



Religion and Worldviews in a Broad and Balanced Curriculum

A Practical Tool

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I. A broad and balanced curriculum

Schools in England and Wales are required to provide a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’ in order to ensure children and young people are prepared well to live life in modern Britain. A broad and balanced curriculum also ensures that they are given the opportunity to flourish and thrive as individuals. This practical resource will support you to think about the process of curriculum design and the ways in which RE¹ can contribute effectively to the broad and balanced school curriculum.

Why are we teaching what we teach? (Curriculum Intent)

A broad and balanced curriculum shouldn’t just be a mishmash of different subjects and topics. For it to have impact, the curriculum needs to be well thought-through. This means thinking carefully about what we are teaching, how this is put together and why it matters. To put it another way, it means thinking carefully about the **intent** of the school curriculum. It also means considering the ways in which the curriculum as a whole can help a school move towards realising its overarching vision.

Think point I: Vision



Notes

¹ Although we refer to Religious Education or RE throughout the document, our thinking has been shaped by the reimagined subject, ‘Religion and Worldviews’ as set out in the Commission on RE’s recent report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (2018), <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>.

Case Study 1: What are the curriculum drivers? How do these relate to the school's vision?

A small, rural Church of England primary school has recently updated its vision. This vision can be divided into three core pillars: to provide an excellent education, to ensure all members of the school community flourish and to help pupils understand themselves to be agents of change in their local community.

The senior leaders have used these three pillars as a focus when developing the whole school curriculum. For example, in upper Key Stage 2 they have introduced a project that addresses the context of the local community. They are concerned that there is little engagement with the school by members of the local community, despite various opportunities for such engagement being provided by the school.

They develop a curriculum-based local study project for pupils in upper Key Stage 2. The pupils will be challenged to carry out research into the barriers that prevent engagement and devise a solution that will overcome these barriers. Pupils will work together to produce a survey for members of the local community. They will go out into the community and carry out their survey. They will then return to school and analyse the data they have collected, producing a report of the work they have carried out. Next, they will present a series of possible solutions, several of which will be implemented. In time, they will evaluate the success of their solutions and hypothesise further improvements. This project requires pupils to demonstrate a range of knowledge and skills relevant to the core curriculum (e.g. collecting and analysing data – statistics, graphs, percentages, fractions, etc.; report-writing, use of formal language, etc.), as well as skills and knowledge that are more broadly related to personal development and cultural capital (e.g. road safety awareness, positive social interactions, awareness of social injustice, etc.). At the heart of the project is the drive to bring about positive change in a local community that is currently disconnected.

The senior leadership team has ensured that the entire school curriculum reflects these core pillars. The statement of curriculum intent includes reference to the ways in which the fundamental business of teaching and learning can help the school community move closer to fulfilling its vision.

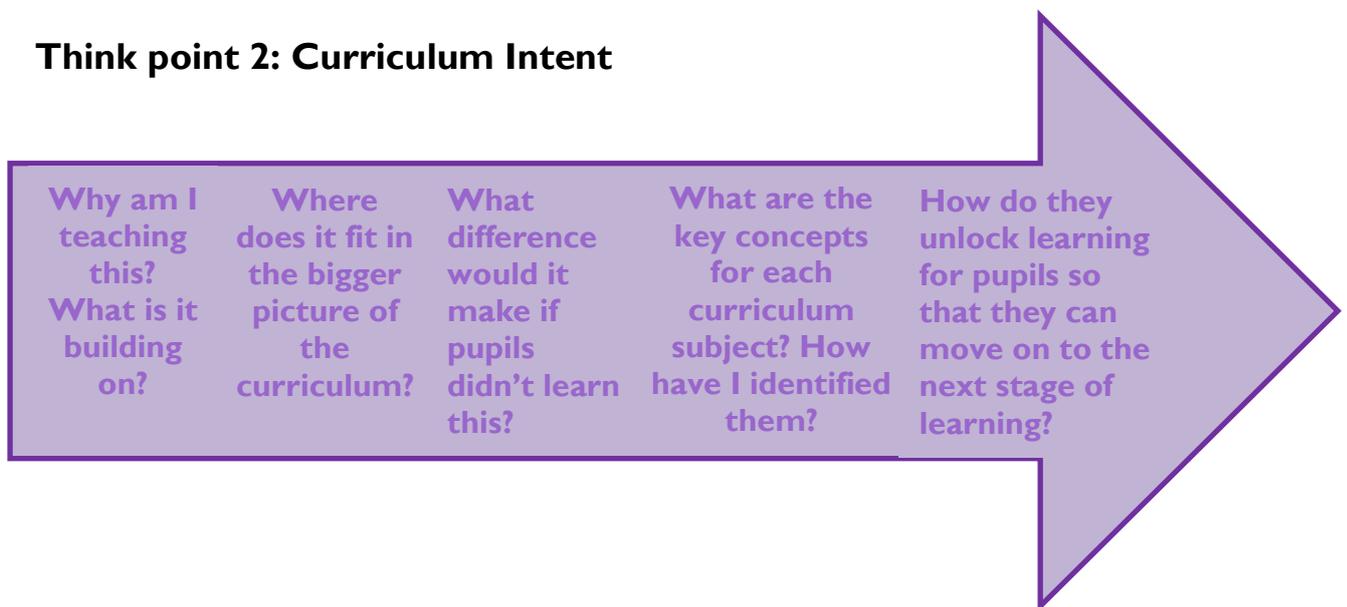
How do we achieve what we have set out to achieve? (Curriculum Implementation)

Once we have an idea of where we are going, what we want our curriculum to achieve, the next step is to work out how we are going to get there.

The starting point is to have identified what Ofsted calls the ‘the content that is most useful’ in each curriculum area (Ofsted 2019 page 44₂) and Willingham calls the ‘unifying ideas of each discipline’ (Myatt, 33₃). For example, in maths pupils must learn about the concepts of place value, addition and equals before they can access deeper learning about multiplication and division.

The school curriculum is constructed from a range of academic disciplines and it is helpful to look to these disciplines to identify the ‘most useful content’ for each subject area.

Think point 2: Curriculum Intent



Once these key concepts, or useful subject matter, have been identified, the next stage is to think carefully about how they are put together.

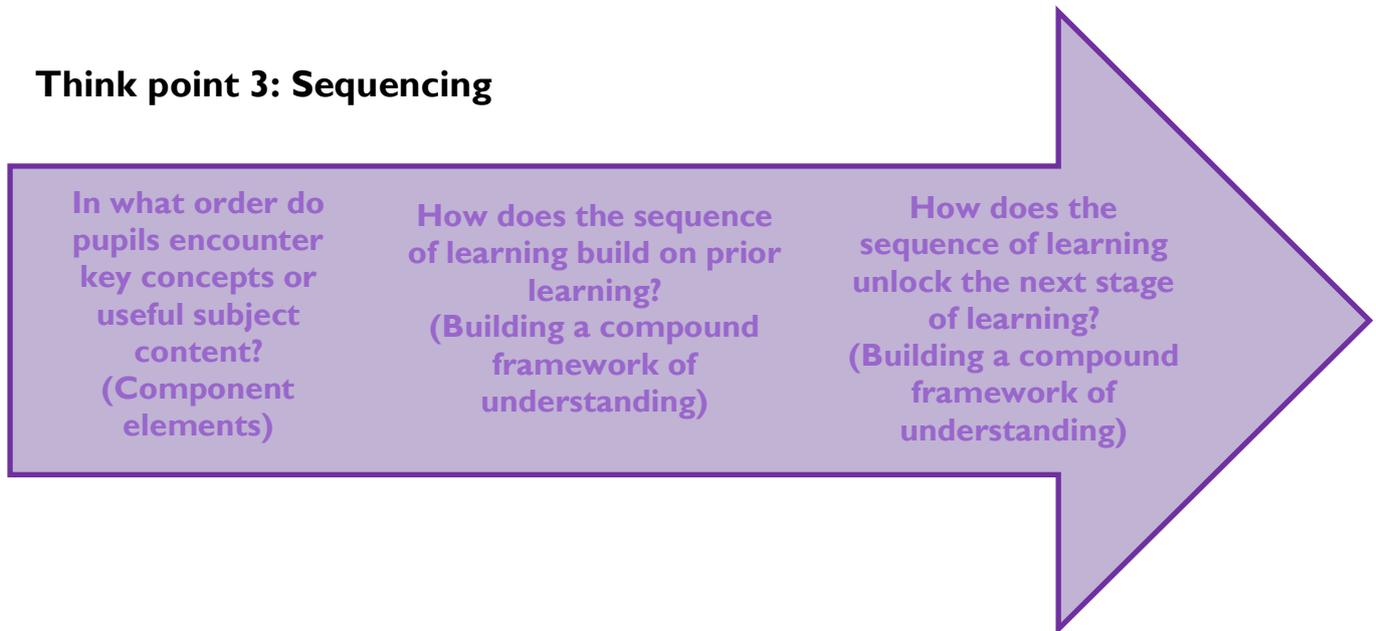
The sequence of learning matters. It enables pupils to move important conceptual knowledge from the working memory (which can only take in so much at any given time) to the long-term memory, from whence it can be retrieved for future learning. For example, pupils at Key Stage 1 are introduced to the scientific concepts of growth, habitat and survival. These concepts are embedded, not only by repeated teaching and learning activities that ensure understanding of each concept, but also through placing the concepts within a

² Ofsted, *School Inspection Handbook* May 2019, p. 44, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814756/School_inspection_handbook_-_S5_4_July.pdf [accessed 13/08/19]

³ Myatt, M., *The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to Coherence* (John Catt Educational Ltd 2018), p. 33.

broader framework by studying a range of plants and animals. Having done this work early on, pupils are then able to retrieve and use these concepts in more complex ways in Key Stage 2, for example, when studying pollination and nutrition. In terms of curriculum design then, the key is to carefully consider the ways in which the **component elements** are built into a **compound** framework.

Think point 3: Sequencing



Case Study 2: what is the ‘most useful content’? How is it sequenced?

A Church of England voluntary controlled primary where the majority of pupils are from White British heritage has a significant number of pupils receive Pupil Premium funding and an average number of pupils with SEND.

The school’s vision can be summarized as “unlocking potential, empowering a community of hope”. Its statement of curriculum intent includes the need to “ensure that when a Year 6 pupil moves onto the next chapter of their lives, they will have aspiration and an understanding of themselves as valued and valuable”. The curriculum is defined in terms of social, personal, and academic potential:

- **Social:** developing engaged citizens of our richly diverse modern world who have an acceptance of and respect for diversity in all its forms, and are empowered to see themselves as agents of positive change in the world
- **Personal:** developing confident, assertive, self-aware children who have the life-skills required to embrace the challenges and joys that life may bring
- **Academic:** developing inspired and curious children committed to life-long learning and empowered to access learning from their own context

When designing the Maths element of the curriculum, the school has identified the core concepts a pupil must encounter at KSI: number and place value, addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, fractions, measurement, properties of shapes, position and direction, and statistics. They have ensured that teaching staff are mindful of these as the 'powerful knowledge' all pupils are entitled to encounter and engage with in Maths.

The school has considered the defined end points a pupil must reach in Maths in this phase. They have sequenced learning to ensure that all pupils have an appropriate grounding in fundamental concepts, such as place value and addition, before they move onto more complex concepts, such as fractions and multiplication, in order that they can securely reach these defined end points.

Finally, the school has thought carefully about the opportunities provided within the Maths curriculum for ensuring that pupils are developing socially and personally, as well as academically. For example, they have considered opportunities to explore issues of justice and injustice through considering what fraction of the cost of a food item bought in the supermarket goes to the person who produced the food. This enables pupils to develop social awareness through the Maths curriculum. Similarly, they have incorporated teaching and learning opportunities within the curriculum sequence that require pupils to mentor each other through 'choice and challenge' activities. This ensures that no barriers are placed on pupils' access to learning and pupils are able to develop a confident growth mindset in Maths.

This process has been replicated for each phase in each curriculum subject to ensure that key concepts have been identified, defined end points set and learning sequenced appropriately. This enables the school to be confident that pupils will cover these concepts and reach these end points. It also ensures that the curriculum intent is being realized and, ultimately, the school is moving towards the destination set by its overarching vision.

Notes

2. What does this mean for RE?

The process of curriculum development in RE is the same as it would be for any other curriculum area:

- Do I know why I am teaching this and how it fits into the broader picture of the curriculum?
- Do I know what I am teaching: have I identified the ‘most useful content’⁴, the key concepts that unlock learning in this subject area? Do I know how these key concepts underpin the different disciplinary areas relating to RE?
- Do I know how I am putting together these key concepts in such a way that pupils are building on prior knowledge and unlocking the next steps of learning?

Why do we teach RE?

There is no single answer to this! RE can contribute positively to social cohesion. It can provide children and young people with the resilience they need to resist certain extremist narratives; RE can encourage deep thought and personal reflection on big questions; it can foster an understanding of diversity and promote respectful attitudes.

Perhaps a more useful question to ask colleagues is what they think pupils will miss out on if they do not study RE as part of the school curriculum. Respect, understanding of diversity, social cohesion, and so on, can all be fostered just as easily in other areas of the school curriculum. What pupils get in RE that they don’t get anywhere else in the school curriculum is religious literacy.⁵ Starting from this point ensures that pupils are gaining a consistent experience of the subject in the classroom.

What do we teach in RE?

Identifying key concepts or the useful subject content in RE can be more complex than for some other curriculum areas. Subjects that are part of the National Curriculum have clearly defined subject content. RE, which is developed locally and for which the curriculum can look very different in different types of schools, does not always have this degree of clarity. The locally agreed syllabus, diocesan syllabus or academy syllabus for RE is a good starting point. This should outline the key concepts to be studied in RE across the phases. It is also very useful to have a clear understanding of the disciplines that underpin RE as these are also likely to be sources of information about key concepts and useful subject content.

⁴ Ofsted, *School Inspection Handbook* May 2019 page 44 www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

⁵ For the purposes of this document, religious literacy is understood as the ability for children and young people to hold balanced and well-informed conversations about religion and worldviews.

How do we sequence learning in RE?

Sequencing learning about key concepts means designing a curriculum that allows pupils to revisit constantly and build upon prior learning. Frequent retrieval activities, a spiral curriculum and a consistent focus on key concepts will help. Interrupting the flow of learning by, for example, jumping off-topic to study a religious festival at a particular time of year (e.g. Christmas or Easter) may have a detrimental impact on pupils' ability to embed knowledge and understanding. This may have an impact on the transfer of knowledge and understanding from the working memory to the long-term memory, which may in turn impact on how well pupils can retrieve prior learning in the future.

Think point 4: RE in the wider curriculum

Do we have a shared understanding of what RE contributes to the wider curriculum?

Do we have a shared understanding of the key concepts/ subject content in RE?

Have we thought carefully about how this subject content shapes our RE curriculum?

Have we considered how to sequence subject content in RE so that pupils are able to build on prior learning in order to access the next stage of learning?

Notes

Case Study 2: Designing and implementing an RE curriculum in a voluntary controlled school that must use the local authority (LA) syllabus.

A town-based Church of England voluntary controlled primary where the majority of pupils are from White British heritage. A significant number of pupils receive Pupil Premium funding and there is an above-average number of pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school's vision can be summarized as "opening minds and widening horizons".

As a voluntary controlled school, the RE curriculum must comply with the locally agreed syllabus, which requires systematic teaching of key concepts and practices within Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, as well as the school's choice from a range of thematic units.

The school has identified the key knowledge, concepts and tier 3 vocabulary it needs to deliver through the RE curriculum by referring to the locally agreed syllabus. It has also taken account of diocesan advice about the disciplinary areas that underpin RE and has built these into its curriculum. In so doing, it is setting high expectations for pupils, ensuring that they take an aspirational approach to their learning. This is set in the broader context of working towards opening minds and widening horizons.

The set RE curriculum focuses on four core areas: God, Being Human, Community and Life Journey. These areas are revisited at each key stage to enable pupils to retrieve and deepen their knowledge and understanding about the key concepts and practices set down in the agreed syllabus. The core areas God and Community are held together to enable pupils to explore the ways in which beliefs relate to actions and vice versa. The core areas Being Human and Life Journey are mapped together for the same reason. This ensures pupils are setting their learning in a wider conceptual framework so that they understand **how** and **why** religious and non-religious people believe certain things and act in certain ways, not simply **that** they believe certain things or act in certain ways. At each phase, learning has been set against end-of-phase expectations so that both pupils and teachers have a shared understanding of the destination towards which they are travelling.

The RE curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of all learners, thus ensuring each pupil has the opportunity to open their minds and widen their horizons in RE. Built-in opportunities for action research through the delivery of the thematic units also provides class teachers with the chance to do the same as researchers and educational practitioners.

3. Academic disciplines and RE: Designing an effective RE curriculum

When thinking about designing a curriculum, it is helpful to view subjects on the school curriculum as having their roots in academic disciplines re-contextualised for the classroom.⁶ For example, science on the KSI – KS3 curriculum is actually a combination of biology, chemistry and physics, three distinct but related scientific disciplines. Similarly, geography is made of a combination of disciplines relating to physical and human geography.

What is a discipline? A discipline is a ‘tradition of enquiry with its own distinctive pursuit of truth’.⁷ Disciplines take substantive knowledge (established facts) and investigate how this knowledge was established. They ask questions about the reliability of this knowledge, and they investigate its authority for different groups of people. Disciplines consider the way in which our understanding of what we know changes over time, how it is revised in the face of new knowledge, and why it has impact in the way it does.

How does this relate to designing an RE curriculum that reflects broader curriculum intent and has the desired impact on pupils?

In order to ensure RE is contributing as fully as it could to the broader curriculum, we need to understand the academic disciplines that underpin it. If the science curriculum were to be delivered without any reference at all to biology, pupils would be missing out on key knowledge in science. If the geography curriculum only considered human geography, pupils would not gain the deep understanding they need of the physical environment and the way in which this has been investigated throughout human history. Thought must be given, then, to ensuring that pupils receive an RE curriculum that balances the key academic disciplines from which it is drawn.

⁶ This is not the only way to understand school curriculum subjects. Cf Counsell, Christine, ‘Taking Curriculum Seriously’, *Impact*, 4 (2018), pp. 6-9 and Kueh, Richard, ‘Religious Education and the “Knowledge Problem”’ in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), pp. 53-69 for a range of views on this matter.

⁷ Counsell, Christine, ‘Taking Curriculum Seriously’, *Impact*, 4 (2018), pp. 6-9.

How do the disciplinary areas underpin curriculum design in RE?

This is about thinking through living. It requires pupils to think like human and social scientists, or to look at concepts through a human/social science lens. Pupils will explore questions and answers raised in relation to the lived reality and impact of religions and worldviews on people and their lives.



Human and Social Sciences

This is about thinking through thinking.

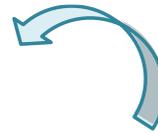
It requires pupils to think like philosophers, or to look at concepts through a philosophical lens. Pupils will explore questions and answers raised through considering the nature of knowledge, existence and morality.



Philosophy

Theology

Religious literacy through a balanced RE curriculum



This is about thinking through believing. It requires pupils to think like theologians, or to look at concepts through a theological lens. Pupils will explore questions and answers that arise from inside religions and worldviews.

Theology

How is theology contextualised in RE and how might it help scaffold the RE curriculum?

Theology addresses the ways in which beliefs shape how humans understand themselves, each other and the world around them. It looks at the concepts that provide people with a framework for understanding life, the universe and everything.

In the context of primary and secondary education, theology is a tradition of enquiry that explores the beliefs and concepts that underpin the diverse ways in which people understand the world around them. This might include investigating where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other. It considers questions of authority, authenticity, reliability, interpretation and adaptation.⁸

⁸ Cf. Georgiou, Gillian and Wright, Kathryn, 'RE-dressing the Balance' in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), pp. 101-114; Georgiou, Gillian, 'Balanced RE: Thoughts on RE Curriculum Design' in *Impact*, 4 (2018), pp. 42-45.

Human/Social Sciences

How are the human/social sciences contextualised in RE and how might they help scaffold the RE curriculum?

The human/social sciences investigate the ways in which religion and beliefs impact on human living. They explore the diverse ways in which people express and practise their beliefs, within and between religions. The human/social sciences consider the impact of religion and beliefs on individuals, communities and societies.

In the context of primary and secondary education, the human/social sciences are traditions of enquiry (for example sociology, history, psychology) that consider the lived reality of religion and the impact that a person's worldview has on the way in which they engage in the world and relate to others.⁹

Philosophy

How is philosophy contextualised in RE and how might it help scaffold the RE curriculum?

Philosophy asks questions about what humans can know and how they can know it. It explores how people have tried to define and demonstrate what is real and examines how people make sense of the world in which they live. It asks questions about what it is reasonable to believe, and it explores ethical issues of right, wrong, good and evil.

In the context of primary and secondary education, philosophy is a tradition of enquiry that uses dialogue, discussion and debate to refine the way in which pupils think about the world and their place in it. It takes seriously questions of reality, knowledge and morality, and encourages pupils to develop their capacity for reasoning.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Georgiou, Gillian and Wright, Kathryn, 'RE-dressing the Balance' in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), pp. 101-114; Georgiou, Gillian, 'Balanced RE: Thoughts on RE Curriculum Design' in *Impact*, 4 (2018), pp. 42-45.

¹⁰ Cf. Georgiou, Gillian and Wright, Kathryn, 'RE-dressing the Balance' in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), pp. 101-114; Georgiou, Gillian, 'Balanced RE: Thoughts on RE Curriculum Design' in *Impact*, 4 (2018), pp. 42-45.

Think point 5: Disciplines in RE

Does our RE curriculum provide opportunities to explore how beliefs have shaped the way in which humans understand themselves, each other and the world around them?

Does our RE curriculum provide opportunities to investigate the ways in which religion and beliefs impact on human living?

Does our RE curriculum provide opportunities to investigate what humans claim to know and how they seek knowledge?

Notes

Case Study 3: using disciplines to scaffold RE curriculum design

A town-based voluntary controlled secondary school where the majority of pupils are from White British heritage. A smaller than average number of pupils receive Pupil Premium funding and there is a below-average number of pupils who have SEND.

The school's vision can be summarized as "providing solid foundations, reaching for the future".

As a voluntary controlled school, the RE curriculum must comply with the locally agreed syllabus, which requires systematic teaching of key concepts and practices within Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, as well the school's choice from a range of thematic units.

The school has identified the key knowledge, concepts and tier 3 vocabulary it needs to deliver through the RE curriculum by referring to the locally agreed syllabus. It is also mindful of the expectations of public examinations at KS4, although this isn't driving curriculum design at KS3. In so doing, it is setting high expectations for pupils, ensuring that pupils have the foundations they need to be successful at KS4. This is done within the broader context of providing solid foundations, reaching for the future.

The RE department is working within wider school priorities to promote literacy skills. As a result, it has been decided to ground the KS3 curriculum in key texts that will enable pupils to engage with, analyse and connect key knowledge, concepts and vocabulary in RE. The department is using the three disciplinary areas of theology, human/social sciences and philosophy to scaffold the RE curriculum.

In Year 9, pupils are required to study the concepts of evangelism and jihad. The department has decided to take an extract from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in which St John Rivers explains to Jane Eyre why he feels compelled to work as a Christian missionary in India. This text is used as the basis of the unit of study and the pupils return to it throughout the term in order to analyse it in light of the new knowledge with which they have engaged.

Using approaches derived from the discipline of theology, the pupils interpret the text of Matthew 28:16-10 as one of the key biblical texts associated with evangelism in Christianity. They investigate the ways in which this relates to various doctrinal councils throughout history as mechanisms for providing some consistency in the message that is being spread. They also look at the impact of the development of different denominations of Christianity on Christian evangelism. The learning broadens out to look at the concept of jihad in Islam and its origins in the Qur'an, as well as a number of ways in which it has been interpreted in medieval and modern contexts by Muslims and non-Muslims. It explores the significance of lesser jihad and considers this in the context of the passage from *Jane Eyre*, investigating to what extent lesser jihad may be an appropriate response to the type of evangelism proposed by St John Rivers.

4. Why is it important to maintain a balance of these three disciplinary areas in the RE curriculum?

Theology, the human/social sciences and philosophy each provide a different lens through which to investigate the impact of religion and worldviews on humanity throughout history and in the contemporary world. They engage children and young people in the complexity of the world in which they live and empower them to have conversations that are informed because they have a real breadth of knowledge and understanding, and balanced because they've examined religion and worldviews through a variety of disciplines. They can provide a useful mechanism, not only for scaffolding curriculum design in RE, but also to measure the impact and effectiveness of RE. For example, they can help teachers identify key disciplinary knowledge and skills and support them in thinking about how these can be placed in a broader conceptual framework. This can help ensure clarity and consistency in teaching and learning, so that every pupil is able to make progress and unlock the next stage of learning in RE. Ultimately, it's about giving children and young people the academic opportunities to grow into free-thinking, critically aware, and compassionate adults.

Notes

Next Steps

1.

2.

3.

Useful Resources

Ofsted

Ofsted inspection framework 2019

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf

Ofsted inspection handbook 2019 (Section 5)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806942/School_inspection_handbook_section_5_060619.pdf

Ofsted inspection handbook 2019 (Section 8)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806946/School_inspection_handbook_section_8_060619.pdf

Chartered College of Teaching

Impact Journal

<https://impact.chartered.college/browse-issue/?issue=issue-4-designing-a-curriculum>

Balanced RE support documents

Key principles of a balanced RE curriculum, a conversation about balance, balanced RE short film

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/religious-education-and-collective-worship>

Audit tool primary

<https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/uploads/attachment/3999/self-evaluation-audit-primary-sept-18.pdf>

Audit tool secondary

<https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/uploads/attachment/4000/self-evaluation-audit-secondary-sept-18.pdf>

Church of England Education Office

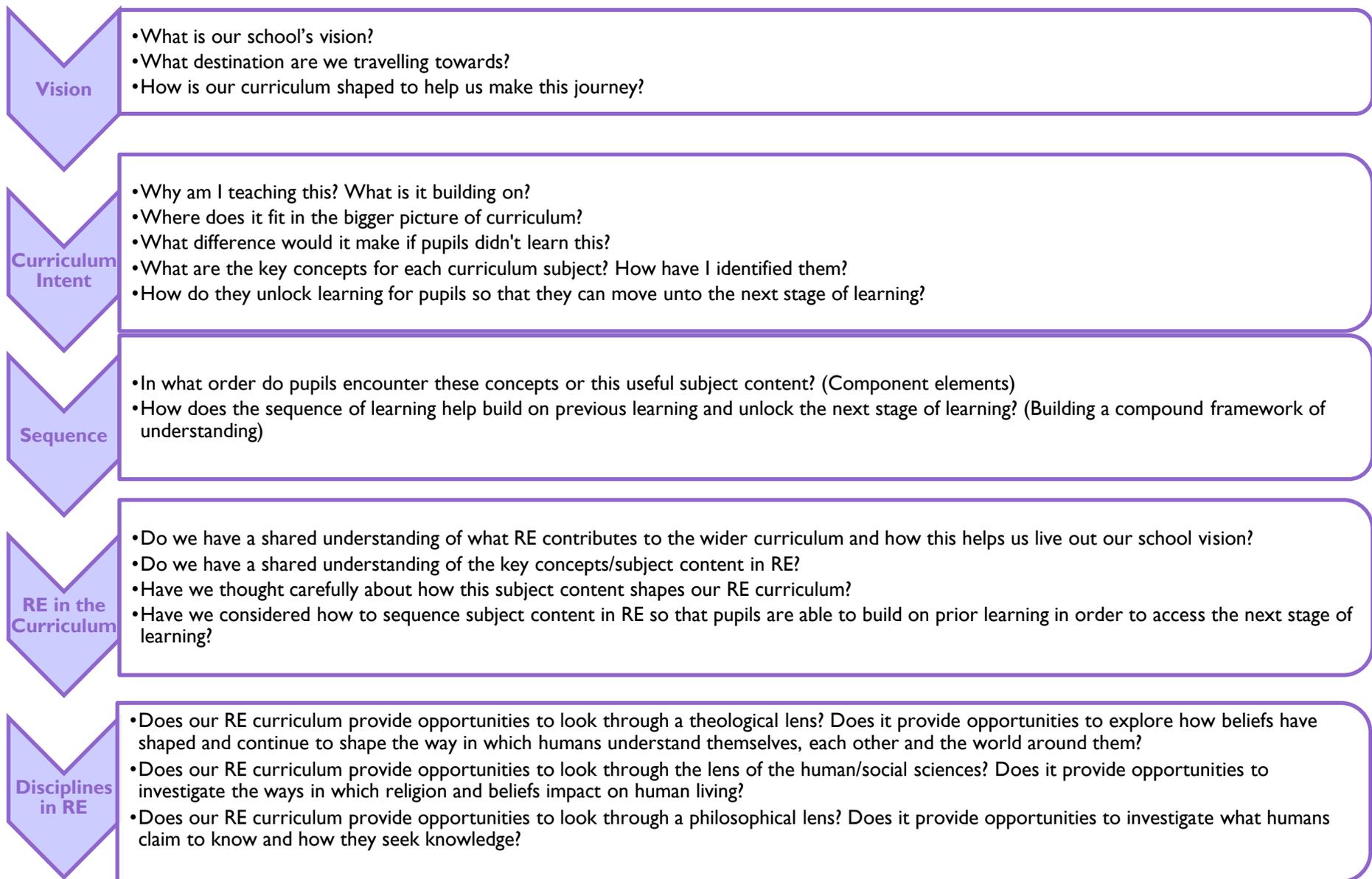
SIAMS schedule 2018

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-school-inspections>

CEFEL

Ethos enhancing outcomes documents that include questions to reflect on in curriculum design

<https://www.cefel.org.uk/visionresources/>



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