

Pupils with SEND and Religious Education

Pupils with SEND are entitled to receive Religious Education based upon the Locally Agreed Syllabus as far as it is practicable. This entitlement applies to all pupils, whether they are educated in mainstream schools or special school settings. We believe that RE can provide challenging and nurturing learning opportunities for every pupil, and we seek creative and well thought out ways of providing for these entitlements to RE, so that every pupil can benefit from the opportunities for personal development the subject provides.

Two principles: good RE seeks to be holistic and inclusive

- **Holistic RE** focuses on the pupil as a whole, rather than only focusing on specific elements. A holistic vision of pupils' development considers all aspects of their individual needs, including how they interrelate with each other and the factors that influence them, and how this affects how they learn. Whether learners are part of a community of faith or not, RE offers them appropriate ways to engage with religion and belief and connects to every individual's need for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- **Inclusive RE** recognises all pupils' entitlements to learning that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of educational needs and preferences. RE offers all learners a space in which they are included, valued and respected.

Section A: Guidance for pupils not engaged in subject specific study

Following the Rochford Review (2019), the government announced plans to introduce the engagement model. This is a new form of assessment for pupils working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and not engaged in subject-specific study. It replaces the Performance Scale's steps 1 to 4 (often called 'P' scales) and will be statutory from 2022.

Further general details of the Engagement model can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903458/Engagement_Model_Guidance_2020.pdf

The engagement model celebrates the different abilities of pupils not engaged in subject specific study. This intention is always appropriate for RE. It enables the collection of qualitative information and evidence that should inform a teacher's assessment of their pupils' evidence of progress in the following areas:

- the effective use of their senses, including the use of both near and distant senses and the use of sensory integration;
- the application of physical (motor) skills to permit active participation in new experiences;
- states of emotional wellbeing to facilitate sustained motivation to learn;
- communication and language skills to inform thought processes.

How will pupils be assessed using the engagement model?

The engagement model has 5 areas of engagement, and pupils can show responses to experience of RE in relation to these areas.

- exploration
- realisation
- anticipation
- persistence
- initiation

The areas allow teachers to assess pupils' engagement in developing new skills, knowledge and concepts in the school's curriculum by demonstrating how pupils are achieving specific outcomes. They represent what is necessary for pupils to fully engage in their learning and reach their full potential.

The model provides a flexible description of ways in which pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties make progress in their education, and recognises that progress for these pupils is not merely linear. The model does not specify a curriculum, but does offer a rounded and holistic way to identify small steps of progress, linked to termly outcomes for these pupils, supporting and enriching the learning pathways for non-subject specific learning. The model allows teachers to assess their own effectiveness in connecting their teaching to the learning needs of each pupil, clarifying teachers' understandings of the pupils' learning journeys.

Progress through each of the 5 areas of engagement should be measured by identifying how established the pupil is against each of the areas of engagement. This will differ for each pupil according to their profile of needs as set out in their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

The model recognises that engagement is multi-dimensional and breaks it down into 5 areas that allow teachers, in relation to RE, to assess:

- how well their pupils are being engaged in developing new skills, knowledge and concepts in the school's RE curriculum
- how effective the special educational provision is in empowering their pupils to progress against the agreed outcomes in their EHC plans and how effectively pupils are engaging with and making progress against these plans in particular relation to RE
- pupils' achievements and progress across the 4 areas of need of the SEND code of practice (communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health difficulties, and sensory and/or physical needs) The four areas all connect to good RE.

The engagement model:

- is a unique method of observation, allowing insight that improves provision for all pupils
- uses a pupil-centred approach that focuses on their abilities rather than disabilities
- values all sources of knowledge and information provided by those working with the pupil, including teachers, school staff, other professionals and parents or carers
- promotes consistency and a common language amongst schools and all those working with the pupil
- recognises there is a complex interaction between pupils' physical, sensory, communication and learning disabilities that affects how they progress

The Five areas of Engagement



Religious Education may provide opportunities for pupils to learn in all of these areas. Using outcome statements from the early years foundation stage profile can provide helpful and relevant clarification of learners' progress. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-handbook>

These questions will help teachers considering the provision of experiences from RE for pupils with SEND to focus their contribution to learning for pupils.

In what ways can RE for pupils with SEND:

- recognise the pupil's individual needs?
- show and celebrate the pupil's success?
- provide evidence of the pupil's responses and achievements?
- provide ways of comparing the pupil's current responses with past ones in order to show evidence of their achievements?
- capture information about the quality of the pupil's progress so the complexities and subtle differences of individual responses can be described, interpreted and explained?
- contain information and evidence that enable decisions to be made concerning the pupil's needs can be used to inform planning and next steps for pupils, including special educational provision?
- assist in gathering evidence for reporting the pupil's achievements and progress against their EHC plan as part of the annual review process?
- assist in compiling evidence as part of end of academic year reporting to the pupil's parents, LAs and governors?

Section B: Guidance for pupils beginning to engage in RE specific learning

1. Introduction

This guidance is designed to stimulate, support and promote best practice and high standards of achievement in RE for all pupils. It focuses on teaching and learning in RE among pupils with a range of special educational needs and disabilities.

RE can make a powerful contribution to the learning of pupils with SEND. They can develop understanding of religious and life issues through experiences including song and music, discussion and talk, use of artefacts and the creative arts which cannot always be reflected in their written work. What follows is guidance on how RE may be made more accessible for such pupils.

2. Principles for RE and pupils with SEND.

A. Valuing the importance of RE for pupils with special needs.

RE is part of the core curriculum and is a positive entitlement for all pupils and should be taught with the same educational purposes, validity and integrity to all. In special schools the law requires the Agreed Syllabus to be taught 'as far as is practicable', and quality teaching will tailor the syllabus carefully to the special needs of all pupils. The positive effect may be that in RE pupils with difficulties, problems or tragedies in their young lives find the most space to explore and seek to resolve their own conflicts.

B. Using pupils' experience of difficulty to develop their capacity to understand searching themes in RE.

There are areas in which pupils with special educational needs may show particular strengths. A pupil's experience of difficulties or suffering could lead to a heightened awareness of searching themes in RE. Sometimes small group work with pupils with special needs is particularly important in making space for reflection on experience and meaning. Good RE faces difficulties sensitively, rather than 'ducking the issues'.

C. Building on pupils' interest in people and what they do.

Some pupils with special educational needs sometimes show more awareness of people's feelings and a curiosity about what people do. This can lead to an interest in the effect of religious belief on people and interest in how individual religious people lead their lives. This may involve pupils working on their own ideas about belief and experience, considering meanings for themselves.

D. Valuing pupils' use of religious language.

Some pupils with special needs may show a lack of inhibitions in using religious and spiritual language, such as 'soul', 'heart' and 'spirit'. This can lead them into a spiritual perception of religion and human experience and an engagement with the symbolic.

E. Being sensitive to the variety of pupils' understanding of religious concepts.

It is difficult to generalise about the appropriateness of introducing certain religious concepts to pupils with special needs owing to the wide range of their needs. Teachers need to be sensitive in judging the appropriateness of different material on, for example, miracles and healing, which may be perceived differently by pupils with different disabilities. RE seeks to develop sensitive and respectful attitudes, and these can be exemplified by teaching which is sensitive and respectful.

F. Allowing pupils to engage with explicit religious material.

RE which lets the emotion and power of explicit religious materials loose in the classroom, and welcomes personal responses can provide powerful opportunities for spiritual development for pupils with a variety of special educational needs. An over-emphasis on seeing special needs pupils as needing a 'small step' approach can block the development of a vital and dynamic form of RE. Some

pupils may respond to the 'burning core' of questions that engage the imagination and often lead from the spiritual into 'explicit RE.'

G. Promoting pupils' use of the arts as a way of expressing themselves.

Pupils with special educational needs may have an enjoyment and engagement with art, music, dance and drama. Using these forms of expression can be very effective with special needs pupils.

H. Recognising pupils' intuitive responses to religious issues.

Pupils with special educational needs may show a more intuitive approach to religion and human experience, and this may be expressed through questions, insights or gestures. These intuitive moments can display leaps of learning or understanding which are at odds with their understanding of other concepts. Some pupils with special educational needs will show a willingness to share a spiritual response. These achievements can be celebrated and noted by the teacher, but often no written product of achievement exists. A lack of permanent evidence of achievement does not matter in such cases.

I. Valuing pupils' achievement through creative forms of assessment and recording.

These forms need to be developed in order to reflect moments of intuition, insight and response. A 'Wall of Wisdom', where pupils' deep comments and questions about religion and human experience are written can be displayed in class, or a photographic or video record of significant events can be kept, or a running record in the teachers' notes.

3. Educational contexts.

The principles set out above apply to pupils with special educational needs in all settings. These include SEND pupils in mainstream schools, special units attached to mainstream schools, PRUs, hospital schools and special schools. Pupils have a wide range of backgrounds and needs, including learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In RE these may be accentuated by differences of home and faith backgrounds. It is important to recognise that all pupils can achieve in RE, and teachers have the task of unlocking that potential and facilitating that achievement.

4. Differentiation in RE: meeting each learner's needs.

Legislation provides an entitlement for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum. A wide range of ability and experiences exists within any group of pupils. Teachers need to be able to provide equal opportunities in learning through a flexible approach and skills which differentiate teaching and learning, matching the challenge of RE work to individual learners' needs.

Differentiation within RE involves meeting the individual needs of pupils in ways that are relevant to their life experiences. Successful differentiation is dependent on planning, teaching and learning methods and assessment. This requires:

- an understanding by teachers of the ways in which pupils learn;
- providing imaginative learning experiences which arouse and sustain pupils' interest;
- supporting the learning which takes place in RE by what is taught in other curriculum areas.
- matching work to pupils' previous experience;
- an understanding of factors which may hinder or prevent pupils learning;
- careful analysis of the knowledge and skills which comprise a particular learning task;
- structured teaching and learning which will help pupils to achieve and to demonstrate their learning outcomes;

Differentiation strives to help all pupils to learn together through providing a variety of tasks at any one time. Pupils can also be given some choice over what and how they learn so their learning reflects their interests and needs.

The ethos of a school and the work of individual teachers is very influential in RE. A positive ethos facilitates differentiated teaching through excellence in relationships based on mutual respect. Two factors make an important contribution:

- **attitudes to learning** - a philosophy which encourages purposeful learning and celebrates effort alongside success, as well as helping pupils take responsibility for their own engagement in tasks;
- **a safe, stimulating environment** which recognises individual needs of pupils, sets appropriate challenges and builds on a positive, praising classroom culture.

5. Planning.

Once schools are familiar with the requirements of the RE Agreed Syllabus and have chosen which religions are to be studied in which Key Stage, long, medium and short term planning can be put in place which includes teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs. Special schools have the flexibility to modify the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to meet their pupils' needs, such as selecting materials from an earlier key stage or by planning to focus on just two religions. They must teach the syllabus 'as far as it is practicable.'

The development of pupils' individual education programmes (IEPs) allows for RE to be provided according to pupils' needs, such as focusing on communication, social, sensory or other skills to which RE can make a significant contribution. Some pupils may need additional experiences to consolidate or extend their understanding of particular concepts, so timing needs to be flexible enough to allow for this. Where teaching is good, the specific skills of reflection, expression and discernment will not be neglected.

Planning should provide for:

- the range of pupil ability in the group, with differentiated activities;
- the past and present experience of pupils;
- the family background of pupils;
- the individual needs of pupils, including their special educational needs and their personal learning plans;
- a range of opportunities to assess progress and to report to parents.

There are some commercial resources available to support this work, for example the 'Equals' programme offers well thought out work for SEN RE to schools.

6. Teaching and learning approaches for pupils with SEND

A wide variety of approaches can succeed, including the use of artefacts, video, visits and visitors, ritual, reflection, stilling and experiential activities, classroom assistants, the widest possible range of sensory and experiential approaches, and use of ICT including internet, recorded music, a digital camera and scanner, new video technologies, big mac switches, concept key boards and overlays. New technologies are often created to help pupils with SEN: Good RE teaching must always seek to make the most of them.

7. Recording pupils' achievement.

Pupils with SEND in RE want to be able to show their achievement. Teachers need to enable pupils to demonstrate statements of achievement and learning outcomes. For pupils with SEND, this document provides an application of the DfE's Engagement Model and the use of performance statements (formerly called 'P4-P8'). These refer to skills, knowledge and understanding in RE. Teachers can also make special use of the Early Learning Goals applied to RE in the syllabus and the outcome statements

for pupils aged 7, 11 and 14, as appropriate. It is practicable for RE outcomes to break age related norms for pupils with SEND.

Particular outcome statements could be broken down into a number of smaller elements and steps to work on and celebrate achievements. In good RE these could include pupils' responses to:

- experiencing an activity in RE
- sharing an awareness of the activity
- being a part of, or being an agent in classroom rituals for learning
- using the senses in different ways related to RE experiences and content
- exploring artefacts, experiences, stories, music or other stimulus materials in RE
- participation in the activities in varied ways
- praising and being praised, thanking and being thanked
- observing or participating in an enactment of an aspect of the learning

The use of the full range of RE outcome statements may provide useful tools in enabling teachers to:

- plan future work with objectives, tasks and learning experiences appropriate to pupils' ability and development;
- ensure continuity and progression to the next stage;
- set appropriate RE targets for pupils' personal IEPs;
- recognise pupils' levels of engagement and response.

8. Accreditation of RE.

The National Qualifications framework provides for entry level qualifications such as a certificate of achievement to accredit the achievement of students at 16 whose achievement is below that of GCSE. Entry level qualifications in RE/RS are available from several awarding bodies. These accreditation routes award grades of pass, merit and distinction roughly equivalent to National Curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3. These qualifications may allow appropriate forms of assessments for pupils with special needs. Local collaboration between special schools and other schools can provide support for the use of such accreditation.

Descriptions of achievements in RE for pupils with SEND who are working below National Curriculum Outcomes

Progress for pupils with SEND engaging in a subject specific RE curriculum has been described using 'Performance Levels' for some years. P Levels 1-3 have been superseded by the Engagement Model described above, but these statements (formerly referred to as P4-8) continue to provide flexible and useful descriptions of the ways in which pupils with SEND show some of their achievements in RE. Teachers are advised to use these statements for planning and teaching and learning.

Pupils learning in RE may be characterised by increasing progress described below. These descriptions are open to interpretation by teachers and provide flexible tools for recognising some steps towards learning and progress in RE.	
<p>Involvement is mostly responsive and prompted</p> <p>(Formerly called P4)</p>	<p>Pupil can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use single elements of communication e.g. words, gestures, signs or symbols, to express their feelings. • show they understand 'yes' and 'no'. • begin to respond to the feelings of others e.g. matching their emotions and laughing when another pupil is laughing. • join in with activities by initiating ritual actions and sounds. • demonstrate an appreciation of stillness and quiet.
<p>Involvement is increasingly active and intentional</p> <p>(Formerly called P5)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond appropriately to simple questions about familiar religious events or experiences and communicate simple meanings. • respond to a variety of new religious experiences e.g. involving music, shared emotion, drama, colour, lights, food or tactile objects. • take part in activities involving two or three other learners. • may also engage in moments of individual reflection.
<p>Learners are beginning to gain skills and understanding</p> <p>(Formerly called P6)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express and communicate their feelings in different ways. • respond to others in group situations and co-operate when working in small groups. • listen to, and begin to respond to, familiar religious stories, poems and music, and make their own contribution to celebrations and festivals. • carry out ritualised actions in familiar circumstances. • show concern and sympathy for others in distress e.g. through gestures, facial expressions or by offering comfort. • start to be aware of their own influence on events and other people.
<p>Learners are beginning to be able to use their skills and understanding</p> <p>(Formerly called P7)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to and follow religious stories. • can communicate their ideas about religion, life events and experiences in simple phrases. • can evaluate their own work and behaviour in simple ways, beginning to identify some actions as right and wrong on the basis of consequences. • can find out about aspects of religion through stories, music, or drama, answer questions and communicate their responses. • may communicate their feelings about what is special to them e.g. through role play. • can begin to understand that other people have needs and to respect these. • can make purposeful relationships with others in group activity.

<p>Learners are more secure in using the skills and understanding they have gained</p> <p>(Formerly called P8)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can listen attentively to religious stories or to people talking about religion. • can begin to understand that religious and other stories carry moral and religious meaning. • are increasingly able to communicate ideas, feelings or responses to experiences or retell religious stories. • can communicate simple facts about religion and important people in religions. • can begin to realise the significance of religious artefacts, symbols and places. • can reflect on what makes them happy, sad, excited or lonely. • are able to demonstrate a basic understanding of what is right and wrong in familiar situations. • are often sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and show respect for themselves and others. • treat living things and their environment with care and concern.
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Additional practical materials:

'Growing in RE', a booklet by Anne Krismann, is available free on the NATRE website at www.natre.org.uk

[NATRE member link:](https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Member%20Resources/NATRE%20Resources/Primary%201000/SEND%20RE.pdf)

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Member%20Resources/NATRE%20Resources/Primary%201000/SEND%20RE.pdf>

It provides a wealth of practical illustrations of great SEND RE work.

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