Religious Observance in Schools

Executive summary

The Education, Children and Families Committee, at its meeting on 4 March 2014, requested a further report to be submitted addressing the recommendations in the report of March 2014 as follows:

1. The Headteacher Guidelines, Position Paper 16 (Appendix1) will be reviewed by a cross-sectoral working party in consultation with interested parties;
2. Consideration will be given to advising schools to use the term “Time for Reflection” instead of “religious observance”;
3. Consideration will be given to offering a series of CPD events to support school programmes and policies;
4. The Quality Improvement Officer will attend a RO Conversation Day organised by Education Scotland on 25 March 2014;
5. Schools whose programmes are causing concern will be visited with a view to offering additional support;
6. A second survey of all headteachers will be undertaken by June 2014 to collect data on the proposed content of religious observance programmes for session 2014-15, the number of pupils choosing to opt out, and the details of organisations that visit schools in relation to religious observance including the resources they use.

This report provides an update on progress with those recommendations.

Links

| Coalition pledges | P5 |
| Council outcomes  | CO2 |
| Single Outcome Agreement | SO3 |
Religious Observance in Schools

Recommendations

Committee are requested to:

1.1 Note the content of the report.

1.2 Note the progress made to date.

1.3 Note the change of title from “Religious Observance” to “Time for Reflection”.

1.4 Note the continuing Career Long Professional Learning opportunities and the range of support available for headteachers in relation to “Time for Reflection”.

Background

2.1 Two petitions were tabled at the Council’s Petitions Committee on 3 June 2013. The first (PE1487) was presented by a parent who is a member of the Edinburgh Secular Society and was entitled “Remove Religious Observance from non denominational schools”. This petition received 896 valid signatures. The second petition was tabled by Ewan Aitken. It received 1522 valid signatures. Subsequently, on 28 January 2014, the Church of Scotland and the Humanist Society made a joint submission to the Petition Committee of the Scottish Government calling for Religious Observance to be renamed Time for Reflection.

2.2 The Council’s Petitions Committee requested a report to be submitted to the Education, Children and Families Committee in March 2014 providing further information on:

2.2.1 The estimated cost of holding a referendum.

2.2.2 The current position for religious observance in schools in Edinburgh.

2.2.3 What constitutes religious observance?

2.2.4 Details of the training headteachers were provided with on religious observance.

2.2.5 Details of the organisations that visit schools in relation to religious observance and what activities they provide.

2.2.6 Details of further discussion with both set of petitioners, the deputation and other groups.

2.3 A report entitled Religious Observance in Schools was duly submitted to the Education, Children and Families Committee who requested a further report to be submitted providing an update on the actions outlined below:
2.3.1 The Headteacher Guidelines (Position Paper 16) will be reviewed by a cross-sectoral working party in consultation with interested parties;

2.3.2 Consideration will be given to advising schools to use the term “Time for Reflection” instead of “religious observance”;

2.3.3 Consideration will be given to offering a series of CPD events to support school programmes and policies;

2.3.4 The Quality improvement Officer will attend a RO Conversation Day organised by Education Scotland on 25 March 2014;

2.3.5 Schools whose programmes are causing concern will be visited with a view to offering additional support;

2.3.6 A second survey of all headteachers will be undertaken by June 2014 to collect data on the proposed content of religious observance programmes for session 2014-15, the number of pupils choosing to opt out, and the details of organisations that visit schools in relation to religious education including the resources which they use.

2.4 This report provides the update requested.

Main report

3.1 The City of Edinburgh Headteacher Guidelines were reviewed by an inter-authority working group comprising Quality Improvement Officers, Education Scotland representatives and a representative from SCES (Scottish Catholic Education Service). The group is chaired by a Senior Education Officer from Education Scotland. This working group considered that the City of Edinburgh Headteacher Guidelines were an example of national best practice and proposed that these Guidelines could be used as a template for other authorities. The City of Edinburgh Headteacher Guidelines reflect the content of *Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper 16: Religious Observance* (Appendix 2) which was published in December 2014. In discussion with the chair of the secondary Headteachers’ Executive, it was agreed that no amendments should be made to the City of Edinburgh Headteacher Guidelines at this stage but that an appendix should be added which refers to *Briefing Paper 16*.

3.2 The majority of schools in Edinburgh have moved to using the terminology “Time for Reflection” or similar. The current Guidelines allow for schools to choose terminology appropriate to their own school community. It is proposed that the City of Edinburgh Council will use the term “Time for Reflection” in all future documentation.

3.3 Education Scotland has offered and continues to offer a comprehensive series of professional learning events for headteachers and teachers of RME. The City of Edinburgh had four places reserved at a National Engagement Event for headteachers held on 31 October 2014, however only one headteacher attended. Feedback from those headteachers who were approached individually to attend
indicated that they did not consider religious observance or RME within the curriculum to be a priority. The three denominational secondary schools were represented at an event planned specifically for Roman Catholic schools. Three further Career Long Professional Development (CLPL) events have been organised between April 2015 and September 2015 to raise awareness of the contents of Briefing Paper 16.

3.4 The Quality Improvement Officer attended a Conversation Day on 25 March 2014 organised by Education Scotland. She has since been nominated as a member of the national Short Life Working Group which has met three times since August 2014. Liaison with colleagues in other authorities will ensure that best practice is maintained in Edinburgh.

3.5 The religious observance programmes in a small number of schools were causing concern because of their limited nature and lack of balance. The headteachers of these schools have been contacted, phased programmes of improvements have been agreed, and revised programmes are now being implemented. In particular, one cluster received significant support: the public stance of the Chaplain did not meet the expectations of the majority of the school community, or of the authority in terms of the CEC Equalities Policy. A series of meetings were held where the role of the chaplain was discussed and, as a result, his approach in schools changed. Members of the Quality Improvement Team will continue to sample Time for Reflection events in schools as part of their ongoing support and challenge visits. Examples of best practice will be brought to the attention of the Quality Improvement Officer for Religious and Moral Education, as will schools where there is cause for concern. These schools will then be supported as appropriate.

3.6 A second survey of all headteachers was undertaken in June 2014 to collect data on the number of pupils choosing to opt out and the details of religious organisations that visit schools. Headteachers were reminded to ensure that the proposed content of religious observance programmes for session 2014-15 was available on their school website. There was a 100% return to the survey: 92% responded by email, 8% required a follow up phone call.

The findings of the survey are as follows:

- There are 88 schools in the primary sector. A total of 181 individuals in 31 schools opt out of religious observance for all or part of the programme. This represents an increase from session 2013-14 of 107 pupils of primary school age and an increase of 19 primary schools with pupils who opt out. In 56 primary schools there are no pupils who opt out;
- There are 23 schools in the secondary sector. A total of 14 young people from three schools opt out. This represents an increase from session 2013-14 of 11 young people over the same number of schools;
- The nursery/early years sector is excluded from the legislation;
- There are 11 special schools in the city. Two pupils from two schools opt out. There is no comparative data from session 2013-14 for this sector;
• The proposed content of religious observance programmes is shared with the school community on the school’s website. A sample of websites shows that almost all schools are basing their programmes on their school values, on developing citizenship, and on events of national importance such as Remembrance. In many cases, the programmes are planned and delivered by the young people themselves and are interactive and inclusive;

• Organisations that visit schools:
  — Church of Scotland School Chaplain: there is input in 52 of the 74 non-denominational primary schools, 16 of the 20 non-denominational secondary schools and four of the eleven special schools. The number of occasions on which the Church of Scotland representative visits the school varies from one time to ten times (in one case). The norm is for three or six visits per year. Where there is best practice (Buckstone, Dalry, Portobello), the Church of Scotland representative is part of a Chaplaincy team who plan and deliver RO events in collaboration with representatives of the school community. In cases where the RO programme is imbalanced, there has been discussion with the headteacher as outlined in paragraph 3.5 above.
  — Roman Catholic Schools: in the 14 Roman Catholic primary schools and the three Roman Catholic secondary schools there is significant input from the Parish Priest and representatives of the Catholic Church.
  — The Gideons visit almost all non-denominational secondary schools. They visit once per year to S1 students.
  — Scripture Union visit 9 primary schools. In two schools, they run a weekly lunchtime club; in one school they attend weekly for a block of approximately six weeks; in the remaining six schools they attend once per term. Scripture Union attend one secondary school on a termly basis.
  — Representatives of the Baptist Church attend once per year in two primary schools and one secondary school.
  — According to the survey, representatives from the local Sikh, Hindu and Jewish communities visit four primary schools and three secondary schools.
  — The Army Padre contributes to RO in Colinton PS and Firrhill HS.
  — The Humanist Society are represented in one primary school, two secondary schools and one special school. In the case of the primary school, the Humanist representative is part of the Chaplaincy team.
  — Prayer Space visit two schools. In one case, this was on one day. In the other case, the visit lasted over three days. The headteacher agreed to review this for the future.
  — Bible Alive visit two schools.
  — The Edinburgh City Mission visits one school.
  — Young Life Scotland visit one school.
• All representatives from the different world religions use verbal and visual resources from their own religious communities and experience. In the cases of Prayer Space and Bible Alive, resources used include video and audio material, poetry and texts drawn from members and supporters of their own organisations. As with Scripture Union, headteachers have been advised that input from these organisations should be arranged to take place after school and attendance should be voluntary.

3.7 In addition to the survey, a sample of religious observance events was attended. This was a 25% sample in the secondary sector and a 10% sample in the primary sector. The overall quality was very high, based on pupil involvement, relevance to young people’s lives, and impact on their learning. Focus groups of young people in three non-denominational secondary schools indicated that they were positive about the experience they had in religious observance, they felt that they were able to contribute, and they were aware of their right to withdraw.

3.8 Good practice has been shared at cluster meetings across the city. Although religious observance has not been the subject of authority review this session, the provision has been monitored through support and challenge visits.

**Measures of success**

4.1 Religious Observance will be delivered in line with legislation and City of Edinburgh recommendations.

**Financial impact**

5.1 There are no adverse impacts arising from this report.

**Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact**

6.1 There are no adverse impacts arising from this report.

**Equalities impact**

7.1 Within the delivery of the policy on religious observance all pupils have the opportunity to participate. There are measures in place for parents to request that their child opts out of religious observance if they wish.
Sustainability impact

8.1 There are no adverse impacts arising from this report.

Consultation and engagement

9.1 The City of Edinburgh position paper on Religious Observance was developed by a cross sector working group led by the Quality Improvement Officer.

9.2 All schools have been involved in developing their plans for religious observance in consultation with their Parent Council body.

9.3 Following the Petitions Committee meeting on 3 June 2013, individual meetings took place with representatives from both petitions. A further meeting took place with representatives from the Edinburgh Secular Society in January 2015.

9.4 Consultation on the content and format of the City of Edinburgh position paper has taken place at inter-authority level and with representatives from Education Scotland.

Background reading/external references

- Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper 16

Gillian Tee

Director of Children and Families

Contact: Grace Vickers, Quality Improvement Manager

E-mail: grace.vickers@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3026

Links

| Coalition pledges | P5 - Seek to ensure the smooth introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence and that management structures within our schools support the new curriculum |
| Council outcomes | CO2 - Our children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens making a positive contribution to their communities |
| Single Outcome Agreement | SO3 - Edinburgh’s children and young people enjoy their childhood and fulfil their potential |
| Appendices | 1 – City of Edinburgh Position Paper on Religious Observance |
| | 2 – Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper 16 |
Provision of Religious Observance in Schools
City of Edinburgh Headteacher Guidelines

INTRODUCTION


As a result of this report the Scottish Executive Education Department issued *Circular 1/2005: Provision of Religious Observance in Scottish Schools*. The Scottish Government’s letter of 21 February 2011 replaces the guidance previously contained within Circular 1/2005. The Circular has been updated to reflect the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and applies to all primary, secondary and special schools.

Scottish Government Ministers consider religious observance to be an important educational experience for children and young people at all stages of primary and secondary school. They accept the recommendations of the *Religious Observance Review Group Report* of May 2004. In so doing, Ministers believe that learning and teaching can build on Scotland’s strong Christian traditions without compromising them, while also promoting the understanding of, and respect for other faiths and beliefs.

Many school communities are characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices reflecting a range of religious and other stances. It is important that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in the forms of religious observance devised by their school without compromise to their personal faith stances. This can best be guaranteed by involving a range of people from the school and community in the preparation, planning and presentation of the assembly or other gathering. Pupils should have a key role in this process.

One implication of this diversity is that the forms of religious observance may differ from school to school. Schools are therefore encouraged to make decisions based on local needs and circumstances. Full consultation should take place with all interested parties on how religious observance can be implemented in each school community. Full consultation should also take place on what to call the events that meet the religious observance requirements for that school community. The unifying principle behind the different approaches to religious observance will be the aims set out in this paper.

---

1 Scottish Government letter 21 February 2011: para. 6
AIMS OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE
The aims of religious observance are defined as:

‘To promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.’

DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE
The Report of the Review Group defines the term for use in schools in Scotland as:

‘Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.’

Three key issues emerge from this definition:
• building a sense of community;
• understanding spiritual development; and
• celebrating shared values.

Building A Sense Of Community
Regular assemblies or other gatherings for religious observance provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on, and develop, a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual and the shared values of the school community. Good religious observance strengthens pupils’ sense of belonging to their school. It is a basic premise that the way in which religious observance in schools is implemented should always be justifiable on educational grounds.

Understanding Spiritual Development
Spiritual development ‘includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one’s dignity as a person’.

The spiritual dimension comes from what makes us human and this can be seen and expressed in many ways. There are many contexts across the curriculum that encourage pupils to consider matters from a spiritual perspective. The potential for spiritual development is open to every one and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs. In spite of the move away from involvement with formal religion in contemporary Scottish society, there is evidence of a growing interest in the spiritual dimension. Many people outwith formal religion would use the term spiritual to describe key aspects of their experience. Religious observance plays an important role in the spiritual development of all members of the school community.

Celebrating Shared Values
Many schools would identify and promote values such as ‘honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and concern for others’ as common shared values in our society. It is also true that different communities hold values that are particular to their own tradition. These values should be acknowledged, the right of people to hold them should be

---

3 Religious Observance Review Group Report: p12
4 Religious Observance Review Group Report: p12
5 Religious and Moral Education 5-14 National Guidelines
respected and pupils should be encouraged to reflect on these values and the life stances which they reflect.

**RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AND ORGANISED WORSHIP**

Religious observance is not concerned in the main with organised worship. Worship is a free response of an individual and community to what is considered worthy of worship. This response involves three elements: belief, desire to worship and the commitment to life stances. An organised act of worship is based on the assumption that those present share these elements.

In distinguishing between religious observance and organised acts of worship, the following statement should be considered:

1. Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community’s faith in “the focus of worship”, may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school.

2. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the review group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, groups, chaplains and other religious leaders.  

**ASSEMBLIES AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**

The approach to religious observance should be that outlined in the Scottish Government’s letter of 21 February 2011:

‘Scottish Government Ministers welcome the tradition that, in Roman Catholic denominational schools, Catholic Liturgy will largely shape the nature and frequency of religious observance activities in the classroom and in the wider school community.”

‘In recognition of Scotland’s Christian heritage, non-denominational schools are also encouraged to draw upon the rich resources of this tradition when planning religious observance. However, many school communities contain pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment, and this must be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith.”

At present school assemblies are the most common vehicle for delivering religious observance. A clear distinction has to be drawn between assemblies devised for the delivery of religious observance and assemblies which support other purposes.

Communicating day-to-day administrative arrangements and information about extra-curricular activities at an assembly is important for the life and work of the school. However, this should be kept separate from occasions that are specifically set aside.

---

for religious observance. It is important for those organising and leading religious observance that the overall integrity and purpose of the event are kept distinctive and are not compromised.

FREQUENCY OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The frequency of religious observance needs to balance the impact on the spiritual development of the school community with providing a valuable and inclusive experience.

Every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community. Many primary schools value weekly religious observance as part of their regular assembly programme and it is expected that this will continue. While ensuring that religious observance is sufficiently frequent, the emphasis should be on quality of the experience for pupils rather than quantity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

In order to ensure that the experience of religious observance is of a high quality those planning and leading it should look to ensure that the following characteristics are evident.

Location: All schools have areas such as assembly halls or gymnasia which have the potential for being appropriate locations for religious observance. It is important that every attempt is made to ensure that pupils can participate comfortably. In addition, to take account of the fact that religious observance may at times be organised on a group basis, schools should also look to have a smaller area available if required.

Leadership: The headteacher, staff, chaplains, pupils and visitors from the community or organisations can all make effective contributions to religious observance. Sharing the leadership brings many benefits such as offering a range of perspectives on a variety of issues for pupils to consider. Good planning and clear expectations are important to ensure that the experience appeals to pupils and engages their interest.

Sensitivity: Religious observance should invite pupils through an interesting and appealing stimulus to consider and reflect on a range of issues that relate to their experience. As in good teaching the stimulus for reflection should look to draw on

• incidents which occur in the life of the school or in the local, national or international communities,

• a programme of values which the school wishes its pupils and staff to reflect upon

• the annual cycle of religious festivals.

Atmosphere: Good religious observance happens in atmosphere where pupils feel relaxed and open to learn from what is being said and done.
CHAPLAINS

A chaplain plays an important role in the life and work of the school as a resource person and as someone who can offer pastoral and spiritual support. A full discussion should take place between the headteacher and the chaplain on how religious observance should be planned and implemented in order to address the needs of the school community. The discussion should be based on the premise that the way in which religious observance in schools is implemented should be justifiable on educational grounds.

The role of the chaplain or chaplaincy team includes:

- being a member of the Religious Observance Team;
- being a resource for the RE curriculum;
- providing pastoral care for staff and pupils (and if appropriate, their families);
- being available at community events in the life of the school;
- having a key role at times of extreme difficulty; and
- providing a bridge and common resource across the cluster.

THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS

Under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, parents have the right to ask for their child to be withdrawn from religious observance. The school will deal with such requests with sensitivity and understanding. Headteachers are encouraged to meet with any parent wishing to withdraw their child to ensure that they are clear about the school policy. In particular, parents should be reassured that religious observance adopts an open and respectful approach and does not seek to compromise the beliefs of any pupils or their families.

DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

It is recognized that in denominational schools, there is a distinctive emphasis on nurturing the faith of pupils in line with gospel values. This is achieved through the school ethos, the religious education curriculum and in particular religious observance. In denominational schools organised acts of worship are considered appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school and will continue to feature in religious observance. Specific support and guidance for developing religious observance in denominational schools is available to schools through the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

NURSERY SCHOOLS

There is no formal requirement for religious observance in nursery schools and classes. However, there are many opportunities to help children develop an early awareness of different religious and cultural groups and their traditions. By marking significant religious celebrations and exploring shared values as well as matters of
common concern, children can build up a sense of their own uniqueness. In this way their journey of spiritual development begins. Such activities provide important foundational experiences for young children on which primary and secondary school can build.

RACE EQUALITY POLICY

Central to this document is the principle of respect for others. Religious, cultural and personal characteristics permeate and enrich the life and work of our schools. This diversity of belief and tradition provides an ideal context in which pupils can learn about and so learn from what is important in the lives of others. The approach to religious observance in this paper recognises and welcomes diversity and promotes respectful understanding. In this way the guidance is fully consistent with other council policies relating to race equality.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Schools will provide religious observance events of high quality. Each school will appoint a Religious Observance Team under the direction of the headteacher or nominated depute headteacher to supervise the religious observance programme and events. Regular evaluation of the programme and the events will be the responsibility of the headteacher or nominated depute headteacher. The quality of religious observance may also be subject to external evaluation by officers of the authority or HMI Inspectors.

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

A list of helpful support materials and websites is contained in the Appendix.
Appendix

Helpful Resources

www.ltscotland.org.uk/religiousobservance/keydocuments/index.asp
www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/schools-resources
www.fischymusic.com
www.alwaleed.ed.ac.uk
www.eifa.org.uk
www.assemblies.org.uk
www.gla.ac.uk/departments/religiouseducation/coursesanddegreeprogrammes/religio
usobservancedesignandpractice
Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is taking a fresh approach to what, how and where children and young people learn. It aims to raise standards, improve knowledge and develop skills for learning, life and work. It seeks to improve achievement for all and reduce inequity in educational outcomes by helping every individual to be successful, confident, and to contribute effectively, including as responsible citizens. At the heart of RO in CfE is this aspiration to develop every learner as an individual. This means helping them to grow and develop their own sense of themselves, to be confident in expressing their own beliefs and values, and to develop an understanding of and empathy towards others. This briefing, then, provides background information about the role of RO and explores how it is developing across educational establishments as part of CfE.

1. What is the policy framework for RO in CfE?

In 2005, the Scottish Government set up a review group to define and exemplify RO. The review group defined RO as: community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community. The aims of RO are clearly based on that definition: to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community. RO is relevant and meaningful for the whole school community. It contributes to children and young people's learning and personal development particularly well when it is engaging and creative. The RO review group defined “spiritual development” as something which:
Religious Observance provides opportunities for the school community to express and celebrate values which are considered common human values.

includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one’s dignity as a person.

This approach to RO recognises that schools are communities of learners often from different cultural and social backgrounds with a wide range of beliefs. It recognises that individual, personal development is founded on respect for oneself and for everyone else. In practice, this means that RO:

- provides opportunities for the school community to express and celebrate values which are considered common human values;
- gives the school community time to reflect upon a variety of traditions and viewpoints as well as other stimuli such as literature, art and music; and
- provides opportunities for the community to reflect upon values, beliefs, commitments and hopes which are implicit in being human.

Many non-denominational schools refer to RO as Time for Reflection. This helps to describe the type of experience that the learner can have through engaging with issues and events as part of RO. RO takes different forms and educational establishments are well placed to take account of their own particular contexts when planning RO. This includes making local decisions about whether the term “Time for Reflection” is suitable or not or perhaps, for example in denominational schools, the term “worship” may be considered more appropriate. In all cases RO has an important part to play in children and young people’s development. It also helps the whole school community to reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the worth and contribution of each individual. As such, RO contributes directly to the intended outcomes of CfE.

2. How do children and young people benefit from RO?

RO makes a contribution to the ethos and life of the school because it can influence how children and young people develop values and behaviours. The context for learning can be particularly effective when RO is planned through appropriate experiences and outcomes. For example, RO can help learners to develop respect for others and understand their beliefs and values (RME 0-07a – 4-07a; RERC 0-21a – 4-21a, RERC 3-25a). It can also assist learners in developing increased awareness and understanding of their own beliefs and values, as well as reflecting upon how to put their own beliefs and values into action in positive ways (RME 1-08a – 4-08a, RERC 1-24a – 4-24a). RO helps learners to reflect upon “ultimate questions” (RME 3-09a, RERC 1-23a – 4-23a) and in considering and reflecting upon topical social and moral issues (RME 1-09a, 1-09c, 3-09c). It can also provide children and young people with an opportunity to learn about and from the beliefs of others (RME 2-01c, 2-04c, 3-01b, 3-04b, RERC 3-25a, 4-25a, b). It can engage children and young people actively in reflecting upon spiritual, social, moral and philosophical issues through, for example, drama or other activities (EXA 0-01a – 4-01a, EXA 0-13a – 2-13a). This active approach can also address mental, emotional and social aspects of Health and wellbeing (HWB 0-01a – 4-01a, 0-09a – 4-09a, 0-13a – 4-13a).

Other attributes and skills can be promoted through RO. For example, skills such as reflection and evaluation benefit from relevant experiences across the curriculum. Learners can develop an “appreciation of aesthetic and cultural values, identities and ideas” (Expressive Arts Principles and Practice), or indeed “establish a pattern of health and wellbeing which will be sustained into adult life” (Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice). RO can help children and young people to develop their “understanding of what is special, vibrant and valuable about [their] and other cultures” (Literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes). It can help them to “develop a curiosity and understanding of their environment and their place in the living, material and physical world” (Sciences Principles and Practice) as well as “develop their understanding of their own values, beliefs and cultures and those of others” and so “broaden their understanding of the world” (Social Studies Principles and Practice).

RO can also help learners to develop higher order skills including, for example, analysis and evaluation. RO can give learners confidence in making their own minds up about important issues and help them to express their own views reasonably and securely. Effective RO can allow learners to address issues of equality, for example by developing respect for the beliefs and values of others as well as by developing empathy with a wide variety of perspectives. So, in effective RO, children and young people learn about the beliefs and
values of those around them and through reflection, consider their own beliefs and values; these skills are central to their development as citizens in our modern, pluralistic society.

3. **What are the features of effective learning through RO?**

RO can be an engaging, challenging and reflective experience that enables children and young people to explore, evaluate and reflect on a range of views to help form their own. This happens in many stimulating and often thought-provoking contexts that are sensitive to and respectful of everyone’s right to their own beliefs and values. Some of the kinds of contexts and learning experiences that promote this effective learning are described here.

**Discussions** help children and young people learn about the beliefs and values of others as well as learning from them. Discussions enable creative thinking between young people, helping them to develop a clearer understanding of how a person’s life is influenced by the beliefs and values they hold. They also offer opportunities for reflection on views which may be very different to the child or young person’s own views, and to develop important skills such as listening attentively and respecting the rights of others to hold views which are different to their own.

**Personal research** enables learners to delve into different perspectives which can lead to a deepening of their own understanding and awareness of emerging viewpoints. In evaluating and responding to the challenges which stem from RO experiences, children and young people might gather data about supporting or conflicting viewpoints and explore many sources of information to deepen their own understanding, perhaps following an RO experience they’ve had. This helps learners to be active in RO.

**Partnerships** often involve interactions between visitors and children and young people that expose the learners to the real-life experiences of people whose lives may be very different to their own. This can provide an authentic experience for children and young people that enables them to come into contact with a wide range of viewpoints and perspectives – religious and otherwise. Such interactions go to the heart of meaningful education in that they involve meaningful dialogue between people, and the development of a sense of our shared human identity.

**Personal reflection** is about having the space to step back from daily business for a time. It creates the environment to take stock of situations that really matter, and for learners to consider their own developing role in the world in which they live. This process of stepping back is appropriate and helpful for all children and young people, no matter what their own beliefs and values are.

**Outdoor learning** can be an important context for learning. Many religious places, sites of cultural significance and other out-of-school locations lend themselves well to supporting children and young people in developing their own beliefs, values, attitudes and attributes. Engaging with and reflecting upon the natural world allows learners to consider their place in it, as well as their responsibilities towards it. It can also prompt discussion about important “ultimate questions”.

Overall then, effective RO is active, engaging, challenging and thought provoking. It supports children and young people in the development of their own set of beliefs and values, and it allows them the opportunity for deeper reflection about the beliefs and values of others. This enables each and every individual to gain a sense of his or her own place in the world.

4. **Do all children and young people need to take part in RO?**

All educational establishments and local authorities are expected to have policies that describe their approach to RO. School handbooks should describe the provision of RO and also explain arrangements for those who wish to exercise the parental right to withdraw a child or young person from RO. To support parents in making decisions about RO, schools are expected to set a clear rationale for the approach taken and to involve parents and children and young people in decisions about the RO programme. All schools are required to make suitable arrangements so that children or young people who are withdrawn from RO can benefit from alternative relevant activities. For example, where appropriate, schools will work with parents to agree a programme that enables learners to further their understanding of their own family beliefs, values and traditions. Parents may, and often do, provide some additional study material that enables these learners to use RO time to engage in some personal development and reflection in line with the beliefs and values of the family. Exercising the right to withdraw should never involve a child
or young person feeling excluded – nor should parents feel under any pressure to avoid exercising their right to withdraw. This can be achieved by sensitive handling and clear communication.

5. How can community partners support RO?
A wide range of community partners often support school staff to plan and implement RO. This can include members of faith communities, belief groups and other partners such as youth workers and local charity workers. It is important for schools to ensure that such community partners are diverse and varied – representing a range of beliefs and viewpoints. Schools recognise the important and varied contributions that community partners and other community leaders can make to the life of the school. Effective educational establishments act professionally in this respect, ensuring that relationships with partners are negotiated and agreed. They ensure that such activities are guided by educational principles and apply normal safeguarding protocols when working with visiting speakers.

School assemblies are varied and diverse. Whole school assemblies can be very positive occasions, particularly when they recognise and celebrate achievement. They can be used very effectively to share information and expectations with children, young people and staff. Effective provision ensures that a clear distinction is made between assemblies arranged for the purpose of RO and assemblies arranged for other purposes such as, for example, celebrating success. Members of the school community, including children, young people and their parents sometimes wish to contribute to RO within the school, and staff can ensure that this happens in an appropriate way.

6. RO in Roman Catholic schools
The distinctive RO approach in Roman Catholic denominational schools was recognised in a letter of guidance issued by the Scottish Government in February 2011.

Roman Catholic schools follow the customs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church in order to nourish spirituality and faith. Traditional prayers, devotions and services are used to help young people to become aware of, and show reverence to God. Pupils are invited to pray at times in classrooms and assemblies, and in liturgical services. Usually a classroom will display a Crucifix on the wall; in some classrooms and other areas of the school, a sacred space will feature signs, symbols and objects connected with Roman Catholicism. Prayer is complemented by religious services conducted to mark special occasions. To mark special Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation, Holy Mass will be celebrated by the school chaplain, with the school community, in school buildings or in local parishes. Some pupils, at certain stages, may be able to participate in retreats and pilgrimages to places of special religious significance. While Religious Education is governed by separate Church guidance, it is complemented by RO practices and, together, these experiences help pupils to develop their understanding of the Catholic faith and experience opportunities for spiritual growth and commit to beliefs, values and actions in a positive response to God's invitation to faith. Chaplains and other members of the Diocese play an integral part in the life of the school and will support learning and spiritual development as well as religious assemblies and services of worship.

7. How do we take forward RO in CfE?
As practitioners look to make increasingly effective use of RO to promote the intended outcomes of CfE, it may be helpful to consider the following questions.

- How well do learners and their parents/carers understand the purposes of RO?
- How well does everyone concerned understand the relationship between learning, RO and CfE?
- To what extent are learners and their parents/carers confident that RO in their school is fully inclusive of their own beliefs and values, while respecting the beliefs and values of the school community?
- How well does RO contribute to the development of the whole person at different stages of learning?
- How wide and varied are the viewpoints and beliefs explored through RO in your establishment?
- How effectively are children and young people themselves involved in the planning of RO?
How effectively are children and young people themselves involved in the planning of Religious Observance?

- Where RO involves community partners, what mechanisms are in place for schools to engage in dialogue with community partners about the aims and format of RO? You might like to look at: www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/partnership/improvementguides/theschoolinitsscommunity.asp

- In what ways can RO support and challenge children and young people in the development of their own beliefs and values?

- To what extent are children and young people aware of the skills and attributes which can be developed through RO?

- How far are children, young people and their parents/carers encouraged to engage in dialogue about the aims and format of RO?

- How inclusive is RO in your establishment?

- How well does RO contribute to an understanding of diversity and equality in Scotland?

- How far can RO be used to promote active learning? www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/learningandteaching/improvementguide/promotionofactivelearning.asp

Links to Exemplification of Practice in RO

Supporting faith formation through RME in St Andrew's Primary School – http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/faithformation.asp

Supporting children's learning through meditation and prayer in St Andrew's Primary School – http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/meditationandprayer.asp

Using a labyrinth to explore spirituality in RME and RO – http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/labyrinth.asp

Links to resources for RO


RO in Roman Catholic Schools: http://www.sces.uk.com/

Link to support available from Humanist Society of Scotland: www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/content/education