

The Governance of RE – guidance for Foundation Governors

Foundation Governors in all Church schools have a particular responsibility for monitoring Religious Education. This may be treated as a whole governing body responsibility or a nominated curriculum governor may be paired with the RE subject leader.

As a governor, what do I need to know about RE?

The purpose of RE in Church of England Schools is to develop religious literacy. This approach is about the knowledge and understanding of religion and belief and understanding its impact on the world.

The Church of England Education Office have produced a 'Statement of Entitlement' for RE in all church schools. This outlines clearly the aims of RE in a church school and expected outcomes. This is available to download on the Church of England website. See: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/RE%20Statement%20of%20Entitlement%20for%20Church%20Schools.pdf>

In VC schools, RE is provided in accordance with the Suffolk locally agreed syllabus. In VA church schools RE is determined by the governors and in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed / Anglican designation. This means Christianity will be given prominence, in line with the foundation of the school, but other faiths will be taught as well.

The RE governor should:

- Know which member of staff is responsible for RE and meet with them regularly, at least once a year, to discuss how RE is developing in the school, check the RE policy, and be updated on targets etc.
- Be briefed by the subject leader on how RE is planned and assessed in the school and on any needs e.g. resources and training.
- Discuss with the subject leader how and where RE features in the SDP and what was said about it in the last SIAMS inspection.
- Discuss the place of RE in the next SIAMS inspection schedule for their school and what the school needs to do in relation to this.
- Actively ask to see RE displays / scrapbooks and children's work / talk to children about what they are doing in RE.
- Represent RE to the governing body, seeing that it is discussed, and its importance recognised in the curriculum, challenging under-resourcing or lack of training.
- Have the opportunity to attend a 'Basics of RE' course with the Diocesan Schools' Adviser so that they are clear about legislation etc.

Does it matter if I am a governor in a VA or VC school?

If your school is a VA school (or an academy that was previously VA), RE will be inspected as part of your Section 48 (SIAMS) inspection. If you are VC, then RE will be looked at as part of the ethos, but will not usually be inspected separately through SIAMS. You will

probably be invited in to talk with the SIAMS inspector, so it is important to have a good understanding of RE as well as other aspects of the church school inspection framework.

In a VA school, an extremely important part of the role of Foundation Governors is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of RE. Pupil voice is also important in gauging the effectiveness and impact of the subject, and conversations between governors/clergy and the children about their RE experience will support self-evaluation.

What do I need to ensure happens in my school in RE?

Time spent on RE - The importance of RE should be demonstrated through the amount of curriculum time given to the subject, and through resourcing and budgeting. The subject should have a high profile in school. Books and artefacts should be purchased to accompany Emmanuel Project units, RE should be displayed around the school, and use of extra 'RE' days to particularly support the teaching of Christianity.

High quality training - Schools should ensure all staff and governors have access to high quality training. We encourage all schools and academies to enable all their staff and governors to attend some form of RE training at least every 3 years. This might be in the form of inset delivered at school, or a session provided centrally by the Diocese.

What monitoring could I undertake?

The RE governor could:

- Watch RE lessons from different year groups on a regular basis and complete a simple observation form.
- Meet smaller groups of pupils to discuss their displays / scrapbooks / exercise books, with a particular question in mind – supplied by the subject leader?
- Use questions from the REQM pupil questionnaire to gather information and assess progress in the way the subject is seen and developing in the school.
- Discuss with individual teachers, especially those new to school, their needs in terms of resourcing and training, and assess the role of TA's and HLTA's covering RE.

Monitoring of Christianity

Look for:

- Key Christian beliefs such as Incarnation, Salvation, Creation, Gospel, Church and Trinity appearing in all key stages, at an appropriate level.
- Pupils being encouraged to use technical theological terms.
- Knowledge of key Christian texts e.g. parables, the Lord's prayer and The 10 Commandments, as well as an understanding of the Eucharist.
- Learning about celebrations e.g. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost.
- Knowledge of what goes on in local parishes, including rites of passage, worship, evangelism, and service to others
- Awareness of Christianity as a world religion i.e. knowing something of the Christian faith in another country e.g. in our link diocese of Kagera in Tanzania.

Talk to children about some of the following:

- Do pupils enjoy and value RE?
- Can they say how it links, or helps, with their everyday lives?
- Do they show respect for people of faith and no faith?

- Do they feel safe to share their own views and own beliefs?
- Are they engaged in 'theological' enquiry, finding out about beliefs and ideas? Or just learning names and labelling?
- Do they present their work well in RE? Is there progress over time?
- Is their work valued by others e.g. through good marking / display?

You should expect to meet staff who can say what they, and their class, are doing in RE and how this links to the bigger picture of RE in the school.

Talk to teachers about some of the following:

- Have they taken part in CPD for RE provided by the Diocese and Local Authority, or by the RE subject leader?
- Do they feel secure in their subject knowledge with a positive attitude to teaching both Christianity, and other religions and beliefs?
- Do they feel they can be creative in RE?
- Have they found opportunities for cross-curricular learning?
- Have they made visits to places of worship e.g. the local church and cathedral, and invite local speakers to share their faith e.g. vicar, members of different denominations and faiths?
- Do they feel their children are able to ask and answer challenging questions around faith and belief, not simply about religious phenomena?
- Can they show you how their class environment supports / values RE e.g. resources, displays?
- Can they show you how their marking and assessment aids the progress of all learners?

Governors should also check to see whether:

- there is progress in RE across the school.
- the school is using the right materials / syllabus.
- there is an appropriate budget for RE.
- succession planning is in place for the subject and subject leadership.
- RE has parity with other subjects in terms of time (min 5%).
- RE is monitored by the head and /or subject leader and they have sufficient time to do so effectively (and what impact this has had).
- RE is on the school website and how parents are made aware of what is happening in RE (and what they think of it).
- the Diocesan Education Team has been invited to school to check the school's RE provision and any issues arising from this.

This can be done through conversations with pupils, the subject leader, classroom visits, questionnaires and book scrutinies.

The Foundation Governors could also actively look at ways of developing links with the local church e.g. children presenting RE work to the congregation through display boards in church and contributions to newsletters, or by invitations to the church community to special school occasions.

What questions should I be asking about RE as a VA governor?

Together with the staff, you will need to consider the following:

- **How high are the standards in RE and how well do learners achieve?**

The achievement that the students make will be measured against the criteria set by the locally agreed syllabus and compared with achievement in the core subjects. The school subject leader will be using data and work examples to support this evidence and you will be able to discuss this with them.

- **How effective are the learning and teaching in RE?**

As part of your monitoring role you will be able to look with the subject leader at the schemes of work and planning. This should show evidence of the teacher using assessment to promote the children's learning. There would also be an opportunity to see that lessons are imaginatively planned and reflect latest developments in RE during your visits to the school.

- **To what extent do learners and staff of all faiths and of none demonstrate a positive attitude towards the subject?**

The easiest method of monitoring this is by talking to the pupils and asking them about their RE lessons. The extent of their engagement in the lesson and their perception of the learning objectives will be reflected in their responses. This is perhaps the best way to gain an insight into staff attitudes as well!

- **How well does RE contribute to the spiritual and moral development of all learners?**

The planned lessons should include opportunities to develop the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural aspects of life. You should also, through questioning of pupils, be able to assess their perception of how their beliefs and views are respected.

- **To what extent does RE promote the distinctive character of the school, together with an understanding of other faiths?**

To assess this you will need to look at the scheme of work used and how it complies with the relevant agreed syllabus, and any advice given by the Diocese and the Local Authority.

- **How important is RE in the life of the school and how is this demonstrated?**

To assess this, consider how much of a priority RE is given in your school and whether this is recognised by the whole school community? Are you as governors ensuring RE occupies at least 5% of curriculum time? Are the resources sufficient and up to date? Is your RE subject leader supported by the governing body and given opportunities to maintain and share their expertise?

The more you pose these questions, the better you will understand the impact of RE on your pupils' learning.