

GATEWAY DOCUMENT 3.2

Basing RE provision on a sound knowledge of religions and beliefs

WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

When contentious issues are being addressed, a good knowledge of religions and beliefs is important to set dialogue and debate within a clear, informed context. This knowledge also provides teachers with more confidence when presenting different religious and other belief stances on contentious issues.

KEY QUESTIONS

How can this help teachers and students to increase their understanding of contentious issues?

- It helps to ensure that dialogue and debate are set within a context of sound knowledge and understanding about the religious issues involved.
- Students have a better understanding about the range of viewpoints within and across religious and non-religious beliefs, and why there is diversity and, sometimes, fierce disagreement.
- Having a focus on how religion or belief is understood from within and through first-hand experience helps students to understand issues in a deeper way than from textbook knowledge alone.

What classroom challenges might arise in RE?

- Some issues are complex, and even teachers with good subject knowledge can feel out of their depth. Within faith and belief communities there may be different views around a particular issue and teachers often fear causing confusion or misrepresenting such views.
- Information in text-books can be inaccurate, or be written from a particular perspective, or portray greater uniformity within a religion or denomination than exists in practice, or represent as standard belief and practice that which may be adhered to by only a minority of committed believers.

- Some teachers find themselves teaching only a small amount of RE alongside their main curriculum subject, therefore acquiring even a sound basic knowledge about a range of religions is difficult because they lack the time to do so.
- Some students are not engaged with any kind of formal religion and the teacher needs to consider all backgrounds when planning work.

How can teachers address such challenges?

- By keeping up to date with current initiatives in RE (see *Signposts to further resources* below), e.g. through *RE Today* and RE websites.
- By engaging the students through confident, inspiring teaching.
- By presenting accurate information about the range of faiths and beliefs, including their historical background and modern day practice.
- With the students, identifying the key questions that controversial issues raise for different religions.
- By facilitating students' personal search when appropriate, through enabling them to learn from as well as about faiths and beliefs.

NEXT STEPS

Signposts for further reading

Rivett, R (2007) *A teacher's handbook of Religious Education*, RE Today Services

www.re-handbook.org.uk (2010) A CPD e-resource for RE, funded by the Government and published by the REC

'A very short introduction to ...' series, Oxford University Press. (This series has concise and authoritative introductions to a range of world religions and humanism).

Signposts for further resources

General resources

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion> Useful basic information about religions, religious and ethical issues and religion in the news worldwide.

<http://www.natre.org.uk> for general information about RE and for 'RE Today' and other publications.

<http://www.interfaithkirklees.org.uk> Visiting places of worship is an enriching experience, but it is also possible to gain perspectives on faith groups through related websites such as this one.

<http://www.reonline.org.uk> After a school's locally agreed syllabus or diocesan syllabus, this is a good starting point. The 'Teachers' resources' section links to four very useful areas:

Better RE, *Subject Knowledge*, *People of Faith* and *REfuel*. The *Subject Knowledge* section provides detailed information, with links, about ten different religions and beliefs. Another useful link is to *People of Faith*, which deals with how religious beliefs affect lives. It provides the opportunity to email members of faith communities. *Better RE* has a section specifically designed to support teachers of RE who are not subject specialists. The site map sets out further links to helpful sites.

Classroom resources

Kirby/Emmett (1999) *Student Handbook for Religious Education*, Pearson Publishing.

RE Today Services, *Tackling Tough Questions* (DVD).

Best of British Islam: This is a set of DVDs produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and copies are available free of charge from the RE Council, info@religioueducationcouncil.org.uk

Signposts for further action

Check need for staff CPD and access it by, for example:

- using RE CPD Handbook (see *Signposts to further reading* above) to acquire relevant knowledge and understanding;
- taking the online subject knowledge booster course available from *Teach RE* (<http://www.teachre.co.uk/content/booster-course>);
- considering the availability of opportunities associated with effective CPD as identified by Ofsted in *Transforming RE* (2010: 40);
- active involvement in training initiatives within the local authority;
- participation in local authority networks looking at, for example, standardising assessments and developing schemes of work linked to the agreed syllabus;
- effective opportunities to embed whole-school initiatives to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning within the work of the department;
- opportunities for RE staff to visit other schools to observe good practice;
- dedicated time for the subject leader to plan and review work with non-specialists who teach RE.