



# Review of Religious Education & Collective Worship

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Charlwood Village Primary School, Charlwood, Surrey

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## Introduction

This review was conducted on behalf of Surrey County Council, at the request of the Surrey Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), as part of its statutory obligation to monitor the provision for Religious Education and Collective Worship in county maintained and voluntary controlled schools. It was conducted by the RE adviser to SACRE, a member of group A (representatives of religious / belief groups) and a member of group C (teachers) after consultation with the school about the focus of the visit. The date of the visit was the first day back after the February half term break.

The school is currently smaller than the average-sized primary school but is growing in numbers, having converted from Infant to Primary status in September 2016. This small rural school has a delightful family feel to it, with considerable collaboration between parents and the school community, ensuring that children benefit from the best learning experience that they can have. When full, (September 2020) the school will still be smaller than the average-sized primary school, with 15 pupils in each year group, so the school operates mixed age cohorts, with provision for early years children in a Reception class (Wrens) of 15 children. There is a Year 1 and 2 class (Owls) for up to 30 pupils, a Year 3 and 4 class (Woodpeckers) of up to 30 pupils and 15 pupils in Year 5 (Red Kites). Older pupils in each class act as mentors and role models for the younger pupils, which ensures high expectations in terms of work and learning behaviour.

The school offers a rich and varied curriculum, which ensures the children develop the skills they need for the next stage in their development. They recently underwent an Ofsted inspection (November 2018), which graded the school 'good' with elements of 'outstanding' in leadership, pupil behaviour & safety, and early years provision. In the report, Ofsted said that: *"Pupils enjoy the stimulating enrichment opportunities they experience across the wider curriculum, including, for example, their 'enhancement' days in art. The teaching of physical education is very well developed. The teaching of religious education encourages pupils to reflect carefully."*

During the course of the visit, an assembly and three part-lessons were observed, some pupil work was briefly audited and pupils interviewed, as well as discussions with the RE subject leader (who is also the headteacher) about her view of the Agreed Syllabus and of collective worship. The children we met throughout the morning all spoke so positively about their school, their learning and the importance of finding out about other people's beliefs and ideas.

## Collective Worship

A whole-school assembly was observed and was led by the headteacher. This is normal practice for a Monday assembly: on other days of the week, pupils will have an assembly either as a class, or in key stages, with another whole school singing assembly on Fridays. The school follows themes that are a mix of school values, PSHE and mental health themes, and cultural or religious events, or 'Big Think Time' initiatives (including British Values). The local church vicar is also a regular visitor to school for leading assemblies. There are no withdrawals of any pupils from collective worship.

The assembly followed up on the theme of the week before the half term break, when pupils were focusing on mental health issues. This assembly gave pupils opportunities to practice being mindful and to recall times over the holiday when they had taken time out to relax, reflecting on how this had benefitted themselves and their families. Children were encouraged to think back to things that they had specifically taken notice of in the natural world over their half term holiday, (such as wildlife, flowers, or the sea) as another mindfulness strategy and then led in a collective deep-breathing exercise (which was very relaxing!) The 'four candles' icon that the headteacher displayed to mark the reflective part of the assembly was clearly a familiar strategy and gave pupils the chance to reflect on the importance of 'taking notice'. Although children rarely pray more formally in assembly, they are always given the opportunity to quietly think or reflect, which helps to enhance pupils' spiritual development and ensures that the assemblies are fully inclusive of all faiths or none. The local parish church is also involved in regular collective worship, when it is more common that children are given the opportunity to pray, but always the option to reflect instead if children prefer, which reflects good practice. The member of the clergy who leads these assemblies will often use appropriate Bible stories that fit in with the school's values themes. This also reflects the school's common practice when using stories

from world faiths, including Christianity, as festivals occur during the school year. Religious stories, used appropriately, can be a rich source of wisdom and shared values, and support what the school is doing so well in RE (although collective worship doesn't count as RE!) Further advice about collective worship can be found in SACRE's guidance document '*Time to Reflect*', which can be found using the blue link [here](#).

In the follow-up discussion, the headteacher (who is responsible for Collective Worship), shared her thoughts about whole-school collective worship as an important part of school life as a way for the whole community to 'own' and live out the school's shared values.

## **Religious Education**

The school follows the Surrey Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and the subject is delivered mostly by class teachers to their mixed-age classes. The RE subject leader, who is also the headteacher, is exceptionally well-organised and teaches RE in the year 3/4 class. Since the revision of the syllabus in 2017, she has spent a considerable amount of time working with the syllabus to ensure that all units are covered within the long term plan that sets out a two-year rolling programme, so that all pupils receive their full entitlement within their mixed age groupings. The RE subject leader spoke very positively about the impact that the revised syllabus is already having on pupils' learning, and was especially grateful for the non-statutory support materials which really help to translate the subject content into appropriate learning for pupils, as well as suggesting resources for teachers to use. There are no withdrawals of any pupils from RE.

It was encouraging to be told that RE has a high profile in the school curriculum and is valued by all staff members. As well as pupils' statutory entitlement, the school also offers enhancement opportunities in RE, such as 'Big RE' days, and (it is hoped, for the future) visiting speakers from different beliefs. The RE subject leader spoke very positively about the benefits of the non-statutory support materials, as they have really helped teachers to understand the purpose of the learning and to help children to deepen their thinking. This was also evidenced in the pupils' books that were seen and confirmed through conversations with pupils. RE in this school creates a safe space for pupils to talk, challenge, question and reflect – and make connections across their learning. The RE subject leader is very aware that the school is quite mono-cultural and sees that RE plays a significant role in enabling pupils to learn about beliefs and ways of life that are different from their own, mainly village, experiences, so that they are fully prepared for the challenges that lie ahead as they move to considerably more diverse school communities at secondary level, and the wider world beyond that. The RE subject leader is clearly passionate about both teaching and leading RE and has a clear focus on what the school's next steps should be, and welcomed the suggestions made by the SACRE group during this visit as part of her monitoring role as subject leader.

Three part-lessons were observed – in EYFS, KS1 and year 5. The children in EYFS were beginning a class discussion about 'special' things, during which they were encouraged to share ideas about things that were special to them and why. This is clearly part of the EYFS RE key question 'What makes something special?' and was due to lead into the story of 'Dogger'. Children were observed making relevant contributions to the discussion, and showed high levels of empathy for each other, especially where children had brought something to show to their peers, and for the class teacher, who shared some photos of a special holiday. In the other two lessons, there was good use of talking partners to facilitate children's thinking, some evidence of questioning and high expectations of both behaviour and attainment.

The KS1 lesson was part-way through the unit 'What do Christians believe God is like?' and followed up a discussion that pupils had had about what a shepherd does. Some children clearly had personal experience of this through family members and brought this understanding to the lesson. The class teacher introduced the words from Psalm 23, asking children to think about the meaning as she read the words to them, then to talk with their partner about what they think the words meant. The use of religious text in RE demonstrates high expectations of young children, and it is to their credit that many of the pupils could draw some conclusions from the text about how the shepherd looked after the sheep. A more child-friendly translation may have helped here, such as the International Children's Bible. The ensuing whole class discussion did rather take off in a different direction than the class teacher was imagining – and was therefore quite hard to steer back on course! Though no-one was observed to have made the connection with

what David was saying about what God is like (supporting the question in the title of the unit), the SACRE group returned at the end of the lesson to see what further conclusions the children had made. They were pleased to observe that a short piece of written work in children's books evidenced some deep thinking about how children would feel being the sheep in the Bible passage, and that some had begun to make connections with the shepherd being like God.

The final part-lesson was in year 5, at the start of the unit 'How did Jesus' teaching challenge people?', where pupils were recapping what a parable is – and what they had found out about the messages within the parable of the Good Samaritan. Pupils then watched a retelling of the parable of the Lost Son, during which they were asked to make note of the main points so that they could retell the parable to their talking partner. Although Jesus' meaning was not the focus of the paired discussions, when questioned by the SACRE group, pupils could suggest what they thought the meaning was and shared some deeper thinking about the importance of forgiveness and which of the two sons they felt was a 'better person'. One pair were especially articulate and had made some connections between the parable and a recent 'Big Think' topic related to being responsible with money. Though parables are only one of the suggested types of texts for pupils to investigate during this unit, it is important to remember that looking at the context will help pupils to see why Jesus' teaching often caused challenge for his listeners and help to answer the question in the title of the unit.

### **Conversations with pupils about their work**

7 pupils in Woodpeckers class brought their topic books for the SACRE group to view. They were extremely articulate and enthusiastic, talking knowledgeably about the units that they had been exploring since they started this academic year, many of them using technical vocabulary (e.g. Bar / Bat Mitzvah, shofar, commercialization, Pentecost etc.) to explain their work and to answer questions. All units could easily be traced back to the agreed syllabus and work in pupils' books was a good mix of purposeful writing, diagrams, quizzes and personal comments, many of which contributed towards their personal development. When questioned about the importance of RE, many of the group affirmed the views that it helped them to learn about others so that they would know if they met someone from a different faith, and might have a better understanding of what was important to them. The children we met were excellent ambassadors for their school and spoke so positively about all the different leadership opportunities that are on offer during their time at the school.

### **Areas for development**

The RE subject leader feels that the main challenges that the school faces regarding their RE provision have to do with making wider connections in pupils' learning, ensuring that they develop their capacity for understanding the impact of belief, not just on other people's lives but also for deepening their understanding of themselves and, as they grow, the wider, more diverse world, of which they will be a part. The SACRE group reassured the subject leader that they had seen this clearly evidenced not just in the pupils who had talked about their work, but also in the children they had witnessed in lessons during the visit. The SACRE group also highlighted the issues that had been observed in relation to keeping the question in the unit titles in mind when planning work for pupils, to keep the focus sharp and ensure that pupils make the best possible progress in RE. The RE subject leader also identified that visits and visitors in RE would also benefit not just pupils, but staff CPD – including for herself as RE leader.

### **Conclusion**

RE is clearly a strength of the school, and a valued part of the curriculum for both teachers and children, clearly exceeding the statutory requirements. The teachers make good use of the Agreed Syllabus and the non-statutory guidance, adapting the latter to suit the individual needs and dynamics of their mixed-age classes and demonstrating the importance of talking as part of RE, so that pupils have had time to clarify their thinking before they write. We are delighted to have witnessed such good RE and commend the school for all its efforts.