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## Religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3

June 2018



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## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-2018. The report evaluates standards, provision and leadership in religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3. It does not cover religious education in denominational, independent or special schools.

This report covers standards in religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3, and participation and engagement in learning. It also considers the factors that affect standards, including curriculum planning, teaching, assessment, leadership and improving quality.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia, and members of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs)<sup>1</sup>. The report's findings will also help to inform the development and implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

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## Background

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Religious education is a compulsory part of the curriculum from foundation phase to key stage 4. Schools must also provide religious education post-16. (Great Britain, 1998). Religious education must follow the relevant local agreed syllabus for religious education<sup>2</sup>. Parents have the legal right to withdraw their child from religious education, though in practice almost all pupils participate fully in religious education.

The Education Reform Act (Great Britain 1988) and the Welsh Office Circular (Welsh Office Education Department, 1994) set out the legal requirements for collective worship in schools in Wales. All schools must provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The aim of collective worship is to develop pupils socially, morally, spiritually and culturally. Schools should not use collective worship to teach religious education. Religious education and worship are separate activities although they may reinforce each other.

The 'National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales' was developed by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2008 alongside its review of the National Curriculum (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). The framework aimed to improve standards of religious education nationally by providing a coherent curriculum and assessment framework for Wales. It contains exemplar

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<sup>1</sup> SACREs are responsible in law for advising local authorities on religious education and collective worship. Every local authority must have a SACRE.

<sup>2</sup> The local agreed syllabus for each local authority is available from the Welsh Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education: <http://www.wasacre.org.uk/publications/syllabi.html>

programmes of study for each key stage, together with level descriptions for pupil performance. All local authorities and SACREs amended their local agreed syllabuses to take account of the framework.

The framework states that religious education should encourage pupils to explore a range of questions in a reflective, analytical, balanced way. It also focuses on understanding humanity's quest for meaning, the positive aspects of multi-faith/multicultural understanding, and pupils' own understanding and responses to life and religion. At key stage 2, religious education should foster learners' interest and wonder in the world and human experience to stimulate them into raising and investigating questions. Pupils should develop skills and gather information that will help them think creatively and share ideas through discussion. They should develop knowledge of different religions and a recognition of the importance that religion plays in people's lives. This should help them develop tolerance and respect for others. Pupils should explore spiritual and moral dimensions in order to inform their own search for meaning and purpose. They should have opportunities to express their own feelings and opinions, identify how their actions may affect others, recognise that other people's viewpoints differ from their own and reflect on and revise their own perspectives on life. At key stage 3, religious education should stimulate pupils to think for themselves. They should have opportunities to apply and evaluate their insights of fundamental religious and moral questions and to think creatively. Their knowledge of religions should foster a greater understanding of the significance of religion and its importance in promoting social cohesion, stability, global citizenship and sustainability. Pupils should reflect on the spiritual and moral dimensions of life and should be given opportunities to express and justify their own feelings and opinions about their search for meaning.

Around 15% of maintained schools in Wales have a religious character and teach 'denominational education' as a particular form of religious education (Welsh Government, 2018). Denominational education does not follow the locally agreed syllabus, but instead follows a syllabus determined by the individual school or group of schools with a particular religious character. Estyn does not inspect denominational education as part of its usual inspections of school with a religious character as this aspect of provision is inspected under separate legislation by inspectors appointed by the governing body of the school. Schools having a religious character provide denominational religious education rather than religious education in line with the locally agreed syllabus. In these schools, Estyn does not inspect religious education. Instead, these schools have a separate 'Section 50' inspection conducted by a person chosen by the governors that considers their religious education. 'Section 50' refers to the section of the Education Act 2005 that sets out the additional inspection requirements for these schools (Great Britain, 2005). Schools that provide denominational education were therefore not included in the sample of schools visited for this survey.

There is no requirement for schools to make judgements on pupils' performance at the end of key stage 2 or 3 in religious education. However, the document 'National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) recognises that knowledge of the characteristics of the level descriptions will help teachers to recognise learners' strengths, as well as areas for improvement, and to plan for progression.

In 2013, Estyn published a report on religious education in key stage 3 and key stage 4. The key messages in this survey led to the following recommendations:

‘Schools should:

- R1 Develop strategies to raise the attainment of boys at key stage 4
- R2 Improve standards at key stage 4 for pupils who are not entered for a qualification and consider giving all pupils the opportunity to gain an appropriate qualification
- R3 Improve the accuracy of teacher assessment of pupils’ levels at key stage 3
- R4 Ensure that tasks are challenging enough to enable more able pupils to reach higher levels at key stage 3
- R5 Ensure that the curriculum, staffing and timetabling arrangements enable all pupils to make good progress through key stages 3 and 4
- R6 Strengthen self-evaluation and use data in religious education departments to identify where and what to improve.

The Welsh Government should:

- R7 Collect, analyse and publish attainment data for religious education and religious studies in the same way as for non-core subjects
- R8 Work with local authorities and SACREs to improve the opportunities for professional development and support learning networks for teachers of religious education.’ (Estyn, 2013, p. 5)

In February 2015, the Welsh Government published Professor Donaldson’s findings in the document ‘Successful Futures, an Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales’ (Donaldson, 2015). Successful Futures proposes that the curriculum in Wales should ensure that children and young people develop as:

- ‘ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society’ (Donaldson, 2015, p. 29)

To facilitate this, the review recommends that a single organising structure for the curriculum should apply for the entire age range, from 3 to 16-year-olds. It proposes that this structure should comprise six ‘Areas of Learning and Experience’ (AOLEs) and that each of these Areas of Learning and Experience should make distinct and strong contributions to developing the four purposes of the curriculum.

Religious education sits within the ‘Humanities’ Area of Learning and Experience. Professor Donaldson (2015) writes that religious education should provide valuable experiences for pupils that contribute to each of the four purposes of the curriculum. He recognises that the role of religious education can be misunderstood as being about the promotion of a particular faith or belief rather than developing pupils’ respect and understanding of different forms of religion. He proposes that under the new curriculum the national expectations for religious education should remain a statutory curriculum requirement.

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## Main findings

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### Standards

- 1 In many schools surveyed, standards of religious education are good. In key stage 2, most pupils make good progress in developing their religious education skills and knowledge, although a minority of more able pupils do not make appropriate progress in line with their ability. In key stage 3, most pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve standards in line with their age and ability. However, a minority of schools often repeat work covered at key stage 2, and as a result pupils do not always make sufficient progress in improving their skills and knowledge.
- 2 In religious education lessons, most pupils engage well with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They discuss important questions with interest and enthusiasm. Many pupils offer considered reasons for their opinions and listen to the views of others respectfully. In the majority of schools, pupils express their personal responses confidently. They use their knowledge of different religions to make appropriate comparisons between their own lives and those of others. Most pupils respond positively to the opportunities that they have to take part in a wide range of interesting debates.
- 3 Many pupils have a secure understanding of the beliefs and practices of different religions. They have a sound knowledge of Christianity and Islam in particular along with a basic knowledge of at least two other religions.
- 4 Many pupils consolidate and extend their literacy and thinking and reasoning skills well in religious education lessons. Too few pupils, at key stage 3 in particular, apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively within religious education lessons.
- 5 Many pupils have a positive attitude towards religious education lessons and contribute with interest to group and class discussions. The majority of key stage 3 pupils understand how religious education supports them to become informed global citizens and feel that this helps them to contribute well in their local community. They are also aware of the issues facing many parts of the world today and feel that their religious education helps them to understand and respect the similarities and differences between people. As they mature, the majority of pupils recognise how this knowledge will benefit them in their adult life and that it will help them in their future careers. In many schools, religious education lessons help pupils to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

### Provision

- 6 Many schools plan well for religious education at key stage 2. In schools where curriculum planning is weaker, schemes of work do not support staff to teach skills and knowledge progressively and ensure that they cover the full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. In the majority of secondary schools, curriculum planning at



key stage 3 is good. In these schools, the curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of interesting and stimulating learning experiences that build successfully on their skills and knowledge as they move through the school. A lack of transition work means that in a minority of schools, topics and skills taught in key stage 2 are repeated in key stage 3.

- 7 Most teachers plan lessons that are stimulating and engage pupils in their learning successfully. However, in key stage 2 most teachers do not plan activities to challenge more able pupils to extend their skills further, or consider more complex religious ideas. In key stage 3, in a few schools, teaching does not engage pupils well enough as teachers do not use a wide enough range of stimulating activities and strategies. Additionally, where teaching is weaker, tasks are too difficult for less able pupils and do not stretch more able pupils well enough.
- 8 Most key stage 2 teachers have appropriate religious education subject knowledge. A minority of teachers are fearful that they might 'say the wrong thing' when teaching religions other than Christianity, particularly when their knowledge is less secure. Often, a combination of specialist and competent non-specialist teachers teach religious education lessons at key stage 3. In a few cases, the use of non-specialist teachers limits pupils' progress.
- 9 Nearly all primary schools have strong links with Christian organisations that enrich pupils' learning experiences. However, only a few schools have developed useful links with organisations relating to other faiths. For example, only a minority of pupils at key stage 2 visit a place of worship that is not Christian. Although most secondary schools have a few links with local Christian organisations, these tend to focus on giving pupils opportunities to perform concerts at local places of worship. Only a minority have developed strong and purposeful relationships that enhance learning through visits or visitors contributing to lessons.
- 10 The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils in key stage 2 and key stage 3 is variable. In lessons in both key stages, most teachers provide pupils with suitable oral feedback on their work. At key stage 3, many teachers' written feedback helps pupils' progress. Written feedback for pupils at key stage 2 is helpful in a few schools.
- 11 In key stage 2, only a very few teachers use any standardised material to assist them to make judgements on pupils' achievement in religious education. Staff in only a very few primary schools liaise with other schools to moderate their judgements or use Welsh Government exemplar material to assist them.

### Leadership

- 12 Leadership of religious education from headteachers and subject leaders is good overall in the majority of schools. In many primary and nearly all secondary schools, subject leaders regularly monitor that teachers are covering the agreed syllabus. However, at key stage 2, they rarely evaluate the quality of pupils' learning in religious education and, as a result, leaders do not have a secure awareness of pupils' standards. Nearly all secondary schools undertake an annual self-evaluation for religious education. In a minority of these schools, leaders focus on a narrow range of evidence and do not consider standards of teaching and learning well enough.



- 13 In most schools, teachers have very limited access to professional learning for religious education. Local authorities and regional consortia offer very little specialist professional learning in religious education for teachers or subject leaders. Only a few primary schools and a minority of secondary schools receive support and challenge specifically for religious education from local authorities or regional consortia. Where there are regular meetings for secondary school subject leaders to share resources and develop schemes of work, teachers find that these help them to improve practice in their school. Most headteachers are aware of the local SACRE but are unsure of its role and purpose. A few SACREs provide schools with a list of approved places of worship to visit. In only a minority of secondary schools are religious education teachers involved in any recent or meaningful school-to-school working that support improvements in teaching and learning in the subject.
- 14 There is very little transition work between secondary schools and their partner primary schools relating to religious education. As a result, pupils often repeat religious education topics and skills in secondary schools.
- 15 In most schools, leaders have a secure understanding of their role and responsibilities under the Prevent duty (HM Government, 2015) relating to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Great Britain, 2015). Many leaders recognise how important religious education is in contributing to this agenda. In a few schools, leaders do not fully understand these responsibilities. Many schools need advice on how to address sensitive issues with pupils and how to deal with parental concerns on visiting places of worship.
- 16 In most schools, leaders have considered changes to the teaching of religious education in light of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), although only a minority have made changes to their curriculum so far.

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## Recommendations

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### **Schools should:**

- R1 Ensure that more able pupils achieve in line with their ability in religious education
- R2 Strengthen monitoring and self-evaluation arrangements in key stage 2 to focus on improving pupils' standards and skills in religious education
- R3 Strengthen transition arrangements so that learning experiences in key stage 3 build on those in key stage 2 and avoid repetition of work
- R4 Evaluate their curriculum for religious education to prepare for the development and implementation of the new Humanities Area of Learning and Experience

### **Local authorities and regional consortia should:**

- R5 Work with SACREs to provide:
  - a. suitable professional learning opportunities for teachers of religious education
  - b. support for schools to evaluate their curriculum and plan for religious education as an integral part of the development of the humanities area of learning and experience
  - c. advice for schools on how to address sensitive issues with pupils and how to deal with parental concerns on visiting places of worship
- R6 Ensure that all leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015
- R7 Provide schools with guidance on approved places of worship to visit

### **The Welsh Government should:**

- R8 Work with local authorities, regional consortia and SACREs to ensure that there is clarity over the place of religious education within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience

## Standards

### Skills, knowledge and understanding

#### Key stage 2

- 17 In many primary schools, standards of religious education in key stage 2 are good. In these schools, most pupils make good progress and achieve standards in religious education in line with their ability and those they achieve in other subjects. However, the majority of more able pupils do not make progress in line with their ability, as teachers do not plan enough activities that enable them to work at a higher level.
- 18 In many schools, pupils develop their thinking skills well by engaging with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They discuss important questions with interest and enthusiasm. Many pupils extend their answers to questions well, for example by giving reasons for their responses and at times other religious perspectives.

In one primary school, in all classes in key stage 2, pupils discuss and contribute to philosophical questions through a study of 'big questions'. These questions include, for example, 'Is stealing always wrong?', 'Is everyone capable of being a hero?' and 'Is it right for people to be richer than others?' Through this work, pupils of all ages develop a sound understanding of how to respond to these fundamental questions raised by their own experiences, the world around them and religious beliefs.

- 19 Many pupils have a secure understanding of different religions, their beliefs and practices. They have a sound knowledge of a range of world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism in particular. For example, they understand the importance of Christ's resurrection to Christians and how the Qur'an influences the lives of Muslims. In most schools, pupils begin to compare different faiths using their knowledge of their practices and beliefs. In a few schools, pupils do not have a secure knowledge of different faiths beyond religious symbolism. Additionally, in a few rural schools, pupils do not have a strong understanding that Wales is a multi-cultural, multi-faith country and believe that people with different religions only live in other countries.
- 20 In the majority of schools, pupils express their personal responses confidently to religious or philosophical questions. They make appropriate comparisons between their own lives and those of others using their knowledge of different religions. Many pupils consider, appreciate, empathise with and respect the viewpoints of others. Many older pupils in particular use religious language appropriately when sharing their views. In many schools, religious education lessons are helping pupils to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

In two primary schools in Cardiff, pupils have regular opportunities to share their faith with other pupils. For example, many Muslim pupils share their religious beliefs and customs with other pupils confidently. Older pupils, in particular, talk about their faith with a clear understanding of how this affects their daily life. They appreciate talking about how and why they pray, and are proud to explain why religious books hold so much importance to them. These arrangements enable pupils to gain a real-life and meaningful insight into the beliefs of others.

- 21 Many pupils consolidate their literacy skills in religious education lessons. Most pupils listen well to their teachers and to each other. They speak assuredly using religious terminology appropriately. They discuss their work and viewpoints confidently in small groups and in whole-class situations. They write short pieces of work for a range of different purposes. However, in many schools, pupils do not write creatively or at length often enough in religious education lessons. In a few schools, teachers' planning inhibits pupils' ability to write independently and at length as they provide them with unnecessary scaffolding for their responses. Many older pupils read aloud from different religious texts with confidence and understanding.
- 22 In the majority of schools, pupils use their ICT skills well to support their learning in religious education. For example, in one school, pupils use simulation software to create simple animations to show their understanding of the Christian story of Moses and, in another school, they use the internet and word processing programs to research and produce useful information sheets to develop and demonstrate their knowledge of the Sikh, Guru Nanak.
- 23 In most schools, pupils use their numeracy skills in religious education lessons when it is appropriate to do so.
- 24 In most English medium schools, pupils do not use their Welsh language skills well enough in religious education lessons because they are not encouraged to do so by their teacher.

### Key stage 3

- 25 In many of the secondary schools visited, standards of religious education overall in key stage 3 are good. Most pupils make good progress throughout the key stage and achieve standards in line with their age and ability.
- 26 In most schools, pupils engage well with fundamental questions. For example, they discuss big questions such as 'Creation or evolution?' and 'What is the purpose of life?', drawing maturely upon their knowledge of different faiths and personal views. Many pupils offer considered reasons for their opinions and listen to the views of others respectfully. In many schools, religious education lessons help pupils to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.
- 27 In many schools, pupils explore a suitable range of different religious beliefs, teachings and practices at an appropriate level. In a minority of schools, the topics covered are often a repeat of those studied in primary schools. As a result, pupils in these schools do not build well enough on their skills or knowledge and understanding of different religions.

In one secondary school, pupils in Year 7 use the department's 'Progress Path' well as the basis of their religious education lessons. This is divided into the three religious education skills of 'engaging with fundamental questions', 'exploring beliefs, teachings and practices', and 'expressing personal responses'. Most pupils write accurate descriptions of the main features of Islam through their study of the life of Muslim Premier League football players. Many pupils debate confidently whether 'sawm' (fasting during Ramadan) is important or not and whether people in Wales should contribute part of their salary to 'zakah' (giving alms to poor and needy). Their work shows a good understanding of the five pillars of Islam and how they relate to daily life. They write appropriate menus for a Muslim feast based on their knowledge of the Qur'an as well as persuasive letters to a football manager noting what the club could learn from the life of a Muslim player.

- 28 In most schools, pupils express personal responses well. Most pupils respond positively to the opportunities that they have to take part in a wide range of oral debates. These include a wide range of topical discussions such as 'Was the Aberfan disaster a moral or natural one?' Many pupils articulate their views maturely, giving considered reasons for their answers. More able pupils make strong links with a range of religious teachings, when appropriate, to support their opinions.
- 29 In many schools, pupils develop their literacy skills well in religious education lessons. Many pupils listen attentively to each other and express their opinions using a suitable range of subject-specific vocabulary. More able pupils in particular use thoughtful, extended answers often using information from religious texts to support their responses. In a minority of Welsh-medium schools, pupils are over-reliant on using English terminology in their answers. In most schools, pupils write for a variety of purposes, generally at the same standard as in their Welsh and English lessons. In a minority of schools, pupils do not write at length often enough in religious education lessons. Many pupils read and interpret texts accurately and more able pupils in particular use skills such as inference and deduction to demonstrate a secure understanding of the meaning of a range of different written sources of evidence.
- 30 In most schools, pupils use their numeracy skills in religious education lessons when it is appropriate to do so. In a few schools, pupils use their numeracy skills to support their learning well. For example, they draw accurate graphs to present information on religions and populations, cost a trip to Mecca and create pie charts to display pupils' views on equality.
- 31 In most schools, pupils do not use their ICT skills regularly in religious education lessons. In schools where pupils use their ICT well to support their learning they develop their word processing skills to produce information leaflets on different religions and use tablet computers to research religious artefacts.
- 32 In many English-medium schools, pupils do not use their Welsh language skills well enough in religious education lessons.

## Attitudes to learning

### Key stage 2

- 33 Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes towards religious education and enjoy the subject. They behave well in lessons and co-operate with each other in group activities. Many pupils have a clear understanding of how religious education lessons are important and help them understand different people's beliefs. They enjoy learning about religious festivals, and how and why people pray. They recognise that it is important to be respectful and tolerant of others' beliefs. The majority of older pupils understand how religious education supports them to become an informed global citizen.

### Key stage 3

- 34 In most schools, pupils have positive attitudes towards religious education lessons. In these schools, pupils engage well in lessons, and contribute with interest to class and group discussions. Most pupils work as hard in religious education lessons as in other subjects. They enjoy having opportunities to discuss real life issues that are relevant to their lives and the world today. In a very few schools, pupils do not take enough care with their writing in religious education lessons and produce work that is untidy and not of a high enough standard.
- 35 Many pupils have a secure understanding of the importance of learning about different religions and describe in detail the benefits of studying the subject. Through studying different religions, pupils value how this helps them to understand equality issues and avoid stereotyping groups and individuals. Many pupils feel that this will help them to become better citizens within their local community and the world.
- 36 The majority of pupils feel that religious education will help them in their future careers. In a few schools, pupils show a strong awareness of how communities are changing, as people are more mobile globally, and how religious education will help them to embrace change and celebrate diversity. They are also aware of the issues facing many parts of the world today, for example discrimination based on a person's religious beliefs. Many pupils feel that religious education helps them better to understand similarities and differences between people and to learn to respect this.



## Provision

### Curriculum planning

#### Key stage 2

- 37 In many primary schools, curriculum planning for religious education in key stage 2 is good. Nearly all primary schools teach pupils about Christianity and Islam with most covering at least two other religions from Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism and Sikhism. In most primary schools, the curriculum meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. In these schools, teachers provide pupils with a broad and balanced religious education curriculum that builds on their skills and experiences. In the few schools where curriculum planning is weaker, schemes of work do not guide staff to teach skills and knowledge progressively and do not cover the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
- 38 In most schools, teachers revise their religious education scheme of work regularly to reflect curriculum changes, for example to take account of the literacy and numeracy framework (Welsh Government, 2013).
- 39 In many schools, pupils have a weekly timetabled religious education lesson. In the majority of schools, teachers teach religious education as a stand-alone subject. In a minority of schools, teachers teach religious education as part of a topic. In one school, for example, when the pupils study the theme of India they learn about Hinduism, and they link Judaism to the Second World War theme.
- 40 In most schools, leaders have considered changes to the teaching of religious education in light of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015). However, only a minority have made changes so far. In these schools, staff have formed areas of learning and experience groups and have started to consider teaching religious education through a humanities-themed approach. Even in these schools, very little has changed to the learning experiences for pupils. In one primary school, teachers have looked in depth at changing the curriculum in line with the principles of Successful Futures. (See appendix 3)
- 41 In around half of schools, the usual class teacher does not teach religious education. Another member of staff (teacher or teaching assistant) who covers Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time teaches religious education on a weekly basis. In a few schools, teachers routinely leave religious education lessons for supply teachers to teach.
- 42 In multi-faith areas of Wales, school provision for religious education can play an important part in improving community cohesion. For example, in one Cardiff school, staff feel that the school's religious education work has helped the community to address issues of racism, with pupils educating other members of their family about rights and the need to respect different views.

### Key stage 3

- 43 In the majority of secondary schools, curriculum planning for religious education in key stage 3 is good. In these schools, the curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of interesting and stimulating learning experiences that build on their skills and knowledge as they move through the school. Learning experiences focus appropriately on religious beliefs and practices as well as fundamental questions relating to moral, ethical and philosophical issues. Lessons provide pupils with a good understanding of the diversity of people within their own community, Wales and the wider world. Nearly all schools ensure that they meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. In most schools, leaders revise their schemes of work regularly to reflect curriculum changes.
- 44 In most of the schools visited, staff have started to discuss the implications for the teaching of religious education in light of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015). A minority of these schools have started to change the key stage 3 curriculum and are currently developing plans to teach religious education within a humanities-themed approach. In a few schools, teachers have started to incorporate the four core purposes in their current religious education planning.
- 45 In most schools, the curriculum covers most or all of the six major world religions. In one school visited, leaders decided not to teach Islam because there are very few Muslims living in their local area. This is unacceptable and deprives pupils of the opportunity to learn about a major religion that influences views on significant global issues. In a very few schools, there is an overemphasis on Christianity.
- 46 In most schools, teachers have little information about what pupils have learnt and the levels that they have achieved in key stage 2. As a result, in a minority of schools, schemes of work repeat skills and activities that pupils have already learnt in their previous school.
- 47 In nearly all schools, pupils receive regular religious education lessons. In most schools, pupils receive the equivalent of one hour of religious education a week.
- 48 Schools are required to teach religious education in key stage 4, so many schools choose to accredit this learning by entering pupils for a GCSE qualification. In the schools visited where this is the case, arrangements for pupils to start their religious studies GCSE course vary. In around a third of schools, they begin the GCSE course at the start of Year 9, a third start in the third term of Year 9, while the other third start the GCSE course in Year 10. In nearly all schools where pupils start their GCSE course in Year 9, leaders ensure that the scheme of work for Year 9 also meets the statutory requirements for key stage 3.
- 49 In most schools, religious education helps schools to play a role in strengthening community cohesion. Most pupils have strong views on the importance of tolerance and respect and take these with them into their homes and wider communities. This is most noticeable in multi-faith parts of Wales. In a very few schools, leaders do not have a secure understanding of the opportunities that religious education provides to prepare pupils to live in a diverse society.

## Enrichment and experiences

### Key stage 2

- 50 Nearly all schools have strong links with Christian organisations. For example, in many schools, local Christian leaders regularly lead collective worship and discuss Christianity with pupils in religious education lessons. In many schools, pupils visit a range of different local churches to learn about Christian beliefs and practices. Pupils also take part in community activities at these places of worship, for example Christmas concerts and charity events.
- 51 Only a few schools engage well with other faith leaders and organisations to enrich the curriculum, and these tend to be schools serving multi-faith communities. For example, in one inner-city school, the local imam regularly talks to pupils in lessons, and members of a Muslim association organise Eid celebrations in the school. In a few schools, parents of different faiths help staff to organise and celebrate festivals such as the Chinese New Year and Diwali.
- 52 In a minority of schools, pupils make visits to places of worship other than Christian. When teachers arrange such visits, they are usually to mosques, temples and synagogues. In these schools, a very few parents do not allow their children to make the visit. However, in schools where visits do not take place, a minority of leaders perceive that, if they organised a visit to a mosque, parents would not support it.

Staff at a primary school in Merthyr recognise the value of making visits to places of worship to enhance religious education. As a result, they arrange for pupils in Years 3 and 4 to visit a synagogue in Cardiff and pupils in Years 5 and 6 to visit a mosque in Swansea. They also have strong links with churches within their local community. The opportunities that pupils have to engage experientially with different faiths and explore questions directly with faith leaders have a significant impact on their learning in religious education.

### Key stage 3

- 53 Although most secondary schools have a few links with local Christian organisations, these tend to focus on giving pupils opportunities to perform concerts at local places of worship. Only a minority have developed strong relationships that enhance learning through educational visits or visitors contributing to lessons. Most schools do not use visits well to enrich their religious education curriculum. When visits do take place, they are generally to churches, cathedrals and synagogues. Only a few schools arrange visits to mosques. Most schools now make fewer visits to places of worship than in previous years. A few schools occasionally arrange for faith leaders to lead collective worship or to discuss their faith with pupils in religious education lessons. These visitors have included representatives from Hindu and Islamic centres. In many schools, there are missed opportunities to work with local Welsh-medium churches and chapels to help include an element of Welsh language in religious education lessons.

In one secondary school serving a diverse community, staff have developed links with faith leaders from various ethnic groups that represent the backgrounds of pupils at the school. For example, they work with members of the local Somali community, who visit the school to hold community days to raise the profile of this ethnic group. This support and advice help staff to support and understand the needs of pupils from different ethnic groups more effectively.

## Teaching

### Key stage 2

- 54 In many schools, most teachers plan lessons well to meet the needs of most pupils and engage them in their learning successfully. They use a variety of effective teaching methods including group discussion, role-play and paired work. Many teachers use a wide range of stimulating and relevant resources to add interest and excitement to their lessons. For example, they use video clips of religious stories and festivals to provide an engaging introduction to a lesson and provide artefacts from different religions for pupils to explore to stimulate their curiosity. They provide pupils with opportunities to compare different religions, for example similarities between a Christian parable and the five pillars of Islam. Many teachers have high expectations of pupils. However, in many schools, teachers do not provide more able pupils with sufficient challenge. This is because they do not teach the higher level 5 skills often enough. As a result, more able pupils do not achieve as well as they could. In a few schools, teachers provide pupils with too much 'scaffolding' for responses, and this restricts their ability to choose how to set out their work and does not allow them to write at length.
- 55 Most teachers have appropriate religious education subject knowledge. However, a minority of teachers fear that they might 'say the wrong thing' when teaching religions other than Christianity, particularly when their knowledge is less secure. As a result, pupils' learning experiences about faiths other than Christianity are more restricted.
- 56 In most schools, teachers plan appropriately for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and thinking skills alongside their religious education skills. In a few schools, teachers' planning concentrates too much on developing pupils' literacy skills at the expense of religious education skills, and this limits pupils' progress in the subject.
- 57 A very few schools employ outside groups to teach religious education lessons. In one school, leaders use a local Christian organisation to teach part of their religious education scheme of work to older pupils. The headteacher has checked the content of the course and is happy that it is suitable. However, leaders do not monitor or challenge the quality of this provision or check that the provider has planned appropriate activities or assessed pupils' work. As a result, these pupils do not receive high-quality teaching that matches their ability well enough.

### Key stage 3

- 58 Most teachers are enthusiastic about the subject. Many plan lessons that are stimulating and interesting for pupils. They use a range of different teaching approaches including multimedia presentations, group discussions and music to

motivate pupils. In a few schools, teaching does not engage pupils well enough as teachers do not use a wide enough range of stimulating activities and strategies. In most schools, teachers match work to meet the needs of pupils well. Where teaching is weaker, tasks are too difficult for less able pupils or do not stretch more able pupils.

- 59 In most schools, teachers have high expectations of pupils and expect them to work hard and progress well in religious education lessons. However, in a few schools teachers do not set high enough expectations for pupils and, as a result, many pupils do not work to a high enough standard or take enough pride in their work.
- 60 In most schools, a combination of specialist and competent non-specialist teachers teach religious education lessons. In only a few schools are all religious education lessons taught by specialist teachers. In most schools, the comprehensive scheme of work for religious education and ongoing support from the subject leader enable non-specialist teachers to teach the subject competently.
- 61 In many schools, teachers plan appropriately to develop pupils' literacy skills in religious education lessons. They provide pupils with regular opportunities to use their oracy and thinking skills through group and class discussions, for example when considering moral dilemmas and prejudice. In many schools, teachers plan a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to write for a range of purposes, including extended written work, within a religious or philosophical context. In most schools, teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to redraft their work. In most schools, teachers ensure that pupils use their reading skills appropriately in religious education lessons. These include opportunities to read texts, including religious texts, from a range of different sources, including online.
- 62 In many schools, teachers do not provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to consolidate their ICT or numeracy skills in religious education lessons. Where teachers provide activities, they tend to be to make a presentation or to undertake research for ICT and to present data in graphs for numeracy. In a minority of schools where teachers plan well for pupils' ICT skills development, there are some strong examples of effective practice. For example in one secondary school, pupils have opportunities to use ICT to design their own lessons on Martin Luther King and to make presentations on Stanley Tookie Williams.

## Assessment and feedback

### Key stage 2

- 63 The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils is variable. In lessons, most teachers provide pupils with helpful oral feedback on their work that enables pupils to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding. In a few schools, this oral feedback enables more able pupils to extend their learning. Only in a few schools does teachers' written feedback help pupils to improve their religious education knowledge and skills well enough. In these schools, feedback is specific and diagnostic and tells pupils what they have done well and how to improve further. In many schools, written feedback only focuses on improving pupils' literacy skills.

- 64 Only a few schools use exemplar material to support teachers' judgements of pupil progress in religious education. A minority of schools keep portfolios of pupils' work. However, in most of these schools, portfolios only show coverage of the curriculum and teachers do not match work to levels in the subject. As a result, only a very few teachers use any standardised material to assist them to make judgements on pupils' achievement in religious education. Staff in only a very few schools liaise with other schools to moderate their judgements or use Welsh Government exemplar material to assist them.

### Key stage 3

- 65 In nearly all schools, teachers track pupils' progress and attainment in religious education accurately. In most schools, pupils complete regular assessments, commonly half-termly or at the end of a topic. Teachers judge pupils' attainment using religious education level descriptors. In a few schools, teachers provide pupils with a valuable level descriptor sheet at the beginning of the year and the success criteria for assessment tasks relates directly to this. This ensures that pupils in these schools know exactly what teachers require of them.
- 66 Most schools have useful portfolios of pupils' work that have been assessed and standardised. Teachers use these portfolios well to assist them in making accurate judgements of pupils' work. Teachers in a few schools liaise well with other schools to moderate their judgements or use Welsh Government exemplar material to assist them.
- 67 The quality of teachers' verbal and written feedback to pupils about their work varies considerably. In the majority of schools, teachers provide pupils with helpful feedback on their religious education and literacy skills. Many teachers provide pupils with useful guidance on what they have done well and how they can improve their work further. In many schools, teachers' feedback relates appropriately to the success criteria for each task.
- 68 In a few schools, teachers' written feedback does not help pupils to improve their literacy skills well enough, with pupils often making and repeating mistakes in basic spelling and punctuation. In addition, in a few schools, there is little evidence of pupils reading and acting on teachers' feedback to improve their work further. In the majority of schools, pupils are not given useful opportunities to assess their own work and that of their peers.



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## Leadership

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### Subject leadership

#### Key stage 2

- 69 In most schools, there is appropriate leadership of religious education from headteachers and subject leaders. All leaders are aware of the locally agreed religious education syllabus and many ensure that their school meets the statutory requirements. They have a sound understanding of the provision for religious education in their school but are less secure about pupils' standards.
- 70 Most leaders have a clear view on the importance of religious education and understand what pupils gain from lessons. In nearly all schools, leaders recognise the importance that the whole-school ethos plays in supporting religious education teaching. They also see collective worship as playing an important role in reinforcing key religious and moral messages.
- 71 Leaders in only a few schools have a secure understanding of the standards that pupils achieve in religious education. In most schools, headteachers and subject leaders have a very positive opinion of standards of religious education in their schools. However, they do not base this view on a robust evaluation of pupils' standards. In the few schools where leaders have a secure understanding of standards, they observe learning and monitor pupils' work regularly and accurately to identify strengths and areas to improve.
- 72 Although only a few subject leaders have any formal religious education qualifications, in most schools the subject leader has developed the skills necessary to lead the subject appropriately. In a very few schools, the headteacher appointed the subject leader as it was the only position available to a new staff member at the time of appointment and not because of the teacher's strong interest in, or knowledge of, the subject.
- 73 In nearly all schools, leaders ensure that teachers have enough resources to teach religious education lessons successfully. Most schools have a comprehensive range of relevant books and artefacts that are high quality and support teaching effectively. Although, in most schools, leaders do not allocate financial resources for religious education annually, leaders make funds available if resources need updating or replacing. In a minority of schools, teachers also use library or local authority lending services to borrow additional books and resources to support their teaching well.

#### Key stage 3

- 74 In most schools, religious education subject leaders lead their subject well. They organise regular, helpful meetings to discuss the school's provision and monitor pupils' progress. They ensure that all staff, particularly non-specialists, receive appropriate support to enable them to teach the subject effectively.

- 75 In most schools, headteachers and subject leaders have a sound awareness of standards of religious education in their school. Subject leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the subject's strengths and areas that need to improve.
- 76 In nearly all schools, leaders ensure that religious education is resourced as well as other subjects outside of the core subjects. In most schools, the headteacher allocates a regular amount of money each year to the subject to purchase a range of useful resources. In a minority of schools, leaders base funding on the number of pupils taking the subject for GCSE and, as a result, the religious education department often gets additional funding for resources.

### Withdrawal from religious education

- 77 In nearly all schools, leaders inform parents of their right to withdraw their child from religious education, usually by a statement in the school prospectus or on their website. In most schools, leaders arrange to talk to any parents who wish to withdraw their child from collective worship or religious education lessons. Following these meetings, most parents change their mind as the headteacher or subject leader addresses sensitively the parent's concerns about the subject and persuades them of its value for their child. As a result, in nearly all schools, very few pupils do not take part in religious education, and this has been the case for several years.

### Improving quality

#### Key stage 2

- 78 In a few schools, leaders use the outcomes of robust monitoring activities to improve the quality of pupils' standards in religious education. In many schools, the religious education subject leader undertakes some form of regular monitoring in line with their school's policy. This is usually annually or part of a two- or three-year cycle. The headteacher usually allocates time for religious education monitoring in line with that given for other non-core subjects.
- 79 Monitoring activities generally include scrutinising pupils' work, looking at teachers' planning and, in a few schools, lesson observations. In a minority of schools, leaders also seek the views of pupils through questionnaires or meetings. Following these activities, many subject leaders produce useful monitoring reports, which they share with other members of staff. In a few schools, subject leaders write specific useful religious education self-evaluation reports and action plans.
- 80 In nearly all schools, subject leaders only evaluate the school's provision for religious education and skills. These include opportunities to develop the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF: Welsh Government, 2013) and ICT in religious education lessons, standards of teaching, resources and opportunities to enhance the curriculum. Leaders do not evaluate the standards that pupils achieve in religious education or the progress that they are making. As a result, most leaders do not have any plans in place to improve pupils' outcomes in religious education and do not have any robust or verified evidence to support their judgements on pupils' standards.

In one primary school, leaders regularly monitor the standards that pupils achieve in religious education through the scrutiny of pupils' work, lesson observations and the analysis of internal data. Recent monitoring revealed that many older pupils were achieving a level 4, but there was no evidence of level 5 work. Leaders identified that pupils were not making links between different religious beliefs, teachings and practices or identifying similarities and differences within and across religions. As a result of this work, leaders included a target to address this as part of their school improvement plan.

- 81 There are limited professional learning opportunities for religious education teachers or subject leaders. Teachers have very few opportunities to work collaboratively and observe good practice in religious education in their own school or in other schools. Local authorities and regional consortia offer very few religious education specific professional learning opportunities for teachers or subject leaders. As a result, nearly all schools rely on organising their own religious education training internally for school staff. The quality of the training depends on the knowledge and skills of the subject leaders.
- 82 In most schools, the subject leader provides suitable support and challenge for colleagues teaching the subject. Most leaders are enthusiastic about the subject and work well with other staff to improve provision for religious education in their school. However, in the few schools where subject leaders do not have an extensive knowledge of a wide range of religions, their ability to support and challenge other staff is limited. In addition, subject leaders do not challenge staff well enough over the standards that pupils achieve, particularly the more able.

### Key stage 3

- 83 In nearly all schools, subject leaders monitor standards and provision in religious education on an annual or biennial basis as part of a whole-school monitoring and evaluation cycle. Leaders undertake a range of suitable monitoring activities including scrutiny of pupils' work, lesson observations and learning walks. In the majority of schools, teachers talk to pupils as part of this process to gain their views on the subject. This includes finding out about what pupils would like to learn. Leaders also monitor the progress that pupils are making by analysing internal pupil tracking data. In the majority of schools, members of the school's senior leadership team also moderate the judgements that the subject teachers make by also scrutinising standards of teaching and learning. As a result, in these schools, judgements on pupils' standards are secure.
- 84 In nearly all schools, the subject leader for religious education, after consultation with subject teachers, produces an annual self-evaluation report and action plan. In most schools, there is a clear link between the outcomes of monitoring activities and priorities for improvement in the action plan. In a minority of schools, however, the quality of self-evaluation is not good enough. For example, leaders base their judgements on a narrow range of evidence, and do not focus on the impact of actions well enough.

- 85 WJEC offers training for Year 9 teachers who teach the GCSE syllabus. However, apart from these courses, there are very few subject-specific professional learning opportunities for teachers of religious education.
- 86 In only a minority of schools are religious education teachers involved in any recent or meaningful school-to-school working that supports improvements in teaching and learning in the subject. In these schools, religious education teachers are part of a regional consortium network of professional practice or regularly attend local authority religious education forum meetings. These gatherings provide teachers with opportunities to share best practice as well as offering them support and guidance.
- 87 In nearly all schools, the subject leader provides colleagues who teach religious education with a suitable level of support through formal meetings and informally, particularly for those who are not subject specialists. They also provide these teachers with a range of suitable resources to support their teaching.

### Transition

- 88 There is very little transition work between primary and secondary schools that focuses on religious education. In addition, there is very little discussion about religious education between primary schools within their cluster, for example on which religions they will study. As is the case with other non-core subjects, very few primary and secondary schools work together to exchange performance information on pupils' achievement in religious education. They do not work together to share information on their religious education schemes of work or what religions have been taught. As a result, pupils often repeat religious education topics and skills in key stage 3 that they learnt in key stage 2.
- 89 In a few school clusters, specialist religious education teachers from secondary schools have supported primary colleagues in teaching aspects of religious education and have shared some resources. In a very few clusters, religious education teachers from secondary schools occasionally teach religious education lessons to primary pupils. In addition, when pupils visit secondary schools on transition days, in a few school clusters they occasionally have a religious education lesson. However, these arrangements are not a regular feature of transition work within these clusters of schools.

### Prevent

- 90 In most schools, leaders have a secure understanding of their role and responsibilities set out in the Prevent duty (HM Government, 2015) under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Great Britain, 2015). Many leaders recognise how important religious education lessons are in contributing to this agenda.
- 91 In larger urban areas, almost all teachers of religious education have attended local Prevent courses to give them very thorough training on how to recognise potential signs of radicalisation and extremism and deal with concerns. A few schools have referred concerns about individual pupils to the relevant local panel to consider. For

example, in one secondary school, a teacher of religious education had concerns over a comment that a pupil made in a lesson. Following further discussion with their designated child protection teacher, the school made a referral in line with their safeguarding policy.

- 92 In most parts of Wales, however, only senior leaders have received training about Prevent and it is their role to disseminate the information to other members of staff. In a very few schools, members of staff are unaware of Prevent.
- 93 In a few schools, leaders do not fully understand their role and do not perceive this as relevant or a threat to their school and surrounding area. This lack of attention to Prevent means that staff in these schools, including religious education teachers, may miss an opportunity to identify and address early concerns about a pupil or the behaviour of individuals outside of school that have contact with a pupil.
- 94 In nearly all schools, leaders have effective procedures in place to monitor external speakers. In most schools, leaders check speakers in advance of their visits and, in the best practice, visitors are required to discuss and agree the exact content of their talk with a senior member of staff. At least one member of staff usually stays in the room when visitors talk to classes or lead collective worship. In a few schools, subject leaders report a marked decrease in visitors to the school over recent years, as leaders are more mindful of possible risks.
- 95 Most schools provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to talk about terror-related incidents, usually in class. In many schools, leaders also reflect on such incidents in collective worship, when appropriate, which supports work within religious education. However, religious education teachers in a few schools lack confidence in handling class discussions about these sensitive issues. For example, in one primary school, during the period around the time of the Manchester bombing in 2017, teachers had planned to teach a unit of work on Islam. Most key stage 2 teachers decided to not teach the unit as planned as they were not sure how to deliver it sensitively and appropriately.
- 96 Most schools carry out appropriate risk assessments before taking pupils on visits to places of worship.

### External challenge and support

- 97 Only a few primary schools receive support or challenge specifically for religious education from local authorities or regional consortia. In line with other non-core subjects, challenge advisers do not discuss systematically standards and provision for religious education and do not request any data.

Staff at one primary school received useful support from their regional consortium to help them revise their religious education scheme of work. Advisers from the consortium visited the school for two days to talk to staff and to review the current scheme of work. They then assisted the school's subject leader to develop a new scheme of work to reflect the context of the school, using the locally agreed syllabus as the starting point.

- 98 Most primary school headteachers are aware of the local SACRE but are unsure of its role and purpose. In a minority of schools, leaders receive useful guidance via emails from the local SACRE. In particular, a few SACREs provide schools with a list of approved places of worship to visit.
- 99 Only a minority of secondary schools receive any external support from the local authority or regional consortia. In consortia where there are regular meetings for subject leaders to share resources and develop schemes of work, teachers report that these meetings help them to improve practice in their school. In the few schools where teachers are part of the local SACRE, they receive the most up-to-date information on the work of the group. However, teachers in a minority of schools make very little use of the information provided by their local SACRE.
- 100 Nearly all SACREs offer support for schools to address recommendations relating to religious education following an Estyn inspection.

One SACRE offers telephone advice for teachers from their professional adviser for religious education. The SACRE provides a list of contacts for schools wishing to visit places of worship or invite members of faith communities into schools. Members of the SACRE have set up a website within the local authority website where schools can access statutory documents and information and guidance about religious education and collective worship. They work closely with the local authority's ethnic minority service who have created a 'faith trail' around the area to support schools with their school visits and resources that closely link their work and the work of SACRE. Members of the SACRE encourage schools to submit articles to the publication, 'RE News', to share good practice. Teacher and headteacher representatives on the SACRE also feed back to the staff in their school and bring to their attention any issues, concerns or points of interest.



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## Appendix 1: Questions for providers

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As a starting point for reviewing current practice in religious education, schools can use the following questions as part of their self-evaluation:

### Standards

- Do we know the standards that pupils are achieving in religious education?
- Do we know that more able pupils are achieving as well as they could?
- Do we know that pupils of all abilities achieve similar standards in religious education as in other subjects?

### Provision

- Do we ensure that we do not repeat skills and topics in key stage 3 that pupils have already covered in key stage 2?
- Do we ensure that learning experiences challenge all pupils, including the more able?
- Do we plan meaningful opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in religious education lessons?
- Do we use visits and visitors to enhance the curriculum well enough?
- Do we use a wide range of teaching methods that engage all pupils effectively?
- Do we have high expectations of all learners, particularly the more able?
- Do we give opportunities for pupils of different faiths to share their experiences with other pupils?
- Do we ensure that pupils know how religious education lessons will help them to become ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world?
- Do we provide pupils with effective oral and written feedback that addresses religious education and other skills?

### Leadership

- Do we monitor the standards that pupils achieve in religious education as well as provision?
- Do we have processes in place to make secure judgements on the standards that pupils achieve?

- Do we base our judgements on a wide range of first-hand evidence?
- Do we listen to learners well enough?
- Do our self-evaluation report and action plan relate to improving pupils' standards as well as provision and leadership?
- Do we provide suitable professional learning opportunities to staff or opportunities for staff to collaborate with others?
- Do we discuss standards of and provision for religious education within our cluster of schools?
- Are we evaluating our curriculum to prepare for the development and implementation of the new humanities area of learning?
- Do we ensure that all members of staff, including supply and new members of staff, are fully aware of their responsibilities under the Prevent duty?

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## Appendix 2: Evidence base

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The findings and recommendations in this report draws on direct evidence from 47 schools:

- visits to 12 primary schools and nine secondary schools
- telephone interviews with leaders in seven primary schools and five secondary schools
- information from 13 primary school inspections in autumn term 2017 where religious education was the additional thematic focus
- questionnaire responses from all 22 SACREs

The sample of schools visited or telephoned takes account of a range of geographical location, socio-economic background, size of school and linguistic contexts. The sample also includes a small number of pioneer schools.

The visits included:

- interviews with headteachers and subject leaders
- lesson observations and learning walks
- discussions with pupils with their work
- scrutiny of pupils' work
- scrutiny of school documents, including, for example, policies, schemes of work, self-evaluation reports and action plans, portfolios of pupils' work, training records and monitoring data

### List of schools interviewed, visited or inspected

#### Schools visited

Albany Primary School, Cardiff  
 Argoed High School, Flintshire  
 Cathays High School, Cardiff  
 Cowbridge Comprehensive School, Vale of Glamorgan  
 Cwrt Rawlin Primary School, Caerphilly  
 Dŵr-y-Felin Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot  
 Llanfair Primary School, Denbighshire  
 Llanidloes Primary School, Powys  
 Moorland Primary School, Cardiff  
 Palmerston Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan  
 Pentrehafod School, Swansea  
 Penygawsi Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
 Plasmarl Primary School, Swansea  
 Treorchy Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
 Victoria Primary School, Wrexham  
 Ysgol Awel y Mynydd, Conwy  
 Ysgol Bro Dinefwr, Carmarthenshire

Ysgol Dinas Bran, Denbighshire  
 Ysgol Gynradd Parc Y Bont, Anglesey  
 Ysgol Santes Tydfil, Merthyr Tydfil  
 Ysgol Tryfan, Gwynedd

### **Schools telephoned**

Blackwood Comprehensive School, Caerphilly  
 Brynmawr Foundation School, Blaenau Gwent  
 Cyfarthfa Park Primary School, Merthyr Tydfil  
 Llangewydd Junior School, Bridgend  
 Ringland Primary School, Newport  
 Shirenewton Primary School, Monmouthshire  
 Stanwell Comprehensive School, Vale of Glamorgan  
 Ysgol Bod Alaw, Conwy  
 Ysgol Brynrefail, Gwynedd  
 Ysgol Bryn Gwalia, Flintshire  
 Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, Torfaen  
 Ysgol Maenclochog, Pembrokeshire

### **Schools inspected**

Darran Park Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
 Ysgol Y Berllan Deg, Cardiff  
 Rhosymedre Community Primary School, Wrexham  
 St Illtyd's Primary School, Blaenau Gwent  
 Ysgol y Faenol, Denbighshire  
 Franksbridge Primary School, Powys  
 Ysgol Sarn Bach, Gwynedd  
 Ysgol Gynradd Penysarn, Anglesey  
 Creunant Primary School, Neath Port Talbot  
 Penrhys Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
 Ysgol Bro Sion Cwllt, Ceredigion  
 Ysgol Baladeulyn, Gwynedd  
 Hendy Primary Mixed School, Carmarthenshire

## Appendix 3: Case studies

### **Case study 1: Dŵr-y-Felin Comprehensive School: Developing ambitious, capable learners that are entrepreneurial and creative in their learning.**

#### **Information about the school**

Dŵr-y-Felin Comprehensive School is a large English-medium 11-16 mixed comprehensive school in Neath Port Talbot. It has 1,134 pupils on roll. Around 14% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales and around 18% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds with very few from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils with additional learning needs is around 26%, slightly above the national average.

The school is currently a 'professional learning pioneer school'. The school's mission statement is in line with the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales.

#### **Context and background to the effective practice**

The religious education department at Dŵr-y-Felin Comprehensive School is a progressive department that is constantly seeking to innovate in its teaching approaches in order to enhance the pupils' learning experiences. In the department's development plan, leaders identified the need to support the school's aim of developing ambitious, capable learners that are entrepreneurial and creative in their learning. Following consultation with all members of staff within the department, leaders took the decision to give autonomy to the pupils to plan and create a series of lessons on a specified theme. This approach was designed to allow the pupils' interests and ideas to be at the centre of their learning, giving them responsibility for driving forward their own progress and developing skills for lifelong learning.

#### **Description of activity/strategy**

Encouraging, motivating and engaging pupils through effective teaching and learning is at the centre of the school's curriculum planning. During the autumn term 2017, the key focus of the religious education department was to provide a balance where skills development is aided through subject content and supported by authentic, learning experiences.

To begin the project, teachers just gave pupils the title of the thematic focus based on 'Heroes and Villains' and the requirement for an assessed outcome at the end of the unit. Following on from this, teachers put pupils into mixed ability and mixed gender groups to decide on a vision for their outcome. The teacher selected the groups based on challenging pupils to

work with a range of different pupils. Within their groups, pupils discussed the skills that they would need to complete the task. They also agreed on success criteria for the assessment, to assist them in achieving their outcome. Through independent research, each group focused on a different aspect within the theme, looking at people who have a religious background and have done heroic things or who became more heroic due to religious conversion. This suited pupils' interest and kept them motivated to learn. Pupils chose to study Martin Luther King Jnr, Nicky Cruz and Stanley Williams. Furthermore, each group member chose their own roles of leader, researcher, organiser, ICT expert, resource developer and questioner. Each role was suited to the individual pupil's interests. Teachers gave pupils the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding by asking them to complete a balanced and evaluative answer that incorporated religious content as well as assessing their evaluative and analytic skills. Each lesson started with the teacher recapping on previous lessons through the use of probing questions. Pupils evaluated the previous skills that they had developed and then independently chose skills that they would focus on for that particular lesson that supported their success criteria.

Teachers facilitated learning by suggesting and discussing strategies amongst groups and through useful plenary sessions. Pupils worked collaboratively and groups were competitive amongst each other as they strived to achieve the best outcome.

Throughout the term the motivation, enthusiasm and engagement by all pupils were outstanding and pupil feedback suggested that this autonomous, independent approach is what pupils enjoyed most about the learning.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

The biggest change that teachers witnessed was improved pupil engagement in religious education when compared to a more set approach to learning. Pupils also gained greater knowledge of religious beliefs, teachings and practices and the relationship between people's beliefs and their actions, than in previous years. Teachers gave pupils the opportunity to evaluate what they have gained from the experience. The main outcome was that they liked the opportunity to choose how they learn in religious education lessons and the greater opportunity to work independently, drawing on a variety of different informed sources in order to present their evidence.

Following this approach, teachers then gave pupils the opportunity to choose their topic for the next term and enabled them to suggest ideas for driving their learning forward further. The school plans to extend this approach to learning in the future.



## **Case study 2: Plasmarl Primary School: Developing religious education skills using real-life contexts**

### **Information about the school**

Plasmarl Primary School is in Swansea. The school has 164 pupils, including 29 part-time pupils in the nursery. Around 45% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the national average. Around 17% of pupils have English as an additional language. The school identifies approximately 49% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is higher than the national average.

### **Context and background to the interesting practice**

Senior leaders wanted to ensure that the curriculum develops pupils' literacy and ICT skills across the humanities AOLE, and provide stimulating, real-life contexts in which pupils can develop and apply their learning. Teachers aim to apply the pedagogical principles identified in Successful Futures when planning their teaching and learning, to ensure that the activities relate directly to the four purposes of the new curriculum.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

Teachers understand the importance of developing pupils' skills within the context of humanities subject content. As a result, the school values the need for relevant context in which to develop such skills, enabling pupils to make connections between their own learning and the real world.

This approach is based on the philosophy that pupils should receive a broad and creative curriculum that develops their skills (subject and cross-curricular), concepts, knowledge and understanding.

In their religious education lesson, pupils discussed issues in Myanmar using information they had heard in the news. The lesson raised many questions that encouraged pupils to think critically. Pupils were keen to learn more and wanted to share more information. The teacher and pupils decided to focus on the Myanmar crisis during philosophy and reflection time.

The teacher planned a range of literacy activities including writing peace contracts, comparing Islam and Buddhism and using thinking grids when looking at photographs. As a result of effective research opportunities, pupils independently combined a range of text, image, sound, animation and video to produce a collaborative multimedia presentation. They presented their work to other pupils in key stage 2. This activity provided a 'real audience' and purpose for pupils' learning.

The activities provided the pupils with access to high quality, authentic information from a range of sources to research Islam and Buddhism, giving them a greater understanding of the values and principles held by both religions. As a result, this influenced home learning, as pupils were motivated to watch the news and take an interest in current affairs, concerning developments in Myanmar.

Opportunities for pupils to express their viewpoints resulted from discussions about the politician Aung San Suu Kyi. The pupils debated the widespread concern about her lack of action in dealing with the suffering of the Muslim Rohingya population in Myanmar.

The school is now developing this approach across all AOLEs, and identifying learning opportunities between the different AOLEs.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

As a result of this approach to learning, the school has noticed a rise in many pupils' confidence when working with their peers. Many pupils have improved their problem solving skills in religious education lessons through their discussion and reflection. Many pupils are making strong progress, recalling prior knowledge effectively and applying this knowledge to support their opinions and views. This approach to learning has helped to create inquisitive and enthusiastic pupils who take greater responsibility for their learning. In addition, many pupils have stronger knowledge about Islam and Buddhism and a better appreciation of how beliefs motivate behaviour.

Staff at Plasmarl Primary have shared this practice with several other schools. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have participated in INSET training and shared aspects of the work with a staff group from a school in a different cluster to their own.

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## Glossary

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<b>AOLE</b>	Area of learning and experience. There are six AOLEs in the new Curriculum for Wales as set out in Successful Futures.
<b>Four Core Purposes</b>	<p>Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) sets out the need for common purposes that permeate the curriculum and promote high aspirations and a determination to achieve. These four core purposes are, that children and young people develop as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives</li> <li>• enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work</li> <li>• ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world</li> <li>• healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy and Numeracy framework (LNF)</b>	This is a skills framework developed by the Welsh Government. It became statutory in schools from September 2013. It is designed to help teachers embed literacy and numeracy into all subject areas.
<b>Pioneer schools</b>	Schools that are currently working together with the Welsh Government to develop and pilot a new curriculum for Wales
<b>PPA</b>	Planning, preparation and assessment. Teachers' entitlement to non-contact time. Another person teaches his or her class at this time.
<b>Prevent Duty</b>	The Prevent duty is the duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 on specified authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
<b>SACRE</b>	A Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. SACREs are responsible in law for advising local authorities on religious education and collective worship. Every local authority must have a SACRE.

**Numbers – quantities and proportions**

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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