

Religious Education

October 2021

Central to the teaching of R.E. in any primary school in Northern Ireland is the Core Syllabus as agreed by the 4 main churches. At key stages 1 and 2, the syllabus has 3 areas;

- The Revelation of God
- The Christian Church
- Morality

The Core Syllabus does not introduce the study of world religions until key stage 3, at which point they are optional.

The Core Syllabus is treated as core, as in 'the main part', however, it is important in an integrated school, and any school that sees itself as part of a multi-cultural society and global community, to study other religions. Aside from various Christian denominations, a variety of other religious faiths and none, are represented in school.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum (published after the Core Syllabus) also states that;

"Through Religious Education young people are able to develop a positive sense of themselves and their beliefs, along with a respect for the beliefs and values of others. It also has a role to play through presenting young people with chances to develop their personal understanding and enhance their spiritual and ethical awareness."

This further underlines that while the Core Syllabus should be core, the teaching of R.E. should go beyond teaching an exclusively Christian, fact based curriculum.

The Aims of R.E.

The teaching of R.E. in Naíscoil & Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir should;

- Provide pupils with opportunities to develop a positive sense of their own identity, beliefs, values and ideas.
- Challenge pupils to consider religious and moral issues.
- Help pupils to develop and reflect on their understanding and awareness of the religious beliefs of others.
- Highlight the diversity of religious belief in society, and the world.
- Promote sensitivity towards the beliefs and values of others, fostering attitudes of inclusion and appreciation, and working against sectarianism, racism and prejudice.

Approaches to Teaching

Teachers should try to make R.E.;

- Relevant. Where possible teachers should look to find ways to make R.E. relevant to the lives of pupils today. For example studying religions that are present in school, a religious festival related to a certain time of year or maybe a religious issue that has been in the news. Also, while pupils may learn about a bible story, teachers should look to extend the objectives of the lesson beyond factual content. For example the stories of Jesus choosing his disciples, Judas betrayal of Jesus or Peter's denial of Jesus can be used to help pupils think of issues of friendship, trust and loyalty. The lesson may begin with a purely R.E. topic, but could end with aspects of other areas incorporated too, such as Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU).
- Integrated. R.E. topics and themes will attempt, where possible, to tie in with other aspects of the curriculum, such as PDMU, Literacy and World Around Us.
- Inclusive. Other than the classes for Catholic children preparing to take the sacraments, all R.E. is taught as a subject. (The only exception to this might be Nativity, where attendance is optional). The practice of a particular religion is a matter for families themselves. This is a departure from how R.E. has traditionally been taught in Northern Ireland. When looking at aspects of a religion, the role of R.E. is not to state what is true or false, so much as to help pupils understand the beliefs and practices of others.

For example statements such as;

"We believe that..."

"This story teaches us that Jesus was the Son of God..."

"This tells us how the world was created..."

"We take communion to remind us that..."

...are not used. Instead teachers will say;

"Christians/Hindus/Sikhs believe that..."

"This is why Christians believe..."

"This is how the bible says the world was created..."

"People take communion to remind them..."

Similarly, stories from a religion are taught as religious stories. Their ultimate truth, literal or parabolic, is not a matter for school. For example, the creation story in Genesis will be studied as a story from the bible that is important to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. (It is likely that by P6 or P7 pupils will be able to discuss not just the story's content, but also its possible meanings, and why it has caused so much disagreement, even among Christians.)

This way R.E. is a subject that includes everyone, and no one is left out because they are of a religion other than Christianity, or have no religious beliefs.

During the year each year group will teach a series of lessons on the main world faiths see below.

Year group	World Faith
Primary 1	Buddhism
Primary 2	Hinduism
Primary 3	Sikhism
Primary 4	Catholicism
Primary 5	Judaism
Primary 6	Islam
Primary 7	Atheism