

RE Core Syllabus Consultations

Lines to take/Key Suggestions

PCI Overall Position

- 1 PCI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education's consultation on the proposed Religious Education (RE) Core Syllabus.
- 2 PCI supports the proposed commitment to an RE curriculum that is informed, objective, critical and pluralistic, while retaining Christianity as the core element of RE in Northern Ireland.
- 3 Our central message is that the proposed syllabus would be strengthened by providing greater clarity about the legal requirements for grant funded schools, while also protecting meaningful flexibility for individual schools to shape and deliver RE in light of their ethos, community context and pupils' needs.
- 4 Below are some of the key Issues that we raised in our consultation response:

(a) Christianity must remain genuinely 'core'.

- (i) Key suggestion: The Department should provide greater clarity about what pupils should know and understand about Christianity at each stage of education.
- (ii) Lines to take:
 - Welcome the explicit recognition of Christianity as the core element of RE. However, simply identifying Christianity as "core" or "central" does not, in itself, establish what that means in terms of content, depth or progression.
 - The syllabus should identify essential Christian knowledge, beliefs, teachings, texts and practices.
 - There should be a clear and coherent progression in pupils' understanding of Christianity from Foundation Stage through Key Stage 4.
 - Particular attention should be given to pupils' knowledge and understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. This would provide greater clarity for schools, teachers, parents and pupils about the common statutory entitlement.

(b) The statutory requirements should provide a clear framework while allowing schools flexibility in how they deliver RE.

- (i) Key Suggestion: Schools should retain the flexibility in how they deliver RE.
- (i) Lines you could take:
 - Supporting the clear and consistent statutory requirements for RE across all schools.
 - However, these requirements should not be so prescriptive that they prevent schools from adapting RE to their own ethos, context and pupils' needs.
 - The proposed syllabus rightly recognises that schools should have flexibility regarding sequence, depth, examples and pedagogical approaches.
 - Flexibility should extend beyond how RE is taught and sequenced, allowing schools some freedom to shape the curriculum within the statutory requirements.

- Schools should be able to make connections between RE, their ethos, wider curriculum, community and pupils' lived experiences.

(c) School ethos should have a meaningful place.

- (i) Key suggestion: The role of school ethos should be explicitly recognised in implementation of the syllabus.
- (ii) Lines to take:
 - School ethos is not simply a matter of branding or school identity; it can shape the values, relationships and wider educational experience of pupils.
 - This is particularly important in schools with a longstanding Christian ethos and history.
 - Schools should have sufficient freedom to express their ethos through the way in which they contextualise and deliver RE, while meeting the statutory requirements.
 - The proposed syllabus already recognises the importance of ethos and community context; PCI supports retaining and strengthening this principle

(d) A statutory RE policy for all grant-aided schools.

- (i) Key Suggestion: The Department should consider requiring all grant-aided schools to maintain an RE policy.
- (i) Lines to Take:
 - Greater curricular flexibility should be accompanied by clarity and accountability.
 - An RE policy would provide a practical mechanism for schools to explain how they meet the statutory syllabus while exercising their legitimate curricular autonomy.
 - This could also provide useful clarity in the context of the Department's intention to strengthen inspection of RE.

(e) Spiritual development should not disappear from the wider curriculum.

- (i) Key Suggestion: Spiritual development should be more clearly reflected in the aims and objectives of the wider curriculum.
- (i) Lines to Take:
 - PCI welcomes the recognition of spiritual development within the Vision for RE.
 - However, spiritual development appears much less clearly in the subsequent curriculum structure and accompanying capabilities.
 - Spiritual development is an important dimension of the education of the whole person.
 - It concerns questions of ultimate meaning and purpose, values, transcendence and what it means to live a meaningful life.
 - It should therefore not be confined to a single reference within the RE Vision.
 - Spiritual development should be more explicitly reflected within the aims, objectives and relevant Capabilities of the TransformED curriculum.

(f) Recognise theology alongside philosophy.

(i) Key suggestion: Theology should be recognised as a relevant discipline within the PSCC framework, alongside philosophy.

(ii) Lines to take:

- The proposed RE syllabus appropriately recognises the contribution of theological and philosophical approaches.
- However, theology appears to have less recognition within the wider PSCC framework.
- This creates an intellectual disconnect between RE and the wider curriculum.
- Recognising theology alongside philosophy would therefore strengthen coherence across the curriculum.
- Theology is not simply a component of religious education; it is an important intellectual discipline through which pupils can engage with fundamental questions about human life and society.