.

C. What are our aims for Religious Education?

Through their RE learning in schools, pupils should gain a positive understanding of how our community may be influenced and affected by religions and other belief systems, enabling them to appreciate the multicultural and multifaith society that we live in today.

We are keen for our pupils to gain an understanding of what is meant by a worldview [\[7\]](#) and consider how people's worldviews may be formed and expressed, influenced or changed. We believe it is important that pupils develop an appreciation of how their own and other people's individual worldviews, both religious and non-religious, may relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews, and to understand the reasons for diversity both within and between religious and non-religious worldviews.

This means that pupils should be exposed to the disciplines and fields of study which will help them to explore their own and other religions and worldviews, including a focus on the lived experience of people, and be supported to develop the skills of enquiry, investigation and dialogue.

This is necessary if we want Hillingdon pupils to celebrate our diversity and positive coexistence and be empowered to positively contribute to this cultural synthesis themselves.

However, we are mindful that any curriculum can only include 'cumulatively sufficient' understanding [\[8\]](#), and not total coverage: no 'religious' person, even those who have dedicated their life to study, would likely acknowledge they understood all there was about their own faith or religion, let alone other people's.

Therefore, the content for any Religious Education curriculum should be chosen which best allows pupils to interact with each other and collaboratively to explore responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience [\[9\]](#). By focussing on wider, more meaningful questions, this ensures more inclusive learning, inviting and engaging with responses from both religious and non-religious perspectives [\[10\]](#).

Whilst there is a requirement to reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian [\[11\]](#), we are also aware that there are more religions and worldviews that may be represented in our community even beyond the religions named in the British census. Therefore, the curriculum should also include other religious traditions (e.g. such as Zoroastrian, Bahá'í, Jain, Rastafarian) where exploration of differing viewpoints will provide an even broader perspective for pupils to reflect. [Please see Section E.](#)

By exploring their own and others' worldviews, pupils gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. This not only helps them to value themselves but also supports their wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Meaningful RE should inspire pupils with curiosity and imagination, develop their skills of communication, interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation when exploring and testing their own and others' beliefs or responses to ultimate or 'Big' questions in a respectful and disciplined manner.

RE, therefore, contributes more than 'cultural capital' [\[12\]](#) to a school curriculum: it effectively enables higher level achievement through the development of conceptual thinking and reasoned critical analysis. In these ways, the subject should provide 'sufficient substance [\[8\]](#) to prepare pupils to live in a complex world'.

D. How can we promote meaningful Religious Education?

We have defined below the key components or principles for meaningful RE learning and have explained why these are felt necessary to reflect and encompass the aims as described above.

1. Learning in RE should be an active **enquiry process**, requiring pupils' engagement with information being more than just a superficial recalling of it.

Simply recalling the life story of Jesus does little to help pupils to understand how someone may believe Jesus is the Son of God, nor how this relationship might affect their life. Instead, pupils should be able to use a variety of disciplines to develop skills in interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation, in order to not just recall what some believers may do or say or wear but have a better understanding of the '**why behind**'.

It is when considering the meaning 'behind' that more meaningful connections and similarities between people and communities can be made.

2. Therefore, we propose enquiries should be based around a **key concept** or idea that allows exploration of a range of responses to fundamental and **meaningful questions** raised by human experience.

Pupils remember information better when it is grouped together or underpinned with a linking idea. However, the grouping of information should be deeper than their 'visible entities' [\[8\]](#) such as buildings, clothing or shapes and symbols. This may also lead to over-simplistic assertions about religious traditions. If we want learning to be more meaningful, then the focus should be on understanding the meaning behind the items, not just recalling what they looked like and with which religion they connect.

For example, rather than comparison of information about superficial similarities and differences between scriptures from different religions, pupils could perhaps instead be exploring the concepts about authority and sanctity. *Why are certain texts more important to some people? How are they treated differently, and why? What does holy mean, and how can an item be holy? Is this the same reason for all these texts, or do some believers have a different understanding about what makes something special or holy?*

“ The anchoring concept... is a powerful tool to plan RE curricula, as it moves us away from substantive only knowledge and towards meaningful, relevant, real and responsive curricula ... enables us to plan units of learning that enquire into relevant ideas which frame human existence and experience, and are therefore relatable by all or most people, and to dig deeper or more meaningfully into religious and non-religious worldviews.

Without the anchoring concept, the substantive knowledge is not 'hooked' or attached to meaningful ideas, and simply becomes ... unconnected pieces of knowledge, preventing meaningful schema to be built about the lived worldviews of people that we seek to teach to our pupils, which ultimately equips students to engage meaningfully in our multi-religious and multi-secular society. ”

Ria Searle, Northwood School

If we limit learning only to 'things' (e.g. books, buildings, pilgrimage) within only 'six world religions' (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism) then we are not helping pupils to appreciate why there are different worldviews and religions in addition to these. Instead, by exploring the underpinning concepts, we can help pupils develop an appreciation of how beliefs and attitudes on the nature of humanity, the world and our place within it have evolved over time. This can be achieved through the study of both religious and non-religious worldviews, encompassing contemporary and historical perspectives from across Europe and beyond, including those rooted in the ancient world.

'With challenging questions that religions seek to answer' [8] we are more likely to inspire our pupils' curiosity, imagination, and engagement. Broadening an enquiry through identifying the underlying concept allows a wider range of ideas and beliefs, including the non-religious, to be explored, in turn providing more opportunities for self-reflection. Therefore, this should lead to more meaningful interpersonal dialogue and in the longer term, engender a deeper respect for others and boost a sense of self-worth.

“Let's take an example question we may see in some curriculum materials: '*what happens at a wedding?*'

This suggests that the learning should be based around the features (words, actions, items) in a wedding ceremony, and we can imagine that checking pupils' understanding will be limited to recalling these features and perhaps even identifying some similarities and differences between those in different religions and worldviews.

However, this learning, with the focus on a 'theme' at the centre, would miss out the meaningful questions about the 'why behind'. Surely, a more meaningful enquiry would encourage pupils to critically think about how a person's beliefs may be reflected or shown through modern relationships and in particular marriage as a concept in a globalised world.

To help pupils explore this concept we could be asking pupils to instead consider: *What is the purpose of marriage?*

Is marriage for everyone? Should marriage be till death us do part? What do some believe is sacred about marriage?”

Sally Nathan, Vyners School

3. All enquiries must allow pupils to consider their own **worldview** and consider how all worldviews, both personal and organisational (i.e. a religion), can change or be influenced and how these may perhaps even influence others. This is why conceptual learning is important, and not 'themes.'

This further highlights the need to not just move away from only 'covering' facts and information from within the 'six world religions', but to also ensure inclusion of even wider scopes and lenses, including non-religious worldviews. For example, an understanding of history and geography may help pupils gain an appreciation that religions are not static: that they may look different around the world, and may be affected by historic events, technological advances or changes in societal attitudes.

By exploring the idea that worldviews (and religions) start with people, we can help pupils recognise the value, importance, benefits and challenges of diversity, both between religions and worldviews, and within them.

4. For this reason, wherever possible, pupils should engage with **original source materials** and examples which originate from the worldview or religion they are investigating. These may include:

- A range of written and spoken religious and non-religious sources for study and extended writing (including texts, stories, poetry, diaries, prayers, liturgy, worship, religious and sacred texts).
- Visits and trips relating to places of worship or with special meaning/relevance for specific belief systems and religions.
- Artefacts, items, material sources used within religions, faiths or worldviews, that have or are used to express special or religious values or beliefs.

Firstly, by using those derivatives of the religion/worldview allows pupils to interact with the ideas, beliefs and words which are legitimately drawn from within the worldview or religion itself, and therefore use and understand the language and vocabulary these believers themselves may use [\[13\]](#). This in turn, will mean that pupils are more likely to use the correct language in their own learning.

This may also include the use of **etymology**, and the understanding of why certain words may or may not be used may be incredibly helpful in helping pupils to understand key ideas of believers from a particular religion or worldview. Furthermore, by appreciating the similarities and differences in beliefs, it should drive the pupils to show respect for those who may hold them, irrespective of their own belief. [\[14\]](#).

For example, recognition that 'Christ' is a reverential term and not Jesus' surname, can also engender sensitivity to others by avoiding its use when speaking to/about other believers' understanding of Jesus, such as a prophet or a historical figure. Similarly, many Jewish people would not use the term 'Old Testament' when referring to their scriptures, as for them the original testament, covenant or promise with God has not yet been fulfilled. This is a belief held by some Christians, and therefore this terminology should only be used when speaking about or within the Christian religion.

By examining original sources from *within* religions/worldviews, rather than external texts *about* them, we can ensure that we too can use the correct **vocabulary** in the learning.

Rather than running the risk of confusing pupils' understanding with another person's interpretation, we should instead allow pupils to explore the source materials themselves to hone their skills of interrogation, interpretation and application, in order that they can develop their own understanding of what is being expressed. We can then give pupils the opportunity to reflect on how they have come to or derived their understanding, and how this may differ to their peers' and believers themselves and thus be given the opportunity to reflect on their own positionality. In other words, *is there something from their own worldview or personal experiences that has enabled them to gain a particular understanding of/from the source material itself?*

This part of the learning process is important, as it not only provides a chance for any misconceptions to arise and be explored, but it also deepens pupils' appreciation of how worldviews- including their own- might be impacted and influenced.

Furthermore, it recognises the importance of deploying '**personal knowledge**' (as referred to by Ofsted [\[8\]](#)) or their own worldviews in the understanding of other people's responses to key ideas or concepts, or the 'substantive knowledge', through the process of enquiry and by making use of different 'ways of knowing.'

5. Therefore, all three **types of knowledge** should be present and used interactively during enquiry learning that is not based on simplistic recalling of superficial factual information. See **Section F**.

“ We can visualise the learning we want to see in Religious Education as a flower. If the main concept or big idea we wish them to understand is the pistil in the centre, then we may select a range of varying responses from different religions and worldviews to help exemplify how this concept may be understood by others. This substantive knowledge could be represented by the petals.

A flower can be appreciated more than just visually, and we have already identified strong Religious Education as requiring more than simple recall of any substantive information. In the same way we may smell, touch, handle, or even eat some parts of a flower, pupils will need to develop their disciplinary skills of enquiry when actively examining and exploring the substantive knowledge (through a range of ‘ways of knowing’) to gain a deeper understanding of the concept these ‘petals’ surround.

The stem of a flower then might be representative of a pupils’ own personal worldview. This knowledge is used to help them make sense of the substantive knowledge. In the same way their understanding will increase throughout the exploration of these petals and ideas, so too does a stem strengthen as a flower grows.”

6. Bearing in mind the principle that RE should focus on people rather than ‘things’, pupils should be encouraged to recognise that every religion or worldview encompasses a diversity of individual beliefs, experiences and perspectives within it. When examining source material in response to a key question or concept, care should therefore be taken not to present beliefs or practices as though they are understood, interpreted or lived in exactly the same way by everyone within a particular religious or worldview community.

Even in younger years, when appreciation of the reasons for **diversity** have yet to be explored, language used in lessons by and with pupils should always reflect that we can only consider how ‘some’ and not ‘everyone’ identifying with that belief system may respond.

E. How can we plan an effective curriculum for meaningful Religious Education?

7. The purpose of a RE curriculum is to explore key ideas or concepts through the investigation of various responses to meaningful questions. This should ultimately lead to a **bigger picture** of some religions or worldviews themselves, as well as to gain an appreciation of what is meant by a worldview, and how these may impact on the life of a person- whether religious or not.

Whilst we maintain that the law requires a curriculum to reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian [\[11\]](#) it does *not* automatically mean that the curriculum must include a specified amount of time for this, or any other specific religion or worldview.

Further to this, we are mindful of published evidence where a curriculum has tried to ‘cover many religions, like slices of a pie’ [\[8\]](#), resulting in pupils generally being able to remember very little. We have already mentioned that we cannot expect pupils to finish school with a complete picture of a religion or worldview. However, over time and as they progress through the curriculum, pupils should gain a sense of what a religion or worldview may be, having examined several key concepts and beliefs and how these may be reflected in the lives of some believers. This means that a curriculum should be planned so pupils are encountering examples of a particular religion or worldview more than once.

Moreover, in order for this learning to ‘stick’ in pupils’ memories, their encounters with these religions and worldviews need to happen more regularly than once a Key Stage, once a year or, worse, only once in the entire curriculum, so pupils are revisiting examples or aspects of a particular religion or worldview. For this reason, and for the others stated earlier (Section **C**) *we do not condone the study of one world religion per unit/mid-term plan in isolation*. This structure will not meet the aims of how RE is taught, as specified in this Syllabus.

8. A curriculum must also ensure the **continuous building and deepening of conceptual learning** and understanding. Every task, activity, lesson and unit should be building on and connecting the learning from the previous, so that pupils' understanding is building on, and connected to, the constant increase of 'complexity and demand' over time.

A curriculum should be designed so that pupils are not just encountering more information at the same level each new unit, for example, as a series of themes. The substantive knowledge is not just the 'petals' but also their understanding of the concepts or 'pistils' of the flower (see **Section D5**). This learning must also be sequenced so that pupils' understanding of these also deepens over time.

For example, in order for pupils to meaningfully respond to the question 'Why do some Muslims believe that certain people may go to Heaven when they die?' and explore the concepts of judgement and morality, they will first need a solid understanding, not just a superficial recall, of beliefs about Allah as God, as creator, as the giver of an eternal soul, as well as an understanding of how a Muslim might determine good and evil.

Therefore, great care must be given to how the RE curriculum is structured. Pupils will need an informed understanding of these concepts and opportunities to reflect how these not only affect each other, but how they might compare with other religions and worldviews, including their own. This cannot all be achieved within a single unit or scheme of work, but only as part of a planned and sequenced learning journey.

9. As pupils progress through a curriculum, it is imperative that they understand which prior learning is linked to the current topic, how it will build upon, the new knowledge that will be imparted and its connections to previous content, as well as to the pupils themselves.

A curriculum is not simply a series of individual, independent units or topics. If we imagine each stage/step as a flower (see **Section D5**), then through a curriculum we are intending to create a bouquet. Pupils need to remember what they have learnt previously for it to be included in the bouquet.

Learning in one year needs to be more demanding than that of previous ones, not just in providing more surface layer information for pupils to remember or repeating similar activities which do not advance the thinking and understanding any deeper. A well-planned learning journey should be sequenced so that pupils' understanding of concepts, which increase in depth, breadth and complexity over time, should also reflect the increasing expectations of their 'ways of knowing' and skills in handling, interpreting, analysing, comparing, connecting and expressing the further substantive and personal knowledge they have gained.

10. Thought should be given in how this progression in learning might be demonstrated or evidenced, checked, recorded and reported both formatively and summatively. Any **assessments** need to incorporate acknowledgement of pupils' skills in 'ways of knowing' as well as identifying whether their understanding of the substantive knowledge and of the concepts underpinning their learning is proceeding as expected.

There need to be repeated opportunities throughout the curriculum for demonstrating and checking learning, not just at end of a unit, year or Key Stage. This Syllabus sets out a Progression Spectrum (**Section G**) which provides higher level or overarching age-expected objectives. By law, schools should be reporting at least annually in accordance with these.

Schools can use this to derive appropriate subject-specific expectations of learning for their own RE curriculum. These should relate specifically to the content within it and be clear and explicit for teachers and pupils to understand what learning is expected, and how this can be shown.

11. As pupils will be exploring content through enquiry and in response to meaningful questions, it is suggested that **questions** can also be used to define the intended learning for the unit/mid-term period, as well as for individual lessons and sessions or steps in learning.

Thought must also be given to how pupils can be supported in recalling prior learning, so that they are able to connect and extend this with new knowledge at every stage of their learning. Certain types of questions may be used to support pupils in recalling prior learning of key vocabulary and layers of substantive information.

‘Open’ questions that relate to the subject-specific content and allow pupils to make their own connections are often more engaging, and can help to stimulate curiosity, trigger memory, inspire initial and personal responses from the pupils themselves, whilst also promoting dialogue. Dialogue is one of the key ‘ways of learning’ recognised to help build, connect, check and consolidate understanding in the subject. These questions therefore provide more opportunities for new learning to ‘stick’ and can sometimes also reveal any misconceptions held by pupils.

Pupils should be encouraged to express their own questions and given space to respond and informally record their thinking and responses to questions. This should be planned into the curriculum in addition to opportunities for developing more formal written responses.

As pupils progress through the curriculum, so too should their skill in identifying, forming and expressing enquiry questions as a ‘way of learning.’

12. To support schools in formulating a curriculum, this Syllabus provides a **framework** in **Section F** which shows how schools can identify big questions to underpin the learning (**see Section E11**) and how and what types of knowledge could be selected to support the understanding of the key concepts within it (**D5**).

13. When planning a curriculum with a purposeful learning sequence, it is necessary to ensure that all those involved in supporting the implementation of it, from teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders, to parents and carers, are cognisant of this constantly building narrative and expanding scope of knowledge, and the curriculum should be readily **accessible** for all learners, including those with SEND. See **Section I**.

. To support one of the aims of this syllabus, i.e. to work collaboratively with schools in providing continuous professional development in Religious Education, a curriculum model for primary schools has been developed. This is not a compulsory model and therefore has not been included in the statutory section of this Syllabus, but in the non-statutory support document entitled the **Subject Leaders’ Toolkit**. One reason for this is because we celebrate that all teachers and adults are also continuing to develop and learn, just like our pupils. Therefore, being non-statutory, these resources can be honed, enhanced and developed organically, using feedback after implementation in our schools. It also allows for schools and subject leaders, with the confidence in their subject knowledge, to adapt these resources to better suit their own pupils or school ethos, as they deem fit.

It is also beneficial for such a curriculum to be devised to support specific pupils in attendance, where possible. For example, some schools may wish to include certain ideas or particular examples from specific religions and worldviews in response to, or as a reflection of, their demographic. This may also be the case where schools may be focused on supporting pupils with specific educational or special needs. Being non-statutory, schools can adapt these materials as required.

14. Some schools and subject leaders may be more confident than others in developing a suitably sequenced curriculum from scratch. This, of course, may be dependent on the confidence of staff in their subject knowledge (including all three types of knowledge as discussed above).

Therefore, schools may choose to adopt a particular curriculum model for their school. This Syllabus does not preclude the adoption of any **curriculum packages** available as long as they fulfil all requirements, including the pedagogical model and criteria (**Sections C and D**) here stated. During school inspections, Ofsted 'considers the extent to which leaders adopt or construct a curriculum' and may therefore be critical of any school adopting a purchased curriculum package [\[12\]](#) without being able to justify and exemplify how it supports the necessary requirements of the relevant Syllabus. It has been found that some of these may purport to support an Agreed Syllabus, but upon closer examination do not comply with the requirements.

It is therefore suggested that schools may seek advice from the SACRE or the RE advisor in post [\[3\]](#) to ensure compliance if considering other curriculum models and packages.

Whilst voluntary aided schools, including faith schools, are not legally obliged to adhere to this Syllabus, nor are they restricted to following the aligned curriculum materials, we have ensured these do build on the messages about what meaningful RE should include from relevant organisations, such as the London Church of England Diocese. This means these schools would be at liberty to adopt these if they so wish.

15. Whichever curriculum a school chooses to adopt, it must make provisions to **support** its implementation effectively. The factors which contribute to better quality RE include, among other things, 'strong teacher subject knowledge and access to professional development.' Therefore, schools should ensure that 'teachers have the subject and pedagogical knowledge that they need to teach RE well.' [\[8\]](#)

This should include not just instruction of what content should be taught, but also provide a secure understanding of the thinking behind the content selection and sequencing, as well as guidance in identifying appropriate pedagogy to support this intended learning as pupils progress.

This will lead to more successful implementation of the RE curriculum as it empowers teachers to be able to impart to pupils why they are including certain content and to make meaningful connections, this will support pupils to remember, reflect and progress.

16. When devising or sourcing suitable curriculum materials and resources to support the delivery of RE for any Key Stage, including **Early Years Foundation Stage** and any pre-determined courses or programmes included as part of the RE curriculum for pupils KS4 and KS5, must be compliant with the requirements of this Syllabus, as per **sections C, D and E 1-11**.

These key aspects of RE, when taught through the three characteristics of Early Learning (playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically), can contribute significantly to areas of learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. **See section H.**

Subject and Phase Leaders at each stage should be clear how their curriculum supports the learning and development of RE for all pupils and be able to report annually on the progress in learning made. For this purpose, additional curriculum materials will be made available to schools.

F. Framework

17. This framework helps show the types of ‘big’ meaningful questions raised by human experience [\[9\]](#) that pupils should be exploring through the RE curriculum. Examples of how these questions can be used to support the development of a curriculum can be found in the [Subject Leaders' Toolkit](#).

 How did we get here?	Learning about what people believe about the origins of the universe and the nature of existence and seeking to understand the nature of humanity. This is sometimes referred to as cosmology. Concepts can include creation, design, non-design, evolution, birth, death, reincarnation, rebirth, beginning, human, animal, belief, evidence, Enquiry Questions might include: <i>What makes us human? Did the world have a beginning? Is there a creator? Why should we care for the world? Who's world is it?</i>
 Why are we here? What is our goal?	Understanding our place, situation or purpose in the world and how we relate to other people. This may include thinking about questions of morality, and how we define what is right or wrong, good or evil to determine how we should live. Sometimes this is referred to axiology. Concepts can include moral, commandment, rule, revelation, tradition, sin, mitzvah, evil, stewardship, happiness, Enquiry Questions might include: <i>How do we know what is right or wrong? Where do our morals come from? What are we trying to achieve in our lifetime? Why should we be ‘good’?</i>
 Is there more?	Thinking about questions of what is real and what is not (sometimes called ontology) and seeking to understand if there is an ultimate and eternal truth, spirit, power or force behind all that exists. For some, this will include how certain experiences may provide insights or connections to beliefs about an ultimate and eternal truth, power or force behind all that exists. Concepts can include God, creator, powerful, force, life, soul, spiritual, Allah, Brahman, rebirth, afterlife, soul, judgement, nature, provider or sustainer, Enquiry Questions might include: <i>What happens when we die? Is there a greater power than us? What is meant by ‘God’? Where does ‘life’ come from?</i>
 How do we know?	Learning different ways people in religions and communities define and express their beliefs and identity through actions, texts and symbols, and recognising diversity in how these may change or be influenced over time, by events, people or place. This is sometimes referred to as praxeology and will include considering the sources of authority which influence our ideas, and can therefore include questions of epistemology around the difference between belief, fact and opinion. Pupils should develop their ‘ways of knowing’ or disciplinary knowledge in examining these. Concepts can include text, scripture, practice, ritual, festival, culture, influence, authority, interpretation, symbolism, Enquiry Questions might include: <i>How can we find out what people believe? Where do believers go to find guidance? Why might there be different ways to show the same belief?</i>
- When exploring these questions pupils will need to consider their own personal knowledge or worldview and others’ responses, both religious and non-religious. - Pupils should have opportunities to explore how beliefs and values can make a difference or affect the way people may choose to live. - When investigating how others respond and express their beliefs, pupils should be reflective of the different ways meaning can be shown and interpreted through ways of knowing. (See progression Spectrum, Section G)	

Pupils will not consider each of these **Big Meaningful Questions** separately nor only once in a curriculum. These overarching questions will need to be broken down into units or smaller scope **enquiry questions** around particular **concepts**, which can then be sequenced so pupils can explore and return to these and the wider questions as they move through a curriculum. This way, they will constantly build layers and deepen their understanding.

These key groupings or types of **Big Questions** is not a linear model but interlinked. For example, **enquiry** questions about morality  (e.g. 'how do we know what is right or wrong?') might for some be intrinsically linked to beliefs in an ultimate and eternal spirit, power or force  and which might be evidenced  in some examples of authoritative texts or scriptures.

Therefore, the first stage in planning a curriculum underpinned by these **Big Questions** should ideally begin with plotting the key **concepts** and the relating **enquiry** questions which will help pupils to explore these from more than one perspective and then sequence these so that there is a continuous building of understanding.

For example, your curriculum might begin by exploring responses from various worldviews – both religious and non-religious – in relation to meaningful enquiry questions around what people may believe  about the origin of the universe. This enquiry would include examples  of creation accounts. Pupils will therefore touch upon, and can then naturally progress towards considering in more detail, examples of ontological  beliefs about an ultimate and eternal truth, power or force behind all that exists. Similarly, pupils won't be able to appreciate the concept of 'stewardship'  if they have not yet first considered questions of cosmology, which are ideas relevant to both religious and non-religious traditions. See further examples in **Sections E8 and E9**.

In this way, pupils will build their understanding of a worldview as they progress through a curriculum as well, having explored several interconnecting ideas over a period of several enquiries or units.

18. Knowledge Content should be selected so that **at each Key Stage** pupils should build on their **personal knowledge** and develop skills of '**ways of knowing**' to:

- explore each **enquiry** question from the perspective of more than one worldview from within both a **Dharmic** and **Abrahamic** religious perspective, as well as a **non-religious** response
- consider a **lesser-known worldview** (e.g. Bahai, Zoroastrianism) where appropriate, to provide a further opportunity to expand pupils' understanding of a key concept.

19. Returning to the **flower** model (introduced **Section D5**), this means for each unit of enquiry we should be:

selecting an **enquiry question** which is rooted in the **Big Meaningful Questions** (see **F17**)
and...

identifying the **key concepts** we wish pupils to explore (centre pistil)
through...

their own **personal knowledge** gleaned from prior learning (stem) and lived experience (roots)
as well as...

selecting appropriate responses from both a **Dharmic** and **Abrahamic**
religious perspective, as well as a **non-religious** response (petals) (see **F18**)
and...

include suggestions of **ways of knowing** and interacting the stem and petals. See **F22**.

This means for each enquiry question we should be...

identifying the key concepts (centre floret) which are rooted in the **Big Meaningful Questions** we wish pupils to explore through...

selecting appropriate responses from both a **dharmic** and **Abrahamic** religious perspective, as well as a **non-religious** response (petals) as well as...

considering the prior knowledge pupils could be using (stem) which might ...

include the personal experiences of pupils (roots) and...

suggest the ways of knowing and interaction activities with these (stem and petals).



21. When planning your unit enquiries, there are several factors^[15] you may need to therefore consider:



22. We have already established that it is not enough for pupils to only recall sources and information about different religions and worldviews, including responses to big meaningful questions around key concepts. In a discussion around **religious literacy** [16], one aim of RE could be to empower pupils to explore, express and use this knowledge as part of critical reasoning and thinking.

Some have suggested different lenses could be identified and used to investigate **sources**, whether they are texts, images, exchanges with believers, observations of practices and artefacts. For example, it may be useful for pupils to consider the origin of a source, and perhaps the perceived intention of its author. Pupils could consider its context as well as a range of perspectives, to appreciate how it may be interpreted differently, perhaps by believers either through time or in different places. This may help them come to recognise the diversity in understanding within a religion or worldview.

There are several models, with their own specific terms, which aim to identify the different types of questions or lenses which could be applied to the study of the substantive knowledge. This Syllabus does not limit the exploration of sources or information to any one particular model, nor a specified number of lenses or disciplines.

However, we do encourage curriculum planning to include a range of age-appropriate questions to promote the development of disciplinary skills when examining sources. These questions can be devised with reference to the Progression Spectrum (**Section G**), and could include consideration of:

Context – to build understanding and appreciation of the origin and context of the source/example

Impact – to build appreciation of the value, use, and scope of a source for some believers

Relevance – to recognise how a source may relate to a particular meaningful question or key concept

Interpretation – to appreciate how and why a source may be understood differently by believers of the same group

Response – to recognise how some believers may respond to, or be influenced by, a source/belief in different ways

These question groups are not restricted to certain subject disciplines, and do not all need to be applied to every source or example within a ‘petal’ of substantive knowledge. Some examples can be found in the **Subject Leaders’ Toolkit**.

23. When measuring the success of your curriculum, the below questions can be used when thinking about the bigger picture of your pupils’ future:

Have pupils developed an openness to worldviews other than their own?

Have pupils developed (are pupils developing) openness, respect for others, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry as a result of the curriculum?

Does the curriculum support personal development through an expanding domain of knowledge?

Has the curriculum helped pupils to develop through an appropriate balance of the three types of knowledge?

Is the curriculum preparing pupils for life in a local, national and global context?

Are pupils developing ways of successfully navigating our diverse and complex world in relation to religion and belief?

Are pupils more consciously and critically aware of their own worldviews as a result of the curriculum?

Can pupils confidently articulate why they think/believe/value/live in the ways they do, and can they connect this with their learning?

G. Progression Spectrum

24. To support schools in checking and reporting on pupil progression in their learning, the Spectrum specifies the expected outcomes for pupils in the subject. It is a requirement that schools use these to annually report on pupil progress with reference to the outcomes in this Spectrum.

These overarching outcomes are **long term** expectations, each encompassing the different types of knowledge pupils should be developing. These therefore include knowledge and understanding of the substantive information, with reference to context and diversity, and the critical analysis or 'ways of knowing' being deployed. Within each of these stages of the Spectrum, pupils' personal knowledge is included.

Therefore, this Spectrum can also be used, in conjunction with the questions iterated in **Section F21**, to support judgements about the effectiveness of the RE curriculum and its implementation in school.

25. Whilst schools may choose to refer to these criteria in the Spectrum when planning assessments within the curriculum (as per **Section E10**), it may be necessary to relate specific content, making it explicit for teachers and pupils to understand what knowledge needs to be learnt and remembered, and how this can be shown.

Though this remains a progression model, it should also be noted that pupils will need to repeat the skills of recognising, recalling and describing details each time they are learning new information.

Whilst pupils may become more fluent and effective in demonstrating these skills as they move up the school, these learning outcomes or expectations should continue to be included as pupils as they move up the school, until a point at which this becomes an automatic process for them.

Mastering	Describe how key beliefs around particular ideas/concepts are involved in a modern/controversial issue and connected to social/cultural traditions, events or changes.	Identify relevant sources and describe how they might support their own and others' responses to certain modern/controversial issues.
By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils should be able to:		
Extending	Explain how variations in interpretation and changes in belief and practices may occur via the influence of historical events/changes and cultural traditions.	Explain how lives may be affected or impacted by having/identifying with certain beliefs/interpretations and values or communities.
Secure	Suggest how sources or practice relating to the same belief about key big ideas/concepts might be interpreted differently or influenced by historical events and cultural traditions.	Suggest reasons for the connections, similarities and differences between responses/beliefs, practices, and sources. Suggest how lives may be affected or impacted by having/identifying with certain beliefs/interpretations and values or communities.
By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils should be able to:		
Developing	Suggest appropriate sources, symbols or practices to explore responses to ultimate questions and relevant key big ideas/concepts.	Describe in detail relevant beliefs, practices, symbols and sources, identifying similarities, differences and connections between them, and suggesting how certain beliefs and values may be shown/experienced.
Firming	Formulate own ultimate questions which reflect/include the relevant key big ideas/concepts.	Describe and make links between their own/others' beliefs, practices and sources which are relevant to the concept/idea in question with the correct vocabulary.
Approaching	Identify ultimate questions and the relevant big ideas/concepts or ideas.	Identify and recount their own/others' beliefs, practices, symbols and sources which are relevant to the big ideas/concepts in question and with some correct vocabulary.
By the end of Key Stage 1, most pupils should be able to:		
Beginning	Share own response or examples of features, symbols, beliefs or practices relevant to the ultimate question or of the big ideas/concepts.	Recognise religious and non-religious responses and examples (beliefs, symbols, practices and sources or key words) relevant to the ultimate question or of the big ideas/concepts.
Engaging	Express a response to a simple question, source, belief or symbol.	Recognise examples of beliefs, symbols, practices and sources or key words.

H. Early Years Foundation Stage

26. RE must be provided for all pupils on roll, including those in the EYFS. Two of the **prime areas** in the EYFS Statutory Framework [17] are particularly important for learning and forming relationships and which can be strengthened with effective RE:

Communication and Language

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

In addition, providers must also support children in four specific areas, which help strengthen and develop the three prime areas, and ignite children’s curiosity and enthusiasm. Three of these areas relate strongly to RE:

Literacy

Understanding the World

Expressive Arts and Design

27. The EYFS is about *what* children learn, as well as *how* they learn. For example, play is essential for children’s development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, and relate to others.

Children should be encouraged to investigate and experience a wide range of things relating to RE content (Sections D, F), as well as to be creative and think critically in having, developing and making links with their own ideas.

The Flower Model (Section F) for meaningful RE also encompasses and encourages the interactive exploration of and with others, and the link making to personal knowledge.

Therefore, several of the **Early Learning Goals** also naturally reflect some of the components also considered important for meaningful RE (as per Flower Model - Section F).

Examples of how common topics and content already present in the EYFS curriculum could be extended to include specific RE content can be found in the **Subject Leaders’ Toolkit**.

28. Ongoing **assessment** (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process in EYFS, and can also be applied when monitoring learning in RE, with reference to the Early Learning Goals found in the Statutory Framework:

Listening, Attention and Understanding	Speaking	Literacy	Understanding the World	The Natural World
--	----------	----------	-------------------------	-------------------

- ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding
Children at the expected level of development will:
- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
 - Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.

- ELG: Speaking
Children at the expected level of development will:
- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
 - Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
 - Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

ELG Literacy:

Comprehension Children at the expected level of development will:

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role-play.

Understanding the World:

ELG: People, Culture and Communities

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and – when appropriate – maps.

ELG: The Natural World

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

I. SEND

29. RE must be provided to all pupils, including those with SEND. The purpose, aims, principles and features of high quality RE described in this Syllabus all centre around interbelief dialogue, as per the Flower Model (see [Section F](#)), which naturally promotes an **inclusive approach** to learning [18], where all pupils can contribute. Learners with SEND can flourish in RE because it is discussion-based and allows for them to share their own beliefs, opinions and personal knowledge.

In addition, pupils are supported to relate abstract concepts (in the pistil) through substantive concrete examples (identified in the petals), and all learning should be sequenced to ensure learning can be linked together supporting memory recall.

However, for many pupils with SEND, particularly those with communication, cognition, or sensory differences, access to RE will also depend on the flexibility of teaching strategies, including visual supports and alternative communication methods, to ensure that learning is accessible, personalised, and responsive to each pupil with adaptations that enable every learner to contribute, understand, and succeed.

It should be noted that a collaborative learning environment in which pupils support each other's learning with scaffolded tasks can have a hugely positive impact, not only for the learner with special needs, but also for the whole class, as well as visual supports.

All teachers and pupils should be encouraged to recognise, praise and build on achievement, focusing on what pupils can do rather than limiting learning with pre-fixed groupings, or setting unfounded and often unnecessary parameters.

Examples of inclusive strategies supportive to all those learning RE can be found in the **Subject Leaders' Toolkit**. See also:

- i. Education Endowment Foundation, SEND in Mainstream Education, 2025, https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/eef-guidance-reports/send/eef_special_educational_needs_in_mainstream_schools_guidance_report_2025-04-10-110432_klxp.pdf
- ii. Education Endowment Foundation, "5 a day" <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-five-a-day-to-improve-send-outcomes>
- iii. NASEN Teacher Handbook SEND, January 2024

In addition, having been inspired by some of the work taking place in other boroughs, we would like to extend in particular our thanks to Bromley for the sharing of their Agreed Syllabus materials.

K. References:

1. Religion and Worldviews Draft [Resource](#) V2, REC 2022,
2. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>
3. <https://leap.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/6735/Standing-Advisory-Council-of-Religious-Education-SACRE>
4. Since the 1988 Education Reform Act
5. Ofsted, Deep and Meaningful, Subject [Report](#) April 2024
6. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/re-statement-of-entitlement-for-church-schools.pdf>
7. <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/national-content-standard-1st-edition-2023/>
8. Ofsted Subject Review: Religious Education 2021 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education>)
9. Ann Taves Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience, 2018 <https://www.religion.ucsb.edu/wp-content/uploads/Taves-Ann-2018-77-Finding-Meaning.pdf>
10. Non-religious pupils in religious education: an exploration of their specific learning conditions, Alexander Unser, February 2024
11. Education Reform Act 1988 s.8 (3)
12. Ofsted Inspection [Framework](#), July 2023
13. Contact-based interfaith programmes in schools and the changing religious education landscape, Lucy Peacock, February 2023
14. <https://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/REThinking-RE-REOnline.pdf>
15. Religion and Worldviews Approach to RE Toolkit, 2024, Framework 2: <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rec/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/24-25756-REC-Teacher-Led-Framework-Final-Report-DIGITAL-PAGES.pdf>
16. Religious Literacy: A way forward for religious education? Gert Biesta, David Aldridge, Patricia Hannam & Sean Whittle, 2019 <https://www.reonline.org.uk/news/religious-literacy-a-way-forward-for-religious-education/>
17. Early Years Framework, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68c024cb8c6d992f23edd79c/Early_years_foundation_stage_statutory_framework_-_for_group_and_school-based_providers.pdf.pdf

J. Further Reading

This Syllabus has been devised following extensive consultation with primary and secondary teachers, representatives from local faith communities and local Councillors within the LA.

The educational principles it contains has been based on evidence from a wide breadth of academic research. For those who wish to expand their understanding of these principles, in addition to the documents cited and referenced (see footnotes), the following **further reading** may be of interest:

- Philosophy with Teenagers, Patricia Hannam, Eugenio Echeverria, 2010
- Embedded Formative Assessment: (Strategies for Classroom Assessment That Drives Student Engagement and Learning), Dylan William, 2017
- The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to coherence, Mary Myatt, 2018
- How to Teach Even Better: An Evidence-Based Approach, Geoff Petty, 2018
- Academic disciplines and RE: Designing an effective RE curriculum, Gillian Georgiou, Olivia Seymour, Kathryn Wright, 2019
- Religious Education and the Public Sphere (Theorizing Education), Patricia Hannam, 2020
- Religion and Worldviews: The triumph of the secular in religious education, Edited by L. Philip Barnes King's College London, 2022
- Big Ideas for Religious Education, B Wintersgill (2017) and Putting Big Ideas into Practice in Religious Education Book 2, B Wintersgill, D Cush, D Francis, 2022
- Implementing a Ricoeurian lens to examine the impact of individuals' worldviews on subject content knowledge in RE in England: a theoretical proposition, Flanagan, 2021
- Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum, Chater, 2020
- Toward a theory of pedagogical reduction: selection, simplification, and generalization in an age of critical education, Lewin, 2019
- We Need to Talk about Religious Education, Castelli, M., and Chater, M. (eds.), 2018
- Understanding Unbelief, L. Lee, 2017, University of Kent
- Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School, K. O'Grady, 2022