

Planning for Religious Education units and lessons using the revised Pan-Berkshire Syllabus 2018-2023

Planning for Religious Education requires three levels of detail: long-term, mid-term and short-term, as in any other school subject.

Long-term planning is a whole school issue, as decisions will need to be made about the range of religions to be covered in each year group (or phase if you have mixed year classes). It is important that these decisions are made as a school and that the plan is followed to avoid unintentional repetition, which will interfere with pupil progress.

The syllabus recommends that one religion is the focus of each year group alongside Christianity (which should have more time dedicated to it). This means that each of the other main religions can be given a good amount of time, and it is likely that two of the religions will be shared by more than one year-group. Mixed religion units are also a possibility, particularly higher up the school. The choice of religions in a year group is entirely at the discretion of the school, and should consider school demographic, context and available resources. Other religious and non-religious worldviews can be added alongside the major faiths as appropriate.

It is not envisaged that syllabus questions will be tackled as individual units, but combined and focused (as in the previous syllabus) but schools may wish to ensure that all are covered by asking year groups to focus more on some than on others. Many of the questions cannot be dealt with in isolation and will inevitably touch on others to come to an answer. For example, Key Stage 1, question 3 “Does everyone believe the same things about God” will inevitably draw on question 4 “Why do symbols and stories play an important part in religions?” and probably questions 5 and 6 as well. Similar patterns will be seen in Key Stage 2 and 3.

Mid-term planning may be the responsibility of the class teacher, the RE subject leader or be based on a purchased Scheme of Work. The mid-term plans should contain the outline of what is to be taught, with an indication of the kinds of outcomes and activities that are suitable for the year group concerned. The level of detail required in a mid-term plan will vary between schools, but certain key elements need to be considered.

A separate document outlining a 7-Step planning process is attached. This contains a suggested way of approaching writing a unit. Clearly if a long-term plan that stipulates the question, the topic and the concept to be covered, then a teacher will engage with this from step 4 onwards.

Key elements to be considered when planning

What outcomes are envisaged at the end of the unit and how will pupils show their achievement?

It is essential that this question is considered at the beginning of detailed planning for a unit. Unless it is clear what the pupils are intended to learn and how they will demonstrate that learning, it becomes difficult to assess pupil progress and achievement. The key outcome, bearing in mind the expected outcomes from the syllabus, will be to answer the “Big question” upon which the unit is based. Being clear about this answer will help teachers to plan the learning steps that need to take place to enable pupils to answer the question.

What does the process look like in practice? An Example:

KS1:

Step 1: Choose and combine questions with the topic/content

A Christianity based unit on creation might take question 3 (Does everyone believe the same things about God?) and question 6 (How do some people's religious beliefs encourage them to care for the world). This unit will help pupils to work towards expected outcomes A (Recognise and give simple accounts of core beliefs) and D (Recognise the roles of religious leaders and sacred texts). Expectation B (Retell a range of religious stories and explain how they link to the core beliefs and practices) might be covered as well.

Step 2: Create a big question. There may be several possible questions that emerge. In a school familiar with Philosophy for Children it might be appropriate to allow pupils to generate the question.

How do most Christians believe they should treat the world?

How well do Christians show that "The Earth is the Lord's"? (a quote from Ps 24)

Does Creation help Christians to understand God?

How does the Biblical account of Creation encourage Christians to behave?

Step 3: Identify the key concept and its relevance to the pupils

The choice of question may change the emphasis on a concept, but in each of the suggested questions above the concepts are most likely to be Creation, God, Stewardship and Scripture. The balance between them will depend on the choice of texts and activities.

Step 4: Decide what pupils will do to show their learning at the end of the unit.

For example: Match some phrases from the Bible to some Christians beliefs about God.

Match some phrases from the Bible to pictures of people caring for the world/people

Create a poster for a Christian environmental event

Step 5: Decide where to start the learning

This step needs to include an introduction to the big question that is driving the unit. Finding ways to record the pupils' initial responses will enable progression to be shown by the end of the unit.

Will this begin with the religious material or the children's experiences? For example, starting from the children's experience might involve them making a model and having it broken, or perhaps the teacher making a model before lunch and returning after lunch to find it broken, discussing how it feels.

A non-religious book about the environment might be a good place to start, asking age-appropriate questions. The link below leads to some suggested books.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/children/2017/7-books-to-help-teach-children-about-the-environment/>

Starting from the religious material might mean reading the Creation story or Psalm 24 or Psalm 8 (in child friendly language of course) and allowing children to explore the meaning.

Step 6: Plan the steps between the start and the end

What texts, activities, clips or experiences do the children need to have to make the journey? If the learning is recorded in a “big book” then it will be easy to see whether the steps have been accomplished and the outcomes achieved.

Each step needs to have a clear learning objective or learning question that leads the learning enquiry. Objectives that are measurable (list, match, identify, describe, explain, annotate, note, define, underline, highlight) are better than unquantifiable ones (think, understand, know, explore). The learning objective should help pupils to know what they are doing and why. For example: Which is the most important day of creation? Circle your answer or what does the Bible say God made? Make a list (or choose pictures). Include some redundant material to make sure that children think about their answers.

Step 7: Include opportunities to reflect and evaluate their learning.

Allowing pupils to return to the big question at the end of the unit is an important step in assessing their progress, not only with the end of unit outcome, as planned at step 4, but by giving them time to reflect on the value of their learning. Has it changed how they respond? Has it changed their thinking?

Short-term planning will again require a different level of detail depending on school policy. Teacher confidence with the subject matter to be taught will also influence how much detail is required.

Lessons in RE work best when they contain a variety of activities that give pupils opportunity to deepen their learning. Pupils need to see how the learning is connected from one lesson to the next, so starting one lesson with an activity that picks up something from the previous lesson, for example a recap of the plenary or take away thought, a piece of pupil work displayed on the board for all to see or a question that was raised in the previous lesson.

Being clear about the learning objectives for each lesson is essential; a lesson needs to be driven by what pupils are learning more than by what they are doing. The activities need to enable the pupils to achieve that learning objective. Avoid activities that are not adequately RE orientated or sufficiently challenging. Matching numbered pictures of the 7 days of Creation to 7 numbered phrases about what was created may ensure that they get the answer right but is not really helping the children to learn any RE, and the cutting and sticking part of the activity may be very time consuming for the quality of learning taking place.