

# Special Education and RE

## Lancashire SACRE support for teaching

### Ideas, policy, practice and debate

### From RE Today / Lat Blaylock



**Pupils at Weatherfield Special School created art works about the search for God and the theme 'God's Good Earth' for the NATRE Spirited Arts competition**



**Pupils in Owls Class at Kingsmill Special School studied prayers in different religions and their own experience, and created this body sculpture about talking with God.**

# Pupils with SEND and Religious Education

Pupils with SEND are entitled to receive Religious Education based upon the Locally Agreed Syllabus as far as it is practicable - or with a curriculum of similar ambition to national curriculum subjects, if an academy chooses not to follow the local syllabus. This entitlement applies to all pupils, whether they are educated in mainstream schools or special school settings.

We believe that RE can provide challenging and nurturing learning opportunities for every pupil, and we seek creative and well thought out ways of providing for these entitlements to RE, so that every pupil can benefit from the opportunities for personal development the subject provides. Far from being a 'box to be ticked' in the curriculum, RE can help pupils gain awareness of themselves, their place in the world and what it means to be human.

Two principles: good RE seeks to be holistic and inclusive

- Holistic RE focuses on the pupil as a whole, rather than only focusing on specific elements. A holistic vision of pupils' development considers all aspects of their individual needs, including how they interrelate with each other and the factors that influence them, and how this affects how they learn. Whether learners are part of a community of faith or not, RE offers them appropriate ways to engage with religion and belief and connects to every individual's need for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Inclusive RE recognises all pupils' entitlements to learning that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of educational needs and preferences. RE offers all learners a space in which they are included, valued and respected.

## Section A: Guidance for pupils not engaged in subject specific study

Following the Rochford Review (2019), the government announced plans to introduce the engagement model. This is a new form of assessment for pupils working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and not engaged in subject-specific study. It replaces the Performance Scale's steps 1 to 4 (often called 'P' scales) and statutory from 2022.

Further general details of the Engagement model can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/903458/Engagement\\_Model\\_Guidance\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903458/Engagement_Model_Guidance_2020.pdf)

The engagement model celebrates the different abilities of pupils not engaged in subject specific study. This intention is always appropriate for RE. It enables the collection of qualitative information and evidence that should inform a teacher's assessment of their pupils' evidence of progress in the following areas:

- the effective use of their senses, including the use of both near and distant senses and the use of sensory integration;
- the application of physical (motor) skills to permit active participation in new experiences;
- states of emotional wellbeing to facilitate sustained motivation to learn;
- communication and language skills to inform thought processes.

## How will pupils be assessed using the engagement model?

The engagement model has 5 areas of engagement, and pupils can show responses to experience of RE in relation to these areas.

- exploration
- realisation
- anticipation
- persistence
- initiation

The areas allow teachers to assess pupils' engagement in developing new skills, knowledge and concepts in the school's curriculum by demonstrating how pupils are achieving specific outcomes. They represent what is necessary for pupils to fully engage in their learning and reach their full potential.

The model provides a flexible description of ways in which pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties make progress in their education, and recognises that progress for these pupils is not merely linear. The model does not specify a curriculum, but does offer a rounded and holistic way to identify small steps of progress, linked to termly outcomes for these pupils, supporting and enriching the learning pathways for non-subject specific learning. The model allows teachers to assess their own effectiveness in connecting their teaching to the learning needs of each pupil, clarifying teachers' understandings of the pupils' learning journeys.

Progress through each of the 5 areas of engagement should be measured by identifying how established the pupil is against each of the areas of engagement. This will differ for each pupil according to their profile of needs as set out in their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

The model recognises that engagement is multi-dimensional and breaks it down into 5 areas that allow teachers, in relation to RE, to assess:

- how well their pupils are being engaged in developing new skills, knowledge and concepts in the school's RE curriculum
- how effective the special educational provision is in empowering their pupils to progress against the agreed outcomes in their EHC plans and how effectively pupils are engaging with and making progress against these plans in particular relation to RE
- pupils' achievements and progress across the 4 areas of need of the SEND code of practice (communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health difficulties, and sensory and/or physical needs) The four areas all connect to good RE.

The engagement model:

- is a unique method of observation, allowing insight that improves provision for all pupils
- uses a pupil-centred approach that focuses on their abilities rather than disabilities
- values all sources of knowledge and information provided by those working with the pupil, including teachers, school staff, other professionals and parents or carers
- promotes consistency and a common language amongst schools and all those working with the pupil
- recognises there is a complex interaction between pupils' physical, sensory, communication and learning disabilities that affects how they progress

## The Five areas of Engagement



Religious Education may provide opportunities for pupils to learn in all of these areas. Using outcome statements from the early years foundation stage profile can provide helpful and relevant clarification of learners' progress. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-handbook>

These questions will help teachers considering the provision of experiences from RE for pupils with SEND to focus their contribution to learning for pupils.

The table on the next page might provide teachers with audit questions about current provision and planned improvements.

<b>In what ways can RE for pupils with SEND:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise the pupil's individual needs?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show and celebrate the pupil's success?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide evidence of the pupil's responses and achievements?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide ways of comparing the pupil's current responses with past ones in order to show evidence of their achievements?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capture information about the quality of the pupil's progress so the complexities and subtle differences of individual responses can be described, interpreted and explained?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contain information and evidence that enable decisions to be made concerning the pupil's needs can be used to inform planning and next steps for pupils, including special educational provision?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist in gathering evidence for reporting the pupil's achievements and progress against their EHC plan as part of the annual review process?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist in compiling evidence as part of end of academic year reporting to the pupil's parents, LAs and governors?</li> </ul>	

## **Section B:**

### **Guidance for pupils beginning to engage in RE specific learning**

#### **1. Introduction**

This guidance is designed to stimulate, support and promote best practice and high standards of achievement in RE for all pupils. It focuses on teaching and learning in RE among pupils with a range of special educational needs and disabilities.

RE can make a powerful contribution to the learning of pupils with SEND. They can develop understanding of religious and life issues through experiences including song and music, discussion and talk, use of artefacts and the creative arts which cannot always be reflected in their written work. What follows is guidance on how RE may be made more accessible for such pupils.

#### **2. Principles for RE and pupils with SEND.**

**A. Valuing the importance of RE for pupils with special needs.**

RE is part of the core curriculum and is a positive entitlement for all pupils and should be taught with the same educational purposes, validity and integrity to all. In special schools the law requires the Agreed Syllabus to be taught 'as far as is practicable', and quality teaching will tailor the syllabus carefully to the special needs of all pupils. The positive effect may be that in RE pupils with difficulties, problems or tragedies in their young lives find the most space to explore and seek to resolve their own conflicts.

**B. Using pupils' experience of difficulty to develop their capacity to understand searching themes in RE.**

There are areas in which pupils with special educational needs may show particular strengths. A pupil's experience of difficulties or suffering could lead to a heightened awareness of searching themes in RE. Sometimes small group work with pupils with special needs is particularly important in making space for reflection on experience and meaning. Good RE faces difficulties sensitively, rather than 'ducking the issues'.

**C. Building on pupils' interest in people and what they do.**

Some pupils with special educational needs sometimes show more awareness of people's feelings and a curiosity about what people do. This can lead to an interest in the effect of religious belief on people and interest in how individual religious people lead their lives. This may involve pupils working on their own ideas about belief and experience, considering meanings for themselves.

**D. Valuing pupils' use of religious language.**

Some pupils with special needs may show a lack of inhibitions in using religious and spiritual language, such as 'soul', 'heart' and 'spirit'. This can lead them into a spiritual perception of religion and human experience and an engagement with the symbolic.

**E. Being sensitive to the variety of pupils' understanding of religious concepts.**

It is difficult to generalise about the appropriateness of introducing certain religious concepts to pupils with special needs owing to the wide range of their needs. Teachers need to be sensitive in judging the appropriateness of different material on, for example, miracles and healing, which may be perceived differently by pupils with different disabilities. RE seeks to develop sensitive and respectful attitudes, and these can be exemplified by teaching which is sensitive and respectful.

**F. Allowing pupils to engage with explicit religious material.**

RE which lets the emotion and power of explicit religious materials loose in the classroom, and welcomes personal responses can provide powerful opportunities for spiritual development for pupils with a variety of special educational needs. An over-emphasis on seeing special needs pupils as needing a 'small step' approach can block the development of a vital and dynamic form of RE. Some pupils may respond to the 'burning core' of questions that engage the imagination and often lead from the spiritual into 'explicit RE.'

**G. Promoting pupils' use of the arts as a way of expressing themselves.**

Pupils with special educational needs may have an enjoyment and engagement with art, music, dance and drama. Using these forms of expression can be very effective with special needs pupils.

**H. Recognising pupils' intuitive responses to religious issues.**

Pupils with special educational needs may show a more intuitive approach to religion and human experience, and this may be expressed through questions, insights or gestures. These intuitive moments can display leaps of learning or understanding which are at odds with their understanding of other concepts. Some pupils with special educational needs will show a willingness to share a spiritual response. These achievements can be celebrated and noted by the teacher, but often no written product of achievement exists. A lack of permanent evidence of achievement does not matter in such cases.

**I. Valuing pupils' achievement through creative forms of assessment and recording.**

These forms need to be developed in order to reflect moments of intuition, insight and response. A 'Wall of Wisdom', where pupils' deep comments and questions about religion and human experience are written can be displayed in class, or a photographic or video record of significant events can be kept, or a running record in the teachers' notes.

### **3. Educational contexts.**

The principles set out above apply to pupils with special educational needs in all settings. These include SEND pupils in mainstream schools, special units attached to mainstream schools, PRUs, hospital schools and special schools. Pupils have a wide range of backgrounds and needs, including learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In RE these may be accentuated by differences of home and faith backgrounds. It is important to recognise that all pupils can achieve in RE, and teachers have the task of unlocking that potential and facilitating that achievement.

## 4. Differentiation in RE: meeting each learner's needs.

Legislation provides an entitlement for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum. A wide range of ability and experiences exists within any group of pupils. Teachers need to be able to provide equal opportunities in learning through a flexible approach and skills which differentiate teaching and learning, matching the challenge of RE work to individual learners' needs.

Differentiation within RE involves meeting the individual needs of pupils in ways that are relevant to their life experiences. Successful differentiation is dependent on planning, teaching and learning methods and assessment. This requires:

- an understanding by teachers of the ways in which pupils learn;
- providing imaginative learning experiences which arouse and sustain pupils' interest;
- supporting the learning which takes place in RE by what is taught in other curriculum areas.
- matching work to pupils' previous experience;
- an understanding of factors which may hinder or prevent pupils learning;
- careful analysis of the knowledge and skills which comprise a particular learning task;
- structured teaching and learning which will help pupils to achieve and to demonstrate their learning outcomes;

Differentiation strives to help all pupils to learn together through providing a variety of tasks at any one time. Pupils can also be given some choice over what and how they learn so their learning reflects their interests and needs.

The ethos of a school and the work of individual teachers is very influential in RE. A positive ethos facilitates differentiated teaching through excellence in relationships based on mutual respect. Two factors make an important contribution:

- attitudes to learning - a philosophy which encourages purposeful learning and celebrates effort alongside success, as well as helping pupils take responsibility for their own engagement in tasks;
- a safe, stimulating environment which recognises individual needs of pupils, sets appropriate challenges and builds on a positive, praising classroom culture.

## 5. Planning.

Once schools are familiar with the requirements of the RE Agreed Syllabus and have chosen which religions are to be studied in which Key Stage, long, medium and short term planning can be put in place which includes teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs. Special schools have the flexibility to modify the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to meet their pupils' needs, such as selecting materials from an earlier key stage or by planning to focus on just two religions. They must teach the syllabus 'as far as it is practicable.'

The development of pupils' individual education programmes (IEPs) allows for RE to be provided according to pupils' needs, such as focusing on communication, social, sensory or other skills to which RE can make a significant contribution. Some pupils may need additional experiences to consolidate or extend their understanding of particular concepts, so timing needs to be flexible enough to allow for this. Where teaching is good, the specific skills of reflection, expression and discernment will not be neglected.



RE and SEND Planning should provide for:

- the range of pupil ability in the group, with differentiated activities;
- the past and present experience of pupils;
- the family background of pupils (including in relation to religious and non-religious family culture);
- the individual needs of pupils, including their special educational needs and their personal learning plans;
- a range of opportunities to assess progress and to report to parents.

There are some commercial resources available to support this work, for example the 'Equals' programme offers well thought out work for SEND RE to schools.

## 6. Teaching and learning approaches for pupils with SEND

A wide variety of approaches can succeed, including the use of artefacts, video, visits and visitors, ritual, reflection, stilling and experiential activities, classroom assistants, the widest possible range of sensory and experiential approaches, and use of ICT including internet, recorded music, a digital camera and scanner, new video technologies, big mac switches, concept key boards and overlays. New technologies are often created to help pupils with SEN: Good RE teaching must always seek to make the most of them.

## 7. Recording pupils' achievement.

Pupils with SEND in RE want to be able to show their achievement. Teachers need to enable pupils to demonstrate statements of achievement and learning outcomes. For pupils with SEND, this document provides an application of the DfE's Engagement Model and the use of performance statements (formerly called 'P4-P8'). These refer to skills, knowledge and understanding in RE. Teachers can also make special use of the Early Learning Goals applied to RE in the syllabus and the outcome statements for pupils aged 7, 11 and 14, as appropriate. It is practicable for RE outcomes to break age related norms for pupils with SEND.

Particular outcome statements could be broken down into a number of smaller elements and steps to work on and celebrate achievements. In good RE these could include pupils' responses to:

- experiencing an activity in RE
- sharing an awareness of the activity
- being a part of, or being an agent in classroom rituals for learning
- using the senses in different ways related to RE experiences and content
- exploring artefacts, experiences, stories, music or other stimulus materials in RE
- participation in the activities in varied ways
- praising and being praised, thanking and being thanked
- observing or participating in an enactment of an aspect of the learning

The use of the full range of RE outcome statements may provide useful tools in enabling teachers to:

- plan future work with objectives, tasks and learning experiences appropriate to pupils' ability and development;
- ensure continuity and progression to the next stage;
- set appropriate RE targets for pupils' personal IEPs;
- recognise pupils' levels of engagement and response.

## 8. Accreditation of RE.

The National Qualifications framework provides for entry level qualifications such as a certificate of achievement to accredit the achievement of students at 16 whose achievement is below that of GCSE. Entry level qualifications in RE/RS are available from several awarding bodies. These accreditation routes award grades of pass, merit and distinction roughly equivalent to National Curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3. These qualifications may allow appropriate forms of assessments for pupils with special needs. Local collaboration between special schools and other schools can provide support for the use of such accreditation.



Le Rondin Special School in Guernsey created a film about diversity with their visually impaired pupils. Full of texture and sound, written in braille as well as English, the project absorbed the 7-9 year olds for several sessions and provoked deep discussion about their needs, perspectives and differences.

## Descriptions of achievements in RE for pupils with SEND who are working below National Curriculum Outcomes

Progress for pupils with SEND engaging in a subject specific RE curriculum has been described using 'Performance Levels' for some years. P Levels 1-3 have been superseded by the Engagement Model described above, but these statements (formerly referred to as P4-8) continue to provide flexible and useful descriptions of the ways in which pupils with SEND show some of their achievements in RE. Teachers are advised to use these statements for planning and teaching and learning. Constructive debate about ways forward is welcome of course!

<p>Pupils learning in RE may be characterised by increasing progress described below. These descriptions are open to interpretation by teachers and provide flexible tools for recognising some steps towards learning and progress in RE.</p>	
<p><b>Involvement is mostly responsive and prompted</b></p> <p>(Formerly called P4)</p>	<p>Pupil can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use single elements of communication e.g. words, gestures, signs or symbols, to express their feelings.</li> <li>• show they understand 'yes' and 'no'.</li> <li>• begin to respond to the feelings of others e.g. matching their emotions and laughing when another pupil is laughing.</li> <li>• join in with activities by initiating ritual actions and sounds.</li> <li>• demonstrate an appreciation of stillness and quiet.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Involvement is increasingly active and intentional</b></p> <p>(Formerly called P5)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respond appropriately to simple questions about familiar religious events or experiences and communicate simple meanings.</li> <li>• respond to a variety of new religious experiences e.g. involving music, shared emotion, drama, colour, lights, food or tactile objects.</li> <li>• take part in activities involving two or three other learners.</li> <li>• may also engage in moments of individual reflection.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learners are beginning to gain skills and understanding</b></p> <p>(Formerly called P6)</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• express and communicate their feelings in different ways.</li> <li>• respond to others in group situations and co-operate when working in small groups.</li> <li>• listen to, and begin to respond to, familiar religious stories, poems and music, and make their own contribution to celebrations and festivals.</li> <li>• carry out ritualised actions in familiar circumstances.</li> <li>• show concern and sympathy for others in distress e.g. through gestures, facial expressions or by offering comfort.</li> <li>• start to be aware of their own influence on events and other people.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Learners are beginning to be able to use their skills and understanding</b></p> <p><b>(Formerly called P7)</b></p>	<p><b>Pupils can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen to and follow religious stories.</li> <li>• can communicate their ideas about religion, life events and experiences in simple phrases.</li> <li>• can evaluate their own work and behaviour in simple ways, beginning to identify some actions as right and wrong on the basis of consequences.</li> <li>• can find out about aspects of religion through stories, music, or drama, answer questions and communicate their responses.</li> <li>• may communicate their feelings about what is special to them e.g. through role play.</li> <li>• can begin to understand that other people have needs and to respect these.</li> <li>• can make purposeful relationships with others in group activity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learners are more secure in using the skills and understanding they have gained</b></p> <p><b>(Formerly called P8)</b></p>	<p><b>Pupils can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can listen attentively to religious stories or to people talking about religion.</li> <li>• can begin to understand that religious and other stories carry moral and religious meaning.</li> <li>• are increasingly able to communicate ideas, feelings or responses to experiences or retell religious stories.</li> <li>• can communicate simple facts about religion and important people in religions.</li> <li>• can begin to realise the significance of religious artefacts, symbols and places.</li> <li>• can reflect on what makes them happy, sad, excited or lonely.</li> <li>• are able to demonstrate a basic understanding of what is right and wrong in familiar situations.</li> <li>• are often sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and show respect for themselves and others.</li> <li>• treat living things and their environment with care and concern.</li> </ul>

Additional practical materials:

'Growing in RE', a booklet by Anne Krisman, is available free on the NATRE website at [www.natre.org.uk](http://www.natre.org.uk)

[NATRE member link:](http://www.natre.org.uk)

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Member%20Resources/NATRE%20Resources/Primary%201000/SEND%20RE.pdf>

It provides a wealth of practical illustrations of great SEND RE work.

We also support a facebook professional community group about SEND and RE, which we invite all practitioners in this area to join: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/REandSEN>

LB 2022

## Making RE accessible to all: an on-line dialogue about teaching RE to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

From the 'Professional Reflection' section of RE Today magazine, May 2022

Rebecca Pearce

My journey in researching this area of pedagogy in Religious Education (RE) began when I began a teacher fellowship awarded by the Farmington Institute (<http://www.farmington.ac.uk>). RE has long been a passion of mine, largely because I find exploring the belief systems and culture of others as fascinating as I find reflecting on my own. This passion can be seen throughout my personal educational history and life experiences. Although raised Christian, I still feel myself very much on a journey of discovery when considering my own spirituality.

In my current role, I am RE lead in a mainstream primary school in South West England. My experience of teaching the subject has only served to increase my fascination and to cause me to ask further questions, not only of myself but about learning in RE. Experience has led me to believe that children, particularly, are capable of approaching big ideas, concepts and belief systems with an open mind. Children seem open to considering deep philosophical and spiritual questions in ways that adults can find more difficult, perhaps due to psychological barriers created by previous experiences.

An example of this was when recently I asked my class to reflect upon and express their own beliefs about God, a task many adults, myself included, would find extraordinarily difficult. The children however were able to come up with unique and fascinating ideas. One girl drew on her own self, explaining that "God is always with me," Another child thought of his Nan and explained, "I think of passed away family members when I think about God." Many more thought of animals or scenes from nature and were able to explain that they had done so because God created, "Everything beautiful," or because they saw qualities in the animals chosen that they imagined God to have.

Often, I am amazed by the profound, insightful answers and questions children formulate. Earlier this year we read the story of Noah. A girl asked, "Why did God only ask Noah to take his wife and children? What about his parents?" This sparked an animated debate in my year 4 classroom in which the imagined qualities of Noah's parents were discussed in great detail. This led to discussion about why someone hasn't found the answers to these questions and whether they should even try, before one child decided he was going to say a prayer to ask God. One little boy observed, "God makes a lot of promises but always wants something in return." This initiated further conversation about the ethics of this point.

This whole fascinating discussion took place with very little input from me. I was frantically trying to scribble all these quotes down! In my opinion, it is moments like these in which a pupil's ability to comprehend in RE is really evident. As the Wiltshire Agreed Syllabus level descriptions for KS2 attainment target 2 (learning from religion and belief) states, pupils should be able to '-Raise and suggest answers to questions and issues raised by religion and belief. -Apply their ideas relating to their study of religion and belief to their own and other people's lives. -Describe what inspires and influences themselves and others, in relation to religion and belief.'" Some of the pupils whose thoughts I have described above are on the SEND register, are significantly below ARE in reading and writing, and have historically been so in RE. Nevertheless, through the two activities described alone, I would be confident in saying that

these children had accessed and were capable of achieving ARE in attainment target 2 for the unit taught.

Experiences like these throughout my teaching career have caused me to maintain that every child is able to achieve positively in RE. Why, then, do so many appear not to realise these achievements in RE lessons? When an opportunity to further explore why this arose with the Farmington Institute, I grasped it quickly and with both hands!

I decided that answers to my questions and concerns could be explored starting in my own educational setting. I teach in a rural Wiltshire C of E school. Our pupil intake largely consists of white British children who identify as Christian or as having no religion. We have a slightly lower than national average number of children receiving the pupil premium (PP), but a higher than average proportion of SEND children. Nationally, primary schools with higher proportions of pupils with special educational needs (SEND) are associated with lower performance (*research report published by the DFE into supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils*). Although this report focusses on academic achievement across all subjects, it seems particularly relevant to my setting and articulates general educational principles at the heart of the issues around RE for all that I would like to investigate.

Our school has a number of strengths in its teaching of RE, but as in any school, has aspects of practice which we can also improve through reflection and action. In correlation with the aforementioned report, SEND data showed poorer outcomes in RE than for other groups of children. I strongly disagree that these pupils are any less able to achieve in RE than anyone else and therefore hypothesise that there must be a barrier that is currently preventing their achievement that we have not yet realised.

So, what could this barrier be? Interestingly, the best outcomes for SEND pupils in our school in RE were seen in KS1 where alternative recording is more a part of general pedagogy than it is in KS2. This relates to my previous observations where I gathered children's reactions to the story of Noah which resulted from shared thinking and time to verbally articulate responses. Had I asked children to record their reactions to the story of Noah in their books would I have had the same quality of response?

Could the barrier then be around pedagogy? Or even teacher confidence in assessing RE separately to other academic subjects, where evidence in written outcomes may not be so obvious? Or are engaging, practical activities key? During a pupil voice survey on how children felt RE could be improved, practical activities such as drama and art were often mentioned. Could it be that targets and interventions are so heavily focussed on 'core' subjects that it detracts from a child's interest or ability in RE? Although our school endeavours to make as many interventions as possible classroom based, targets chosen for SEND children are often concentrated on maths or English. Does RE then become somewhat irrelevant to the child? If it is none of these things, what does stop a child with SEND from achieving in this subject?

These questions lead me to Anne Krisman, whose published research on themes of teaching of RE in a special school seemed to resonate with my own concerns. Anne invited a former pupil of hers, Michelle, to attend our on-line interview so that I could better understand the experiences of inclusive RE from the learner's perspective as well as that of the teacher.

Anne Krisman

My philosophy of teaching RE in a special school came from watching my pupils. They often had, as Becky described, a spiky profile. Their level of understanding and spiritual responses were markedly different from their achievement in Maths and English. When handed a

religious artefact, they placed it to their heart, showing it was precious, despite not having language to express the concept.

Teachers now are familiar with the Worldviews idea of lenses and how we all see the world differently. Janet pondered in our online discussion whether there was such a thing as a special needs lens. A pupil from a difficult home background once talked about the absence of the mother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The son left, they explained, because there was no mum there to help him.

Over lockdown, I was in touch with several ex pupils, now in their 20s and 30s, who still find relevance in the deep themes we explored in our colourful classroom. RE has helped them through tough times in their lives.

One ex-pupil is Michelle, from the Reform Jewish tradition. Since leaving school, she has become a campaigner for people with learning disabilities - "I used to be a shy girl but now I've opened up and spread my wings." She is involved with Mencap's Treat Me Well campaign and a Speak Out leader for Lincolnshire - "I can help give back to the community." Touchingly, she feels her late grandparents guide her in her work for those with disabilities.

Michelle's learning from past RE lessons and her central Jewish beliefs are reflected in her present campaigning work. She was quick to explain how it was important to fight for disability rights, in a world that can take advantage of the weaker ones. She quoted loving your neighbour as yourself and respecting people, not judging them by their cover. Visiting places of worship was about "knowing there are friends out there and meeting new people." When I mentioned the Jewish concept of 'tikkun ha'olam' - repair of a damaged world - she immediately took the angle of how we could give people with disabilities more care and how councils could help give better access to shops and services for people with wheelchairs.

One thing that fascinated me was her use of the concept of 'connecting'. This is something that was always in my teaching - making links between the pupil and themes in the religion or worldview. It is one of the keys in my '5 Keys Into RE' planning tool, which I devised after watching my pupils' responses to RE. It is also central in Judaism, with our focus on connecting with God, with family, our community and our history. Michelle talked about reaching out to people from different faiths and connecting with organisations who can remove barriers from the lives of those with disabilities.

I asked Michelle for three messages to give Becky and other teachers who have children with special needs in their classes.

- 1) Make reasonable adjustments for your pupils, using symbols, images and dance
- 2) Develop their courage to go out to mosques, temples, synagogues and other places of worship, as they will learn about others' different views
- 3) Always keep children with special needs in RE lessons and never remove them for extra English or Maths. Having a learning disability doesn't mean they can't learn RE... be prepared to explain in ways they understand. We all need to learn about RE and connect other religions with our own beliefs.

#### Broader discussion

Having discussed the ability of SEND children to access RE through observations made in both a special school and in a mainstream primary school it would seem apparent that not only are these children able to access key RE concepts and make progress in their understanding of them, but that they can continue to have a profound and valuable impact on their lives going



forward. It therefore seems essential that RE is valued and accessible for all children, not only as an academic discipline, but as a form of expression and as a potential guiding force in their lives.

One of the most impactful messages Rebecca took from the investigation is the idea of 'connection'. This correlates strongly with observations she has made in her own classroom in which children are more able to consider deep concepts through relevance to their own lives. She will take the advice of Anne and Michelle on board and continue to monitor the impact of this in her quest during the Farmington Fellowship and beyond to ensure all children in her setting are able to access and progress in RE in a valuable and inclusive way which ensures achievement for all.

For Anne and Michelle...

The discussion we have all had continues to emphasise how central an inclusive form of RE is for our pupils. It breaks my heart to see it delivered by 'dropdown days' in primary and special schools. RE isn't a quick inoculation but something that grows with our pupils and needs time to flourish. Over lockdown, my ex-pupil Peter, now almost 40 years old, remembered our classroom work on Buddhism so many years ago. Drawing lotus flowers helped him cope through those anxious months for us all.

Creative RE is also missed by those with learning disabilities who go on to 18 - 25 further education college provision. The emphasis on functional work-related skills seems to exclude any spiritual input. Many young adults with disabilities are not able to communicate their needs and feelings about their provision. This is why we need advocates like Michelle, speaking out with bravery and bringing about change.

### Discussion

- What priorities do Rebecca and Anne identify in their SEND RE work? Do you share these? What would you add or adjust?
- Centring on learner's needs is emphasised here: what factors sometimes draw teaching away from the child, the learner?
- Spirituality - variously described - is seen as a core element here. Do you think that school SEND RE can contribute to pupils' spiritual lives more effectively than it has done? How and why?

Pupils were eager to find ways in which, like Dr King, they could take action to make the dreams come true.

Pupils at Ashfield Special school found Martin Luther King's speeches exciting; some imitated them gleefully. Teachers had 1-2-1 chats about dreams with each pupil. The display was a class favourite.



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Dreams for each one of us



## Case study: a good example of RE in action for SEND pupils.

Please just type into the sheet. A photo of the work, the classroom or the activity would be brilliant. Fill in version available from [lat@retoday.org.uk](mailto:lat@retoday.org.uk)

Your name, school and email	
1. Thinking of an example of RE for SEND pupils that you were pleased with - could be a lesson or several - please can you say what happened? Give us plenty of detail.	
2. What were the RE aims of the work? A simple statement of two or three aims please.	
3. How did the learners respond and what pleased you about their engagement and reactions? Did you observe or record RE outcomes? Again, lots of detail is great.	
4. If you did this work again, how would you improve it from a good start?	

<p><b>5. What made this good RE for you?</b></p>	
<p><b>6. What were the needs of the learning group here, and how were the learners engaged? Did this lesson make a 'gift' to the pupils own needs from RE?</b></p>	
<p><b>7. What are the resource implications of this work - anything a school needs to make work like this effective?</b></p>	
<p><b>8. What else would you add to the case study so that other teachers could use your ideas easily?</b></p>	

## An example from another SACRE:

### Wolverhampton SACRE ran a small project on RE and SEND pupils.

Teachers said...

**Lauren:** One good example of RE from our school is we have done visits to places of worship to put everything learnt into context. Pupils got a lot from this. We had very good welcomes from the local church and the Mosque. We also linked up with another school where pupils went and taught children about their religion.

**Fran:** One example of good RE from our school is RE through ART. Posing a puzzling question to the children and letting them answer through their ART as they really engage and use their imagination. You can see how their mind is making sense of the world. There is a sense of shared achievement.

**Sam:** One example of good RE from our school is that we had a fantastic Diwali day - pupils experienced a range of music, foods, clothing and rituals through a multisensory approach. Storytelling was fun, and our Hindu pupils linked school and their home celebrations.

**Katy:** One example of good RE from our school is that we work hard to provide a wide range of multi-sensory experiences for learners to engage with the wider world, through diversity days. For example we use art, dance, music, food tasting sessions, sensory stories and opportunities for tactile exploration. We expect children to think and share at their own level about deep ideas.

**Tania:** Alongside RE lessons (time constraints are an issue) we have planned a theme day for Diwali where we have Bangra drums and Indian dance planned from a local group. We will fill the day with cross-curricular activities including art and drama so that all children can access the experiences and learning through in multi-sensory ways.

**Katie:** RE in our school is delivered through a cross-curricular approach under the umbrella of Cultures and Communities. By intertwining the learning content with the early skills our children need to make sense of the world around them, we provide a child-led approach to the subject of RE.

**Delia:** One good example of how we use RE as a school is we begin the experience of the learning content in a way that is accessible for our children, which is predominantly through a multi-sensory approach initially. Our curriculum allows RE to be intertwined with other discreet subjects under the umbrella of our 'Cultures and Communities' curriculum scheme.

**Kathryn:** RE can provide pupils with a wide range of multi sensory activities that can support them to develop the ability to engage with the world around them. I wish we had this sort of SEND forum and CPD for all subjects - this thinking will really support in mainstream schools with making the curriculum ambitious for our SEND pupils.

## Extract from a Locally Agreed Syllabus

### What opportunities are provided for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in RE?

The Wolverhampton SACRE vision is of RE for all. Every pupil can achieve and benefit from their RE, including all pupils with SEND. Additional guidance developed from the DfE's Engagement Model for pupils with SEND can be found on the SACRE website from Autumn 2021.

RE is a statutory part of the core curriculum for *all* pupils, including those with learning difficulties. Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are found in all contexts and all teachers are teachers of SEND pupils. Good quality teaching in RE will tailor the planning of the syllabus carefully to the special needs of all pupils. The law says that the Agreed Syllabus is to be taught to SEND pupils 'as far as it is practicable.'

RE provision for different groups of pupils will vary but all pupils are included.

#### For pupils with complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD)

- Good RE begins from the unique individuality where pupils are, and provides rich experiences of religion and spirituality.
- Calm and peaceful space in RE can enable learners to enjoy their RE time individually.
- RE can enable pupils with the most complex of needs to develop awareness of themselves, their feelings, their emotions and their senses.

#### For pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD)

- Multi sensory approaches can bring the possibility of introducing spiritual experiences.
- RE makes a contribution to pupils' social development through story, music, shared experience and ritual.
- RE can enable pupils to develop their relationships with other people and their understanding of other peoples' needs.

#### For pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD)

- RE can provide insight into the world of religion and human experience, especially when tough questions are opened up.
- RE can provide for pupils to participate in spiritual or reflective activity
- RE can enable pupils to make links with their own lives in family and community, including religious communities for some.

#### For pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD)

- RE can enable pupils to address deep issues of concern in helpful ways through exploring spiritual material.
- RE lessons can explore, in the safe space schools should provide, complex emotion or thoughts.
- RE can assist in the development of pupils' maturity.

## Prompts: Paper the walls with your wisdom on SEND and RE

As a professional development activity with SEND staff, invite all participants to complete 6 of these prompts where they have something to say. Post it notes on the wall works well

- a. One thing I love about doing RE with special pupils is...
- b. For younger pupils, I think it is very important that RE should...
- c. For older learners, I think it is very important that RE should...
- d. One thing I think is unique about RE is that...
- e. RE can be well taught linked to other subjects such as... because...
- f. One pupil of mine who taught me something was...
- g. I think we should use art in SEND RE because...
- h. I think we should use music in SEND RE because...
- i. A good example of some outdoor RE for my pupils was when...
- j. A good example of linking RE to story for SEND pupils was when...
- k. RE can give pupils a gift: you could describe it by saying...
- l. It's important for SEND RE to be plural because...
- m. It's important for SEND RE to be creative because...
- n. RE can help pupils think about their identity, including about their special needs, for example...
- o. We need to be brave in SEND RE, for example...
- p. We need to connect pupils' home life (including religious life in some cases) by for example...
- q. Our biggest challenge in SEND RE is...
- r. Resources I like include...
- s. A great RE syllabus for SEND RE pupils would be...
- t. My ambitions for SEND RE include...
- u. I also want to say...

## Profound RE in SEND settings by Tracey Edwards

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to teach RE to some of the most complex learners within our school system? After 10 years working in secondary schools, teaching GCSE and A-Level RS, Tracy Edwards moved into Special Education in 2009. Here, she reflects on what Religious Education can “look like” for pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities.

Around a year ago, in a conversation about whole-school SMSCD (spiritual, moral social and cultural development) a colleague of mine commented that our pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties were “possibly the most spiritual” population within our diverse special education setting. I find it interesting to reflect on why he said this: How can spirituality be the same across an identified group? Isn’t spiritual expression actually as individual and as varied as our learners are?

As a professional in the field of special education however, I do think that it would be fair to say that pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) do tend to connect with the spirituality of the people around them; family members, teachers, teaching assistants, and health and social care professionals. Communication in PMLD classrooms is largely non-verbal, and the neurological atypicality of learners brings responses in sessions, which are unique and beautiful. This leads to occasional “awe and wonder” moments, that trigger reflections in practitioners, around what it means to be human; the first time an 11 year-old girl recognises her face in the mirror; the moment a 16 year-old who mostly sits with his chin down, looks up and extends his gaze towards the light. Life-limiting conditions are also a reality for PMLD settings, promoting further reflections in practitioners about the purpose and meaning, which we all bring to our existence.

Learners with PMLD are not the same as learners with Moderate Learning Difficulties who may also be a wheelchair user or have a sensory impairment. At Swiss Cottage School, we use the term PMLD to refer to those individuals with a profound intellectual disability. Whether they be in our Early Years department or our Sixth Form, sighted or hearing, walking or non-walking, pupils with PMLD will be working on developmental milestones that typically happen in the first year of life, such as understanding cause and effect, being able to indicate if they like or dislike something, responding to their own name, or comprehending that if an object is covered up or hidden it is still there. For PMLD learners, it is difficult therefore to meaningfully apply the six areas of enquiry for Religious Education, which feature in many Locally Agreed Syllabuses. Instead, we plan around priorities for the Spiritual Moral Social and Cultural Development in relation to their Education Health and Care Plans and the SEND Code of Practice. Below are some examples of what this can “look like” and how Religious Education can be shaped to provide a context for enabling holistic growth and community inclusion for all pupils.

### Sensory Stories

Sensory Stories typically have few words, and include a range of sounds, smells, tastes and textures, to boost learner engagement and responsiveness. Much has been written about Sensory Stories by Joanna Grace, author of *Sensory Stories for Children and*

*Teens with Special Education Needs'* who also, like myself, has a professional background in both Religious Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. In her book, Joanna reminds us of an often-overlooked sense: proprioception, which is the spatial awareness of the positioning of the body and parts of the body. She also emphasises the role that the repeated and consistent telling of the same sensory story, over a week, term or half term, can enable many learners with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties to start anticipating what will come next. On the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> (or 56<sup>th</sup>!) telling of a sensory story about the Seder Meal in Judaism for example, a learner might start to stick their tongue out slightly, in expectation of a drop of honey!

In my role within the Swiss Cottage Teaching School Alliance, working with a number of special schools, I have come across a range of wonderful examples of how sensory stories have supported pupils with PMLD, to connect with their faith community. In the days leading up to Eid for example, one school I work with, with a predominantly Muslim population, shared a sensory story with pupils about the celebrations. Teachers of learners with PMLD worked with Muslim members of staff on preparing the sensory stimuli for the story, leading to the inclusion of the smell of perfume (rather than coffee) to signify Eid morning. By encountering the sensory story several times in school, several learners with PMLD were enabled to be more "present" throughout Eid and more able to share in the festivities with their families.

#### Harts Ladder of Participation

In addition to sensory stories, teachers of learners with PMLD can offer a range of multi-sensory activities, which build connections with religious and cultural dimensions to identity and communication. Multi-sensory learning environments can also support spiritual development; the feel of a prayer mat on the skin, or being sat with others, facing the direction of Mecca.

One of my favourites is to add food colouring, loose tea-leaves and/or spices to dried lentils or rice to create a smell which may be associated with a festival or tradition. You then have something to channel through sieves and funnels, and make an appealing swish or pitter-patter sound on hard surfaces. Orange tea with cinnamon and cloves can be great for Christmas, along with a light shone under a dark umbrella to signify a star! A safer option, for pupils who like exploring things with their mouth is to use cooking dough and raisins to create the smell of hot cross buns, or wheat flour, ghee and butter for the taste, smell and texture of the Kara Prasad "sacred pudding".

In all of this however, educators need to be careful to ensure that the spectacular nature of the multi-sensory stimuli do not obscure the individual needs of the learners. In my experience, wonderful experiential learning opportunities can sometimes do the very opposite of what they are set out to do, and focus attention on the "craft" of "teaching" rather than the actual children and young people. In these circumstances, rather than be authentically involved in a session, learners can be "done to" and turn into mere "props" in a theatrical classroom. Sometimes, an empty room can be the value resource

as it enables what is termed “intensive interaction” (ref Caldwell insert year) between practitioner and pupil.

Hart’s *Ladder of Participation* is a useful tool for evaluating the extent to which learners are involved in an activity (see picture below). Similarly, Barry’s Carpenter’s ‘Engagement Profiling’ can support practitioners to assess and evaluate development in relation to the depth in which a learner can access a learning activity.

When using sensory stories, sensory learning activities or multi-sensory environments, my suggestion would be for PMLD practitioners to use the Ladder of Participation to consider the role, which learners are really playing in the process and/or to use the Engagement Profile to look at the development of engagement over time.

### Beyond P-Levels

Along with recent curriculum and policy reforms, the use of P-Levels (which were initially designed to assess learners whose achieving fell below what was National Curriculum Level 1) is starting to decline in many special schools. Whereas it was once standard practice, for learners with PMLD to be levelled somewhere between Level P1i and Level P4 for Religious Education, many special schools I encounter are now starting to instead work with more individualised learning intentions which promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At Swiss Cottage School for example, learners with PMLD are set learning intentions for curriculum areas such as ‘My Care and Independence’ and ‘Accessing the Community’ which are tracked over time, and inform the planning of teaching and learning activities. These learning intentions are based on what has been termed ‘SCRUFFY Targets’; alternatives to SMART Targets, which represent Student-Led, Creative, Unspecified, Fun For Youngers (Lacey, 2010). Two learners may have exactly the same “scruffy target” but take it in two completely different directions. Examples of SCRUFFY Targets, which support spiritual, moral, social and cultural development might include;

- *William will show that he is anticipating a repeated stimulus in burst-pause games with an adult*
- *Mary will respond to range of stimuli*
- *Sally will acknowledge people who come into the room or approach her*  
(Source Lacey 2010 ‘SMART and SCRUFFY Targets’)

### A Developmental Curriculum

In the above examples of “SCRUFFY” Targets, it is at first hand difficult to “see” the Religious Education. However, as a result of working through them, individuals with PMLD may gain enhanced capacity to join in with collective worship or festival, visit pilgrimage sites or holy buildings, or join their families in enjoying rites of passage ceremonies and celebrations. With learners with PMLD that I have taught, outstanding RE practice is around connecting various aspects of development; the cognitive, physical, communicative, spiritual, moral, social and cultural. Although we do not teach or assess Religious Education discreetly at Swiss Cottage therefore, I maintain that our provision for the subject is ‘Outstanding’ because, through our developmental curriculum, we fulfil the core aims and purposes of RE in ways that are relative to this population of pupils. Although this is contextually very different to teaching in a



mainstream secondary setting, the deep reflection which working with pupils with PMLD has inspired, has given me a broader perspective on education which will be of value if I ever find myself returning to those A-Level and GCSE groups, or classes of 30 Year 8 pupils.

*Tracy Edwards is Associate Director of Swiss Cottage Teaching School Alliance, based at Swiss Cottage, Development and Research Centre; an all-age special school in North London, accommodating 240 learners with a range of complex needs. Tracy leads school-to-school support for Religious Education in Camden, is an Assessor for the Religious Education Quality Mark, and sits on the DfE Expert Subject Advisory Group on Cultural Education. She is currently leading an initiative known as 'Making SMSCD Special' in partnership with Culham St. Gabriel's Trust. To get involved in 'Making SMSCD Special' connect with Tracy on Twitter @TracyEd1*

## Lancashire SACRE Case Studies and examples of practice

Case studies for special educational needs in religious education from Lancashire school teachers

### A. Jewish celebrations

**The first case study is by June Walker from the Coppice School.**

My pupils experienced a party and celebration linked to the Jewish celebrations of Yom Kippur and Hanukkah. After looking at photos of different events our pupils had a celebratory engagement! Previously, pupils had been to a wedding, a prom and a birthday party, so I wanted to link their awareness of these celebrations. One had also celebrated Eid Al Fitr. Through celebrating together, the RE aims of this work were met: to help pupils understand that worship brings people together and that there are common elements to any celebration. The pupils learned about the ways communities gather at special times.

Pupils responded well to the challenges of this learning. A selection of party items, balloons, banners and poppers were collected and each pupil chose an item from the box that they thought another would like as a gift. Able students planned to do the party shopping, getting together a list of food and then they held the party for all pupils.

I evaluated that if I was to do this work again, I would start with the party and then have all the items out so the pupils could experience the initial input more fully. The activity enabled pupils access to the shared human experience of celebrating aligned to the 'Field of Enquiry'. There were many opportunities for sensory exploration and all the pupils came to the work with some pre-experience of their own which could be built onto and linked into.

This was a group of sensory learners and more able developing learners and because it was a joint activity it was fully inclusive for all pupils. I thought about each pupil carefully and considered what gift they should be given. Everybody was involved in both giving and receiving.

### B. Visiting a place of worship

**This case study is by Emily Partiso at the Estuary Chaucer Primary School in Fleetwood.**

This work involved a visit to a local place of worship to observe what the church looks like. This visit / walk came about following a conversation. A pupil asked: what does the church look like? No one could answer, and I realised that none of them could identify a place of worship.

Consequently, I arranged for the pupils to visit the local Christian Church and met with Father John in the church to ask questions about what they could see. The RE aims of the work were to enable pupils to have an opportunity to talk about their own

experience of a religious place and find out about what identifies a particular religion, in this case Christianity. I also wanted them to understand and name some features and artefacts that are seen inside a church. Pupils became immersed in their learning, fascinated by the artefacts of Christianity and absorbed in this new environment. Recording was done through observation and shared with parents and carers who were very supportive of the trip. This ensured that pupils were given opportunities through their senses to hear, to see, and to touch the artefacts and objects of Christian worship.

I evaluated that the next time a church was visited I would extend the learning experience by providing a contrast with another place of worship from a different religion. I felt that this was good RE because it gave pupils a shared experience and enabled them to showcase the school at the heart of the community and the church in the community as well.

This group of pupils mostly benefit from experiential, enjoyable, first-hand learning opportunities. The visit took them closer to having a bond or a link with the local church and provided the opportunity to build a good relationship with the local parish and some Christian people in the area. When undertaking a case study like this, I advise to firstly invite internal visitors to school so that external experiences reinforce the learning already undertaken in the classroom.

### **C. Hindu gods and goddesses: a focus on Ganesha**

In this third case study the teacher wanted pupils with a mixed range of special needs to understand something about what Hindus believe. The focus was on one of the Hindu gods, Ganesha, and looked at some core beliefs and images.

The aims of the work were to enable pupils to recall one Hindu belief and provide an opportunity to engage with material linking to the worship of Ganesha. Pupils saw paintings and murtis (images) of Ganesha and learned some new vocabulary associated with the images. Activities were set up so that pupils could listen to Hindu traditional music as they were drawing or colouring a picture of Ganesha.

From the wide range of abilities and needs amongst the pupils, this provided for strong engagement and also developed fine motor skills with a paint brush. The higher ability pupils were able to write about one belief and draw a picture of Ganesh whilst the sensory learners engaged with the traditional music and took part in opportunities to meditate.

The teacher recorded the outcomes in pupils' learning plans and extended the work by giving pupils the opportunity to access more sensory elements thereby creating a more memorable experience.

The teacher was pleased that all the pupils 'I can...' statements were met: they were all engaged and took part at their own level and the work was easy to adapt, meeting a range of needs.

Most of the pupils involved were sensory learners who require a semi-formal curriculum working well below national curriculum levels. Others in the group were just meeting the Year 1 RE outcome statements. The teacher advises that a lesson like this requires a space for different learners in one room. The paint and materials provided worked well

to supplement the writing opportunities. A range of stimuli was provided. For example, a range of images of Ganesha printed in colour and at large scale, a selection of artefacts and a video of Hindus involved in Ganesha worship.

#### **D. Muslim artefacts and nasheeds**

This case study is from a special needs setting in Skelmersdale for 11 to 19 year old students. The teacher wanted to create an immersive experience in the classroom that was similar to a visit to a mosque and included an experience of Muslim prayer. Attention was given to what the students would wear, the food they might taste, the cooking they might be involved in at a Muslim festival and the sounds of the mosque. This included the sounds of Muslim nasheeds (Quranic recitation) that they might hear.

These learners are working within the engagement model and are at a level where they need to explore, to realise and sometimes to anticipate what's going on in their learning. Sensitive decisions were made in light of the students' physical and sensory needs in relation to the music played and the atmosphere created in the classroom.

The teacher was pleased with the ways in which the learners engaged their various senses. A range of communication and physical activity outcomes were recorded. Students engaged fully with the sensory stimuli and this opened up their connection to Islamic religious practice. The lesson was especially engaging for those with more complex and non-verbal special needs.

The teacher reflected that if she did this again, she would like to extend the range of artefacts that were available. One implication of this kind of work is that schools do need to invest in resources and artefacts that support interactive, multi-sensory learning across a range of different religions.

#### **E. Holocaust Memorial Day**

**This case study comes from Claire Lynch of Mill Green Special Needs School.**

Pupils entered a national competition related to the Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), with events based in London. The purpose was to enable children to reflect on the isolation and discrimination which people from Jewish backgrounds suffered for believing something 'different'.

I wanted pupils to understand, at their own levels, something fresh about cultural diversity and provide an opportunity for pupils to become engaged in a whole school art project. Their outcome was chosen to be one of the 50 winning entries and was displayed in London for the memorial event and for the national museums tour of England. The aims of the work included promoting attitudes of tolerance, respect and acceptance of others and posed the question: how would you make the modern world a better place? Pupil's artwork was entitled 'the flames of hope'.

Older classes were asked to share an idea or quote that they felt would make the world a better place, no matter the difference of belief, race, skin colour or religion. Staff were

also included: these ideas were written onto card and cut into the shapes of flames in colours of red, yellow and orange. The work was collated by the Year 14 class, who put them altogether adding tissue paper in a three-dimensional effect to create the shape of a much larger flame, burning with examples of things that would make the world a better place.

The flames included: more hugs, listening, kindness, courage, paying attention to each other. Such thoughtful and thought provoking ideas! The work connected the ideas of many of the school's 14 to 19 year olds who have various needs, SLD, MLD, PMLD, visual needs and more. Some classes made their own versions of the flames of hope to display alongside the piece that went to HMD, making close direct links to the RE content of the subject.

I evaluated that with more time I would have made this into a longer piece of artwork, including contributions from all classes. I also plans to create a display which can act as a focal point for reflection in the school hall. I felt that this was good religious education because pupils built on a growing understanding of Jewish identity in ways that gave them opportunities for collaboration. By appreciating the ways in which hardships and strength were shown in Judaism, they learned about increasing their awareness of cultural diversity and noticing some consequences that come from a lack of tolerance or acceptance.

The 14-19 year olds have a wide range of needs: PMLD, SLD, ASD, MLD. They took the opportunity to collaborate and create together and this contributed both to their sense of community and to their understanding of diversity: they built a simple awareness of the religion of the Jewish people, which none of them belong to.

If you want to try this out then I recommend gathering a good range of art supplies including card, tissue paper, firm and solid bases to build the 3D artwork and lots of glue, glitter and paint. Holocaust Memorial Day and the remembrances that go with it gave us a real world application for this work so the pupils could explore at their own levels questions like: what is a religion? What is a community? What is diversity? What do we mean by culture?

Churchill said those who forget history are damned to repeat it. We wanted our children to find this RE memorable.

## **F. The Five Pillars of Islam**

### **This case study comes from Claire Body at Morecambe Road School**

This example involved the careful use of drama and enactment in relation to Muslim practises. The aim was for pupils to understand the importance of the five pillars of Islam and gain a better understanding of how these rituals express Muslim commitment to God.

Although new to teaching RE, I was keen for pupils to learn from mixed and rich resources: from photographs and video clips as well as from Muslims in school who may

be willing to share their own experience and show others what their religious practise involves and what it means to them.

The goal was to make sure that this work was interactive, practical and fun so that pupils' engagement with Islamic ritual in the five pillars would be memorable. Using religious artefacts as 'props' proved to be a powerful way to make sure that pupils learnt more and remembered more.

Examples of artefacts that can be used are: different kinds of prayer mats, bookstands for the Qur'an, strings of 99 prayer beads to count the beautiful names of Allah, a compass to show the way to Makkah, 5 clocks to show the daily prayer times and how they change.

## **G. Sikhs, dressing for devotion and the Amrit ceremony**

**This case study comes from Amber Gannon at Morecambe Road School.**

As part of a topic in RE linked to Sikh Dharam pupils were learning about the Amrit ceremony, the gurus of the Sikhs within the big theme of 'believing and belonging'. Pupils began by looking at the Five Ks worn by Amritdhari Sikhs. A video clip of the ceremony of becoming an Amritdhari Sikh was shared and pupils discussed the signs of belonging and beliefs.

The lesson progressed to allow pupils to consider what was important in life and they were invited to choose three personal things that mattered very much to them. In this work pupils were exploring a new religion and the aim was for them to understand what is important to Sikhs. Handling and finding out about religious artefacts gave rise to conversations where pupils could compare their own experiences to those of Sikhs, describing who or what is important in the Sikh tradition and community and to us.

Our pupils really enjoyed handling the different artefacts and some of them were happy to try some of the objects on for themselves - this, of course, was done with sensitivity to Sikh community concerns but developed pupils' understanding of the question: what really matters? What is most important? Many pupils could recall the names of the five Ks from lesson to lesson which was one of our learning objectives.

The personal examples they chose to demonstrate what mattered most to them and what was meaningful were individual and fantastic: the pupils' engagement and willingness to share was the best religious educational feature of this lesson. This group of 11 Year 5-6 pupils are all working below age-related expectations and those pupils assessed to have ASD and MLD blew me away with what they shared about what matters most to them.

The school are fortunate to have a good quality resource box of Sikh artefacts for this topic. I also used laminated cards of images and words as a way to build pupils key vocabulary. Many pupils struggle to write so it helped very much to record their achievement with photographs and I wrote notes of what they had to say. Examples of work related to these four lessons about the Sikhs show the depth and creativity of the pupils thinking.

## **H. Sensory RE: Objects and Stories**

### **This case study is from Janet Hilton at Foxwood School.**

When I took over religious education there were a series of worship boxes one for each class. I liked this idea and thought it would work well if an important story or two in each religion was connected to the theme of worship and the contents of the boxes.

One box was made per class per half term, so the stories were visited at least three times over the course of a week to enable the pupils to learn the stories. My RE aims - separate from school worship and assembly - were about seeking to make sure that our pupils could hear and engage with an important story from each of our focus religions.

I wanted them to make engaged responses using multi-sensory props and as the boxes were visited and re-used three times over the course of a week, this gave the children ample opportunities to develop engagement with the stories. Pupils became used to the experience of using the story box and the props inside and a Buddhist singing bowl was used to signify the start of our special story time. Pupils showed anticipation and excitement.

This experience led me to work on a range of sensory stories adding to each box so that there were different expectations and challenges well matched to pupils' individual needs and next steps. This proved to be a very good example of wonder and awe, and the pupils began to make comparisons between important stories and themes from different religions.

Setting aside time for the stories, gave the pupils and staff a shared experience of togetherness. This usually took place at the end of a busy day: we would lower the lights, play music and listen calmly, sharing resources, passing things round, building each pupil's individual responses. My group are a PMLD class: I felt that the gift to them (which RE gave here) was a peaceful, shared experience in which everybody's response was encouraged and valued.

The preparation of the boxes was a time consuming thing and needed a bit of a budget to find some quality multi-sensory resources but now that they are in place, they are a great resource.

- Part of this work was inspired by the free online resource from Pete Wells which is called 'Sensory RE stories for pupils with PMLD'.

## **I. Green Islam**

### **This case study comes from Hayley Hobson at Pendleview Primary School.**

I wanted my pupils to learn about the Islamic faith and particularly to explore beliefs to do with taking care of the world. My class explored cleaning up the ocean through sensory trays of animals trapped in recyclable materials and plastics. They had a blue

spaghetti tray (blue for the sea, of course), blue rice and a blue cornflower tray so that they were tactile materials for all abilities.

Pupils and staff brought rubbish from home and small world animals which we hid or trapped in the blue food which stood for the seas. The animals were freed one by one, cleaned up and the rubbish was sorted into piles and used it to make mixed media collages. I talked to my pupils about the Muslim belief that if Allah made the world, and made us Kalifah, carers, for the world then we should all care for the planet. That was the key RE learning objective.

The pupils responded very well to the sensory play elements of this and enjoyed feeling for the sea life and finding it and freeing the creatures. With support, a few pupils organised the rubbish, did the recycling and all added one or two pieces to their collages: there was a lot of engagement and progress for their levels of need.

I think that the work could be further improved if I used a persona doll from the Muslim faith and shared some Muslim artefacts connected to Allah, perhaps in a feely bag, with the children. For me, this was good religious education because it supported pupils in developing their fine motor, mark making and tactile skills alongside a link to a religious idea about caring for the world.

I evaluated that we had enabled all pupils to work at their own appropriate levels. The needs of the learning group were complex, some children have PMLD or ASD and they work on routes for learning, or perhaps at what we used to call levels P2 to P4 in the engagement model and just beyond. The work supported their understanding of caring for the world and for all living things. Of course, there are some challenges as it's very sensory work and if you want to adopt it you'd need to purchase the spaghetti and the corn flour and the rice and some blue food colouring. Small world sea animals can of course be found in most schools and rubbish to recycle is found everywhere.

I think it's good to reinforce this kind of experiential work with a faith persona doll or a 'what's in the bag' approach to artefacts that link our RE learning at a single keyword level.

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Thanks to the teachers who contributed to this interesting collection of RE good practice in special settings.

Lat Blaylock, 10 22