



# Religious Education (RE) Policy

March 2025

## **RATIONALE**

This policy has been produced to:

- Promote a high standard of excellence and consistency of approach amongst all staff;
- Communicate the main features of the teaching and learning of Religious Education (RE) within our school; and
- Form a reference document for all staff members.

## **CONSULTATION**

On-going self-evaluation is a key aspect of Botanic Primary School. When developing and drafting this policy, staff and the Board of Governors were consulted.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Botanic Primary School is committed to developing pupils' understanding of the Christian religion through RE. This is without enforcing conformity to Christianity; the school's task is one of religious education rather than religious instruction or indoctrination. As a school, we see religion as an important aspect of human experience and of human life: one which children should be allowed to explore. This policy outlines the organisation, teaching and management of RE at Botanic Primary School.

The policy is based on the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum Core Syllabus for RE which has been the starting point for planning our RE curriculum.

## **WHAT IS RE?**

RE in primary schools is about developing children's awareness and understanding of religion. This has the benefit of encouraging pupils to become informed and inquisitive about their own religious beliefs and practices and those of others so that they grow as citizens of a religiously and culturally diverse local and global society, aware of similarities and respectful of differences (RE and the Northern Ireland Curriculum, CEA, 2014).

## **STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

RE is a statutory part of the NI Curriculum and all schools in NI must follow the Core Syllabus. 'The Northern Ireland Core Syllabus for RE at primary level focuses particularly on the beliefs, practices and teachings of the Christian faith, mostly because the Judaeo-Christian traditions and scriptures have affected the history and structures of society in the UK and Ireland more than any other religion' (RE and the Northern Ireland Curriculum, CEA, 2014).

## **BOTANIC PRIMARY SCHOOL AIMS FOR RE:**

In line with our school mission statement that our children delight in achievement, effort and respect, we aim:

- To develop knowledge, understanding and awareness of religion;
- To develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC), personal skills and mutual understanding through RE (Appendix 1); and
- To provide a continuous and progressive approach to the teaching and learning of RE.

**BOTANIC PRIMARY SCHOOL HOPES THIS WILL:**

- Develop good moral character including a disposition for right from wrong, fairness, responsibility and tolerance;
- Challenge prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism, discrimination and bullying;
- Develop meaning, purpose and appreciation in pupils' lives including how to deal with adversity;
- Develop personal, moral, cultural and spiritual attitudes and dispositions (Appendix 2); and
- Develop an awareness and respect for religion so that pupils can relate to all sorts of people and in all sorts of situations.

This will complement our school ethos that our children are encouraged, seen and valued.

## **CHILD CENTRED PROVISION**

### **Inclusion**

We aim to include and support all children so that they reach their full potential across all Areas of Learning including RE. Through our teaching of RE, we aim to provide learning opportunities that help pupils progress according to individual abilities, skills and experiences. We do this by setting suitable learning challenges and responding to each child's needs.

The teachers are aware of the requirements of Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI), and their pupils' abilities and so should plan pupil experiences accordingly. This may include following medical advice and advice from other relevant experts.

Teachers will use a variety of teaching strategies, including whole-class teaching, co-operative small groups, teamwork and individual skill progression. This may involve differentiation by outcome, grouping, activity, resources and/or support. This will happen most naturally by using open-ended RE activities. Activities can be adapted for challenge or support.

Pupils will be assisted to access RE using a range of learning styles: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. They may record and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways according to their learning needs and preferences, including through the use of technology.

### **Pupil Voice**

When and where appropriate, pupils should be involved in the development of RE. Teachers are encouraged to find out what pupils know and at the end of lessons, what else they would like to know.

### **Extra-Curricular Activities**

Pupils may be involved in performances and events such as carol services and nativities. These events may be located in a local church.

### **Rights of the Child**

Northern Ireland follows the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), thus agreeing to uphold the rights of children and young people as set out in the Convention. Through our RE programme, we will maintain the following articles:

Article 2- Every child has these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 14- You have the right to choose your own religion and beliefs.

Article 30- You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion.

## **HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In Botanic Primary School, the teaching and learning of RE provides suitably challenging opportunities for all pupils to take part in lessons fully and effectively. Learning experiences should be active, practical and engaging. We make use of a wide range of resources and teaching methods to engage children in effective learning.

### **Subject Organisation**

We recognise that a sound underlying organisation and management of RE is crucial to promote, support and encourage learning and the development of skills. Organisation will vary to suit the purpose, activity and children involved. Therefore, a range of organisational strategies are essential:

- High quality teaching of RE will follow a 'Plan. Do. Review' model;
- Activities will be differentiated according to the class and the pupils within it;
- Classroom assistants (if available) will be used with individual children and small groups, under the direction of the class teacher;
- One slot of RE will be timetabled in each class per week; and
- Teachers will submit their RE planners and evaluations five times a year. The RE coordinator will monitor these plans and evaluations.

### **Planning**

Planning for RE is most often done on a half-termly basis. Where there is a job share, classroom assistant or another teacher taking the class, they are made aware of the activities and skills being taught. Planners are shared on a planning folder on the school's network.

Planners will outline the day-to-day teaching including the learning intentions, activities and resources required. Teachers should refer to the statutory requirements of the Core Syllabus for RE whilst writing their planners.

Whilst initial planning is **for** the pupils, at all stages, children will be encouraged to become active participants in the planning/learning process.

It is expected that teachers will evaluate and modify their planning according to the needs, interests and perhaps diversity of the pupils. Evaluations should happen on a half-termly basis, with the exception of only one submitted evaluation in term 3.

The RE coordinator has responsibility for overseeing and monitoring half-termly plans and evaluations. They will monitor the standard of children's learning by means of observations and photographic evidence. Teachers are encouraged to share good practice in RE, to promote annual events (as a class or as part of a whole school approach) and to make links to current world affairs/stories that have relevance to the pupils or have piqued their interest.

### **Planning for Progression and Continuity**

Planning for RE ensures there is continuity and progression in children's skill development and knowledge. We have a school framework which each class follows. P1-3 focus on Bible Stories. P4-7 make use of a cross curricular approach (where appropriate and possible) based on World Around Us and Personal Development & Mutual Understanding themes. Some of the resources used in P4-7 are taken from the BES Bibletime Scheme.

## **Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC)**

‘At the heart of the curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of skills and capabilities for life-long learning and for operating effectively in society. Through opportunities to engage in active learning contexts . . . children should develop Cross-Curricular Skills and TSPC.’ (Page 5, NIC, CEA, 2007) Therefore, through the teaching and learning of RE, Botanic Primary School aims to develop links with the TSPC framework.

## **Connected and Cross Curricular Learning**

Recognising the requirements of the NI Curriculum, teachers are encouraged to make meaningful links between RE, other areas of learning and TSPC being taught. When planning for RE, teachers should consider the themes/topics of the class, experiences at that ages, pupil interests and annual and current events. This can create a broad, connected and meaningful programme.

## **Resources and Teaching Strategies**

As much as possible, teachers should make use of a range of active learning strategies and resources that engage pupils and create a positive learning environment. This may include drama, case studies, crafts, paired/group work, apps, websites, use of the Bible, activity-based learning, books, stories, puppets, games, songs and videos.

In all cases, resources and lessons will be vetted by the teacher before use to ensure they are consistent with the school's policy and ethos.

The use of external organisations and local churches can add value to the RE programme at Botanic Primary School. If a visitor is brought into the school or the pupils are on a school trip relating to RE, the activities will complement the on-going programme within the school. Care will be taken to ascertain that they are willing to comply with the school policy.

## **Whole School Approach**

Some school assemblies will be used to enhance the school's RE programme. This may involve a minister or representative from a local church leading the assembly with a moral-based message.

Throughout the year, we may celebrate and promote events such as Christmas, Easter and St. Patrick's Day.

## **Monitoring and Assessment**

Assessment within RE will be used to promote and enhance pupils' learning and skill development. It can also develop a positive learning environment, increase independence and monitor pupils' TSPC within a relevant context.

Assessment within RE involves any method used to appraise the children's learning or skills, either individually or in groups. It will generally take the form of Assessment for Learning, following the belief that 'assessment which is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for raising standards.' (Beyond the Black Box, Assessment Reform Group, 1999)

In line with CEA's document, Assessment for Learning in Key Stage 1 & 2 (Page 15, 2007), quality feedback is essential for effective learning and teaching within the curriculum. 'Feedback can motivate pupils by building self-esteem and reinforcing the positive...' Formative feedback:

- is timely;

- relates to the focus of the learning (learning intention);
- identifies where success has occurred;
- identifies where and how improvement can take place;
- allows time for improvement; and
- is accessible to the pupil in terms of meaning/vocabulary.'

Other forms of assessing RE which teachers may use include observations, class discussions, oral/written/visual or physical demonstrations, projects, homework, independent and group tasks and self-assessment.

Teachers are encouraged to upload photographic evidence of pupils' learning to the school website. This serves as an evidence bank and promotes the teaching and learning of RE.

**The role of the teacher is:**

- To increase pupil voice and become aware of the interests and needs of pupils so that a relevant, engaging environment is created for the teaching and learning of RE;
- To embed active approaches to teaching RE which are suitable to the learners;
- To use a range of teaching strategies in line with the school ethos and aims;
- To follow a Plan. Do. Review model;
- To update RE schemes and resources as appropriate, whilst communicating changes with the RE coordinator;
- To plan an RE scheme of work which has effective cross-curricular links where appropriate, is age-appropriate, relevant, progressive and continuous;
- To help children feel confident and comfortable within the environment through careful monitoring and observations;
- To promote TSPC which are supported within a meaningful context;
- To embed assessment for learning within RE, feeding this information into future planners and evaluations;
- To evaluate RE planners half-termly; and
- To direct classroom assistants to work with individuals or small groups (when available).

**Role of the Classroom Assistant**

Classroom assistants can provide valuable assistance to the teacher in supporting the development of RE within Botanic Primary School.

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

### **Role of the RE Coordinator**

In Botanic Primary School, all teachers accept shared responsibility for promoting RE throughout the school. However, one teacher has designated responsibility for overseeing this work. The RE coordinator is responsible for leading and directing the subject development, in consultation with the principal, teachers, parents and governors and in accordance with the school's development plan. It is the responsibility of the RE coordinator to:

- Draw up, monitor and evaluate a yearly action plan for the development of the RE in Botanic Primary School;
- Negotiate, in accordance with the whole school, the place of RE within the School Development Plan and be involved in monitoring and evaluating;
- Develop and disseminate knowledge and expertise of RE including new resources, schemes, and relevant organisations;
- If and when appropriate, organise relevant staff training;
- Advise and guide colleagues regarding required updates on planners;
- Oversee the progression and continuity of planners throughout the school;
- Formulate, review and update the school RE policy in association with pupils, parents, teachers and principal;
- Promote and disseminate the policy within school;
- Undertake monitoring including lesson observations, reviewing photographic evidence, and examination of planning and evaluations;
- Ensure that classes are properly resourced for effective teaching of RE;
- Promote the teaching and learning of RE through events;
- Organise partnerships and communicate with appropriate churches and organisations;
- Commit to their own on-going professional development and subsequently inform the rest of the staff of recent curriculum innovations and research in the area of RE; and
- Maintain contact with all concerned: principal, senior management team, teachers, other staff, parents and pupils.

### **Board of Governors**

The Board of Governors have the overall responsibility for the delivery and aims of RE.

## **A CONNECTED SCHOOL**

In Botanic Primary School, we believe that the education of our pupils is a collaborative enterprise involving teachers, classroom assistants, parents, pupils, external agencies and the wider community.

During the academic year, parental and community involvement in RE is promoted in a variety of ways:

- School performances and events;
- Information sessions (at the start of the year and letters from the principal);
- Parent-teacher meetings. At these parents can discuss their child's progress in all aspects of the curriculum including RE;
- Visitors from the local churches;
- School trips; and
- Use of the school website.



In the event that a parent/guardian may wish for their child to be excluded from RE and/or collective worship, provision will be made for that pupil to be withdrawn from the lesson.

The school will consider any parental concerns expressed and attempt to deal with any misunderstandings. The likelihood that pupils will discuss the content of the RE lessons outside the classroom cannot be controlled by the teacher.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy will be in line with other school policies including:

- All Curriculum Policies

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF POLICY**

Although the overall aims for RE teaching and learning are likely to remain fairly consistent, the practices will evolve over time as the school progresses in its development of RE.

The RE Policy is:

- Agreed with the Board of Governors;
- Shared with parents via the school office and website; and
- Regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with school stakeholders: staff, children, parents and governors.

Policy written by: H.Barnes (RE Coordinator)

Date for the policy to be reviewed: March 2028

RE provides a rich context for the development of a range of skills and capabilities alongside the acquisition of a framework of knowledge and understanding. In addition to the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT, the following skills are central to RE:

The particular skills which RE seeks to promote are:

**Investigation**

- asking relevant and appropriate questions;
- listening to others and hearing correctly what they are saying;
- using a variety of sources in order to gather information; and
- knowing what may count as good evidence in understanding religion.

**Interpretation**

- drawing meaning from religious stories, artefacts, works of art, poetry and symbolism;
- interpreting religious language; and
- suggesting meanings of religious texts.

**Reflection**

- reflecting on feelings, experience, attitudes, beliefs, values, relationships, religious practices and ultimate questions.

**Empathy**

- developing the power of imagination to identify feelings such as love, wonder, forgiveness and sorrow;
- considering the thoughts, feelings, experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values of others;
- seeing the world through the eyes of others and seeing issues from their points of view; and
- appreciating an individual or group with sensitivity and insight.

**Evaluation**

- debating issues of religious significance with reference to evidence, argument, opinion and statements of faith; and
- weighing the respective claims of self-interest, consideration for others, religious teachings and individual conscience.

**Analysis**

- distinguishing between opinion, belief and fact;
- recognising bias, caricature, prejudice and stereotyping; and
- distinguishing between the features of different religions.

**Synthesis**

- linking significant features of religions together in a coherent pattern, connecting different aspects of life into a coherent whole.

**Application**

- applying previous knowledge to a new situation or concept;
- applying religious principles and practice to one's own life; and
- making links between religion and individual, community, national and international life.

**Expression**

- articulating ideas, beliefs and values;
- explaining concepts, rituals and practices;
- identifying and articulating matters of deep conviction and concern by a variety of means, not only through words; and
- responding to religious issues through a variety of expressive and creative forms.

**Self-Understanding**

- drawing meaning from significant experiences in their own and others' lives and from religious questions and answers; and
- recognising and critically evaluating one's own standpoint and presuppositions.

## Attitudes and Dispositions in RE

## Appendix 2

The following attitudes and dispositions are encouraged through RE:

### **Self-awareness** includes:

- Feeling confident about their own beliefs and identities and being able to share these without fear of embarrassment or ridicule;
- Developing a realistic and positive sense of their own religious, moral and spiritual ideas;
- Recognising their own uniqueness as human beings and appreciating their self-worth and value; and
- Becoming increasingly sensitive to the impact of their ideas and behaviour on other people.

### **Respect** includes:

- Developing skills of listening and a willingness to learn from others, even when others' views are different from their own;
- Respecting those whose beliefs and customs are different from their own;
- Appreciating that convictions are often deeply held;
- Discerning what is worthy of respect and what is not;
- Recognising the needs and concerns of others;
- Being ready to value difference and diversity for the common good;
- Appreciating that some beliefs are not inclusive and considering the issues that this raises for individuals and society;
- Being prepared to recognise and acknowledge their own bias; and
- Being sensitive to the feelings and ideas of others.

### **Commitment** includes:

- Understanding the importance of commitment to a set of values by which to live their lives;
- Seeking meaning and purpose in life; and
- Having the motivation to learn, while living with certainty and uncertainty.

### **Openness to new ideas** includes:

- Developing confidence in their own identities so that they are able to appreciate the identity of others;
- Being open to points of view that differ from their own;
- Having the ability to argue or disagree reasonably and respectfully about religious, moral and spiritual questions without belittling or abusing others;
- Being willing to learn and gain new understanding;
- Being willing to go beyond surface impressions; and
- Being able to identify opinions, viewpoints and beliefs in connection with issues of conviction and faith.

### **Curiosity, appreciation and wonder** includes:

- Developing their imagination and curiosity;
- Recognising that knowledge is bounded by mystery;
- Appreciating the sense of wonder at the world in which they live;
- Developing an interest in key questions of meaning and purpose; and
- Developing their capacity to respond to questions of meaning and purpose.

