

## **Wark CofE Aided First School**

### **Religious Education Policy**

#### **School Vision and Values**

The parable of the mustard seed is one of the shorter pieces of Jesus' teachings and in it he describes the Kingdom of Heaven growing from small beginnings. He likens it to a mustard seed which, though it is the smallest of the seeds, when tended properly it grows so large birds can come and rest in it.

'He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

Matthew 13.31-32:

Later, Jesus explains that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now, not just somewhere we hope to go when we die, and that we should understand living in this kingdom as having 'life in all its fullness' (cf. John 10.10).

Having adopted the parable of the mustard seed for school we set our vision around the children coming to us as small seeds, us nurturing them so that they flourish and grow, and that as a school, we serve them, their families and our community.

#### **Introduction**

Wark Church of England Aided First School is a small rural school which aims to help children learn and grow in the context of a Christian community, and its whole ethos, vision and values are firmly rooted in the bible.

The school is situated in the village of Wark and serves the parishes of Wark and Birtley and we have very close links with St. Michael's Church in the village.

Reverend Steve Wilkinson and members of the wider church community are routinely involved in the life of the school through Open the Book, Let's Get Cooking, Messy Church, collective worship, school governance and volunteering in classes to help individual learners.

Most of our adults and pupils come from a Christian background and we recognise that this helps them understand that throughout the world people are motivated by their faith and by the religious culture which surrounds them. To develop this understanding we provide high quality, effective, academic and non-confessional religious education allows pupils and adults alike to flourish.

Non confessional religious education is at the very heart of the curriculum and strives always to be of the highest standard possible. It enables children and adults to investigate and reflect on some of the most fundamental questions of life through an awareness of their own and others' identities, and by considering the answers given by a variety of religions and belief

systems. Through philosophical reflection on their own beliefs and values the children to grow in respect for themselves and others by deepening their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Christianity, whilst at the same time promoting tolerance and respect for those of other faiths or non.

### **The Legal Position of Religious Education**

The management of Religious Education in our Voluntary Aided School is a distinctive role of the governors and Headteacher. The delivery of RE is in accordance with the Trust Deed and in accordance with the rites, practices and doctrines of the Church of England. Although the Governing Body as a whole is responsible for determining the nature of the Religious Education provided in school, the link governor with overall responsibility is Rev'd. Steve Wilkinson.

Our school curriculum for RE meets the requirements of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which stipulates that Religious Education is compulsory for all children, including those in the reception class who are less than five years old and at least 5% of curriculum time is devoted to RE.

Religious Education and Collective Worship naturally compliment and enrich one another; however, they are managed separately.

### **The management of Religious Education**

Governors have adopted 'Understanding Christianity' within the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle Syllabus for RE, and this reflects the National Framework for RE, the National Society Statement of Entitlement and the requirements of SIAMS.

'Understanding Christianity' aims are:

- To enable pupils to know about and understand Christianity as a living world faith, by exploring core theological concepts
- To enable pupils to develop knowledge and skills in making sense of biblical texts and understanding their impact in the lives of Christians
- To develop pupils' abilities to connect, critically reflect upon, evaluate and apply their learning to their own growing understanding of religion and belief (particularly Christianity), of themselves, the world and human experience.

Lead teacher for RE is Melanie Wilkinson and she is supported by class teachers, teaching assistants, school governors and volunteers.

Christianity plays a central role in RE, taking up the majority of the time available however, appropriate teaching about other faiths and world views is included.

## **RE Curriculum Planning**

The long-term plan maps the RE topics studied in each term during each key stage. As we have mixed-age classes this is carried out on a two-year rotation cycle. By so doing, we ensure that children have complete coverage of the Agreed Syllabus, but do not have to repeat topics. Progression offers the children an increasing challenge as they move through the school.

Our medium-term plans give details of each unit of work for each half-term.

The RE teacher writes the plans for each lesson and lists the specific learning objectives and expected outcomes.

### **Religious Education at Wark C of E First School helps pupils to:**

- reflect theologically and explore the ultimate questions and challenges of life in today's society
- reflect critically on the truth and claims of Christian belief
- see how the truth of Christianity is relevant today
- understand the challenge faced by Christians in today's pluralist and post-modern society
- develop the skills to handle the Bible text
- recognise that faith is based on commitment to a particular way of understanding God and the world
- begin to develop their own commitments, beliefs and values
- develop a sense of themselves as significant, unique and precious
- experience the breadth and variety of the Christian community
- engage in thoughtful dialogue with other faiths and traditions
- become active citizens, serving their neighbour
- find a reason for hope in a troubled world
- understand how religious faith can sustain believers in difficult circumstances and in the face of opposition.

## **Approaches to teaching RE**

In order to make religious education a lively, active subject we employ a variety of teaching methods including discussions, recording, active participation, outside visitors, trips, art, music, the development of thinking skills, drama, the use of artefacts, pictures, stories and the use of periods of stillness and reflection.

Our teaching and learning styles in RE enable children to build on their own experiences, to extend their knowledge and understanding of religious traditions and to develop their religious thinking.

Where possible we organise visits to places of worship and invite visitors of a variety of faiths to come into school to talk to the children.

## **Attainment Targets**

The Religious Education curriculum maintains a balanced approach between Learning about Religion (Attainment Target 1) and Learning from Religion (Attainment Target 2).

This can be expressed distinctively as:

### **Learning about Religion**

We learn about:

- God who reveals the truth about himself and humanity through creation, the giving of the law, his action in history and through the prophets
- God who reveals himself ultimately in Jesus his Son, living among us and dying and rising for us
- God who reveals himself in his Spirit working in the living faith of the Church experienced through scripture, tradition and reason.

### **Learning from Religion**

We learn from:

- an empathetic response to the Christian faith and a critical engagement with it
- responding personally to the stories and teachings of Jesus Christ
- examples of Christian living which give priority to the values of unconditional love, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, compassion and faith.

**Skills to be developed in Religious Education include:**

- investigation
- interpretation
- analysis and evaluation
- synthesis
- application
- expression
- empathy

These skills are cumulative across the key stages.

**Attitudes to be encouraged and developed in Religious Education include:**

- curiosity and wonder
- commitment
- fairness
- respect
- self-understanding
- open-mindedness
- enquiry

It is entirely appropriate and necessary in today's world that children should be encouraged to foster a respect for the followers of the other world faiths. It is essential that this respect is based on an accurate and sympathetic understanding of those faiths.

**Therefore RE in our school also helps pupils to:**

- learn about other faiths, their beliefs, traditions and practices and from them through encounter and dialogue
- recognise and respect those of all faiths in their search for God
- recognise areas of common belief and practice between different faiths
- enrich and expand their understanding of truth while remaining faithful to their own tradition

- enrich their own faith through examples of holy living in other traditions.

**The distinctive Christian content of the Religious Education Curriculum in our school includes:**

- opportunities to explore the experience of the Church's year
- study of the story of the local Christian community with its saints and martyrs
- visits to places of worship, especially the local parish Church and a Cathedral, to develop the understanding of the Church as a living community
- welcoming visitors from the local parish to share their experience of Christian belief and life
- liaison with the local parish to enable these visits and links to occur
- skills to confidently use religious language to express knowledge and opinions.
- a well-used set of Bibles in language that can be understood by the learners and examples of Bibles and prayer books from a variety of contexts
- the facility to listen to Christian 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' from a wide variety of traditions
- access to Christian artefacts that are used with care, respect and confidence
- a sacred space that can be used as a focus for prayer and silent reflection

**Religious Education in our school will enable:**

- pupils and teachers to talk openly and freely about their own personal beliefs and practice without fear of ridicule
- pupils to make excellent and appropriate progress in their knowledge and understanding of Christianity
- pupils from Christian families to talk openly about their beliefs and values in lessons and to grow in their faith
- pupils from other faith backgrounds to understand and be encouraged in their faith
- pupils with no religious background to be given an insight into what it means to be a person of faith
- pupils of all backgrounds to have a safe place to explore the ultimate questions and challenges of life in today's society

## **The contribution of RE to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development.**

Spiritual development within RE in our Church School enriches and encourages the pupils' discovery of God the creator, of their 'inmost being' and of the wonder of the environment.

Moral development is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, which offer pupils a secure foundation stone on which to make decisions and build their lives. The children recognise the difference between right and wrong through the study of moral and ethical questions.

Social development enriches pupils' understanding of what it means to live in a Christian community where Jesus' command to love one another is put into practice.

Cultural development provides opportunities to develop an understanding of Christianity as a worldwide, multi-cultural faith that has an impact on the lives of millions of people.

## **The Contribution of RE to ICT**

ICT enhances RE, wherever appropriate, in all key stages. Topics are presented using PowerPoint and film clips and sound recordings. Cameras, iPads and Flip cameras are used to record drama work and where appropriate to record visits to places of worship, which can also be viewed through virtual tours on the internet. Digital microphones can be used in story retelling, role- plays, interviews and hot seating situations.

## **RE and Inclusion**

We teach RE to all children in order to provide a broad and balanced education. We take all reasonable steps to meet the needs of those children with special educational needs, those with disabilities and those with special gifts and talents.

To set suitable learning challenges, account is taken of a range of factors such as classroom organisation, teaching materials, teaching style and differentiation, so that each child can learn more effectively.

We provide a variety of ways to provide suitable learning opportunities by matching the challenge of the task to the ability of the child eg. by:

- setting tasks which are open-ended and can have a variety of responses
- setting tasks of increasing difficulty (we do not expect all children to complete all tasks)
- grouping children by ability and setting different tasks for each ability group
- providing resources of different complexity
- using Teaching Assistants and volunteers to support the work of individuals or groups of children.

## **Resources**

We hold a growing collection of resources and artefacts in school to meet the requirements of the syllabus. This is augmented by the loan of additional materials from other schools in the Federation and by borrowing items from the Diocesan Resources Centre to enrich the teaching of RE at both Key Stages. In addition there is a set of Bibles for class use and a small collection of Godly Play sets.

## **Assessment for Learning**

Children demonstrate their ability in RE in a variety of different ways. Children may for example, act out a Bible story or ask and answer questions taking on the role of a particular character. They may interpret works of art and suggest comments for speech and thought bubbles. They may undertake longer pieces of writing such as letters, stories or guides.

Teachers will assess children's work in RE by making informal judgements as we observe them in lessons and by giving verbal or written feedback for written work to help guide progress.

Some work is given a summary judgement to assess the progress of the child.

Work is recorded both in the children's individual folders and in the class scrapbook.

The subject leader keeps samples of children's work as evidence of levels of attainment.

## **Reporting**

All parents receive an annual written report in the summer term in which there is a summary of their child's progress over the year.

## **Monitoring and Review**

The coordination and planning of the RE curriculum are the responsibility of the subject leader, Mrs Melanie Wilkinson, who also:

keeps informed about current developments in RE and provides a strategic lead and direction for this subject.

evaluates the strengths and weaknesses in RE and indicates areas for further improvement

reviews evidence of the children's work and progress.

## **Parental Rights of Withdrawal in a Voluntary Aided School**

Parents may request the governing body to provide Religious Education for their children according to the Agreed Syllabus. This can only be requested when parents cannot, with reasonable convenience, arrange for their children to attend another school where Religious Education is provided according to the Agreed Syllabus. The governing body will make provision unless the circumstances make it unreasonable to do so.

Should the governing body be unable to make such arrangements for Religious Education to be delivered according to the Agreed Syllabus, the responsibility for doing so then falls on the Local Authority. The Local Authority may decide that such a request for separate Religious Education is unreasonable and the parental request then fails.

Parents may withdraw their children from Religious Education as they may in any school. However the Worship and Religious Education provided by this school is in accordance with the Church of England Foundation. This foundation is also reflected in the curriculum and the whole life of the school community. Since the conduct of the school as a whole reflects the Church of England ethos, removal of pupils from Worship and/or Religious Education (as parents are legally entitled to do) cannot insulate them from the religious life of the school.

If such a request for withdrawal is made, the Headteacher will explore the reasons for the request and seek to arrive at an accommodation. It may be that only some elements of Religious Education or Worship are objected to.

Headteacher: Mrs Amanda Taylor  
Governor with responsibility for RE: Rev'd. Steve Wilkinson  
RE Subject Leader: Mrs Fiona McKay

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