



# Key Stage 3 National Strategy

Guidance

Curriculum and  
Standards

## Literacy in religious education

*For school-based use or self-study*

Heads of  
religious education  
Teachers of  
religious education

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## **General introduction to the Literacy in series**

The aim of the subject-specific material in the *Literacy in series* is to exemplify how aspects of the *Literacy across the curriculum* training file relate to individual subjects.

Where appropriate, the relevant section from the *Literacy across the curriculum* training file is indicated so that you can refer to it as and when you wish.

### **Key principles**

- To develop consistent approaches to teaching and learning in literacy across departments, and to build increased awareness of the skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils could be expected to bring to lessons
- To use speaking and listening to develop subject learning
- To develop active reading strategies to increase pupils' ability to read for a purpose and engage with text, and to realise the learning to be gained from it
- To demonstrate the sequence for writing and modelling writing for a key text type within the subject; seeing how it is done helps pupils to achieve it for themselves more quickly
- To make suggestions for the learning of subject-specific vocabulary

### **English Framework objectives**

The objectives from the *Framework for teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9* which apply across the curriculum appear in an appendix: most are the key objectives (in bold) but others have been added for clarity or exemplification. This will help you to set literacy curricular targets and ensure common approaches through the objectives.

### **Developments in cross-curricular literacy**

As expertise grows, schools may wish to decide which department teaches a particular aspect of literacy, such as explanations in non-fiction writing, and how other subject areas can support and develop pupils' learning by reinforcing it and applying it to their subject as appropriate. This will save time and ensure that pupils have a consistent approach to specific aspects of literacy.

As expertise develops in, for example, active reading strategies or managing group talk, and pupils know the expectations across the curriculum, their confidence will grow and their ability to take responsibility for their learning will also develop. This, again, will save time for teachers as they will not have to keep teaching the skills.

### **Making use of the Literacy in materials**

Each subject is available on its own CD. On the disc you will find both the text (a combination of information, guidance, case study materials, mini tasks and ideas for practical application in classrooms) and the video clip(s) that accompany it. Where a short task has been suggested, you are invited to check your responses against those of other teachers in the examples provided.

The materials can be used by an individual teacher to reflect on current practice and identify fresh approaches. However, we recommend collaborative use by a department team, so that the activities and discussion topics can be used to promote joint review and collective action. In this way, approaches can be trialled and discussed, and greater consistency of practice ensured.

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**Aims**

- *to consider ways in which explicit literacy teaching can support the raising of attainment in RE*
- *to consider appropriate teaching strategies to support learning in RE*

It is important to relate all the advice given to the appropriate agreed syllabus (for community- and voluntary-controlled schools) and the relevant documentation identified by governors in voluntary-aided schools.

### **1.1 Benefits for RE departments of ensuring that literacy skills are taught**

*Successful pupils in RE need to be able to:*

- *use specific vocabulary and styles of expression*
- *read specific styles of text, some unique to the subject*
- *develop and express an argument persuasively and effectively*
- *develop original thinking and be able to justify their ideas*
- *develop and consolidate skills that lead towards successful examination results.*

The benefits for RE departments of ensuring literacy skills are taught are as follows:

- Teaching and using strategies which encourage pupils to engage actively with text encourages greater understanding.
- Better quality outcomes can be expected when there is an explicit focus on the characteristics of a style of writing; when writing has been modelled and where consideration has been given to word, sentence and text level.
- Improving literacy and learning can have an impact on pupils' self-esteem, motivation and enjoyment of the subject.
- A focus on these issues at Key Stage 3 will have a positive impact on examination results in later key stages.

These ideas will be developed through the next three sections.

#### **Activity 1**

Read this typical reaction when teachers are invited to consider literacy in their subject. It is followed by a reply which justifies the inclusion of literacy teaching.

*A teacher stated: 'I've got all this content in religious education to cover. Why should I do this? I haven't time for it.'*

*A colleague's reply included the following points.*

- *Content is defined in the section of the agreed syllabus entitled 'Breadth of Study'. This is preceded by a section on the knowledge, skills and understanding that have to be taught. An examination of these pages will reveal that students have to be taught to:*
  - *interpret and explain*
  - *account for diversity*
  - *show the relationship between different elements*
  - *define*
  - *investigate and evaluate*
  - *give reasoned responses.*
- *The skills to be developed (see page 16 of the agreed syllabus) include analysis, evaluation, reasoning, synthesis and communication. To think in terms of content at the expense of skills is to distort RE. Literacy supports learning and the development of these skills in RE.*
- *There is a clear emphasis on standards in RE with the adoption in the agreed syllabus of the eight-level scale. Improved literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) will help pupils reach their potential and deal with the higher-order questions. Reasoned argument needs the gathering of relevant information and the ability to express that information in an appropriate form. These skills have to be taught and RE teachers have a responsibility to contribute to this whole-school concern.*
- *The National Curriculum and the Key Stage 3 Strategy encourages teachers to consider, amongst other things:*
  - *the purpose of a written task*
  - *a sense of the audience for whom it is written*
  - *the conventions that create a more powerful piece of writing.*

*The colleague added: 'Having become familiar with the principles and practices of the English strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, I am convinced that attention to these issues in RE will contribute to the raising of standards in our subject. We must pay attention to ideas that help us to support students in getting better at religious education. A consideration of literacy issues at text level, sentence level and word level will enable students to think more logically, express themselves more effectively and result in the use of more interesting and effective vocabulary, and better crafted written work.'*

(continued)

*'When, for example, in RE, students are required to use persuasive writing, we need to identify the appropriate structure and conventions, consider the best connectives to make it a more cohesive piece of writing [and] look for vocabulary that makes it convey its message with precision and in ways which engage the reader. It is not just a case of students having the knowledge, but also the understanding and the ability to evaluate. This needs to be taught. The English strand has something useful to say about this and we can apply it to our subject. And incidentally, if this happens in Key Stage 3, what will be the impact on Key Stage 4?*

*'I've found that encouraging pupils to engage with text and, say, turn it into another text or re-order it, actually helps them to understand and remember it. I gave them a comparison sheet for two creation stories the other day and asked them to record the similarities and differences on it. Not only did they get the ideas, but I could assess their work easily too.*

*'Speaking and listening is at the heart of all learning. I used to ask them to discuss or talk about something without really planning, or deciding how they should talk or how I would organise them. I've got much better responses now I plan for talk in groups and even show the groups how to do it before they start.*

*'We cannot afford not to accommodate literacy issues – they need to be incorporated into our planning and teaching in religious education.'*

Can you think of some good reasons why literacy is important in RE?

Here are the ideas from some other teachers.

- The skills and understanding referred to in the agreed syllabus all depend on having good literacy skills.
- Improved literacy skills will help pupils raise their attainment, not least because they will be able to express their knowledge and understanding clearly.
- The National Curriculum demands the teaching of literacy skills (see text in box below). Teaching about text-types at text, sentence and word level results in better quality written responses.
- Using active reading strategies encourages pupils to engage with text to develop their understanding.
- Appropriately chosen speaking and listening activities encourage pupils to explore, hypothesise, clarify and refine their thinking so they can present their ideas more clearly.

## **Use of language across the curriculum**

1 *In all subjects, pupils should be taught to express themselves correctly and appropriately and to read accurately and with understanding. Since standard English, spoken and written, is the predominant language in which knowledge and skills are taught and learned, pupils should be taught to recognise and use standard English.*

### **Writing**

2 *In writing, pupils should be taught to use correct spelling and punctuation and follow grammatical conventions. They should also be taught to organise their writing in logical and coherent forms.*

### **Speaking**

3 *In speaking, pupils should be taught to use language precisely and cogently.*

### **Listening**

4 *Pupils should be taught to listen to others, and to respond and build on their ideas and views constructively.*

### **Reading**

5 *In reading, pupils should be taught strategies to help them to: read with understanding; locate and use information; follow a process or argument and summarise and synthesise and adapt what they learn from their reading.*

6 *Pupils should be taught the technical and specialist vocabulary of subjects and how to use and spell these words. They should also be taught to use the patterns of language vital to understanding and expression in different subjects. These include the construction of sentences, paragraphs and texts that are often used in a subject (for example, language to express causality, chronology, logic, exploration, hypothesis, comparison, and how to ask questions and develop arguments).*

## **1.2 The way language is used in RE**

*What is distinctive about:*

- *the language used in texts in RE?*
- *the way pupils need to use language to engage with the ideas presented in the subject?*

- The way language is used in RE.
  - In religion, language is frequently highly symbolic as it attempts to describe the sacred.
  - It expresses beliefs, values and deeply held convictions.

- It can be interpreted in a variety of ways, according to the beliefs of the person using it.
- Some adherents of faith communities interpret language literally, while others look beneath the surface.
- RE is concerned with the way in which believers interpret language; for example, a narrative is rarely just a story – it is often a means of expressing a universal truth.
- The cultural context is important in interpreting events, responses, attitudes and dress codes appropriately.
- The inadequacy of human language is a factor for a subject which deals with ultimate mystery. Analogy, metaphor and simile are therefore important.
- Much religious writing depends on its incantatory qualities and rhythms to create an emotional response, for example creeds and prayers.
- The way pupils need to use language is as follows. They need to:
  - use forms of language that are appropriate and reflect and develop respect for the beliefs and values of others, including anti-racist, non-stereotypical forms
  - use abstract nouns such as faith or love specifically and appropriately
  - develop a discursive style of writing which is impersonal, so that they can compare, understand and use technical terminology and forms of language distinctive to Christianity and the other principal religions of Britain.

The sections on speaking and listening, reading and writing that follow, highlight patterns of language used in RE and the need to focus on these in order to develop pupils' understanding.

### **1.3 Conclusion: Skills in RE**

A religious education demands a wide range of skills so that pupils come to appreciate and understand the nature of religion.

#### **Activity 2**

Look at the following table and identify which aspects of literacy pupils need to be taught in order to develop the RE skills identified in the central column. To support the process, some points have already been inserted.



<b>Skills in RE</b>		
<b>Components</b>	<b>What pupils need to be able to do</b>	<b>What aspects of literacy need to be taught to enable pupils to develop these skills</b>
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Think around issues</li> <li>■ Be aware, be alert</li> <li>■ Contemplate</li> <li>■ Explore feelings</li> <li>■ Use imagination to visualise things experienced</li> <li>■ Use imagination to explore things that are beyond experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Relevant vocabulary for thinking: phrases such as: What if ... ? If ... then ... ; I wonder whether ... ?; That seems to mean ... ; Do you think that ... ?</li> <li>■ Developing listening skills</li> <li>■ Using talk as a tool for thinking</li> <li>■ Using inference in reading</li> </ul>
Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ask appropriate questions</li> <li>■ Search for and find answers</li> <li>■ Gather evidence about religions from many different sources</li> <li>■ Organise that evidence</li> </ul>	
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Put themselves in another person's shoes</li> </ul>	
Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Suggest and appreciate a range of meanings for words, stories, symbols and actions in religions</li> <li>■ Make inferences and deductions</li> </ul>	
Analysis and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Weigh up evidence</li> <li>■ Consider the authenticity of evidence (validation)</li> <li>■ Explain strengths and weaknesses of an argument</li> <li>■ Consider alternatives</li> <li>■ Make an informed choice and explain the implications of that choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recognising bias and objectivity, distinguishing facts from hypothesis, theories or opinions</li> <li>■ Evaluating the reliability and validity of information</li> <li>■ Justifying a point of view</li> </ul>

(continued)

Components	What pupils need to be able to do	What aspects of literacy need to be taught to enable pupils to develop these skills
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support ideas with sound reasons and evidence</li> <li>■ Organise a logical argument</li> <li>■ Recognise paradox and understand its place in religious argument</li> <li>■ Deduce</li> </ul>	
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify values and ideas shared by people of different faith communities</li> <li>■ Link distinctive ideas to create an understandable, coherent picture of the religions of the world</li> <li>■ Draw conclusions</li> </ul>	
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Express themselves clearly</li> <li>■ Express ideas, information, thoughts, feelings, conclusions</li> <li>■ Use technical terms</li> <li>■ Listen to others</li> </ul>	

Here are some suggestions from other teachers.

<b>Skills in RE – completed</b>		
Components	What pupils need to be able to do	What aspects of literacy need to be taught to enable pupils to develop these skills
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Think around issues</li> <li>■ Be aware, be alert</li> <li>■ Contemplate</li> <li>■ Explore feelings</li> <li>■ Use imagination to visualise things experienced</li> <li>■ Use imagination to explore things that are beyond experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Relevant vocabulary for thinking: phrases such as: What if ...?; If ... then ...; I wonder whether ...?; That seems to mean ...; Do you think that ...?</li> <li>■ Developing listening skills</li> <li>■ Using talk as a tool for thinking</li> <li>■ Using inference in reading</li> </ul>

(continued)

Components	What pupils need to be able to do	What aspects of literacy need to be taught to enable pupils to develop these skills
Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ask appropriate questions</li> <li>■ Search for and find answers</li> <li>■ Gather evidence about religions from many different sources</li> <li>■ Organise that evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Understanding the impact of different kinds of questioning, e.g. open and closed</i></li> <li>■ <i>Developing research skills, e.g. using KWL* and QUADS** charts</i></li> <li>■ <i>Evaluating the usefulness/reliability of sources</i></li> <li>■ <i>Locating information (in books and on the Internet)</i></li> <li>■ <i>Note taking (using a range of formats for different purposes)</i></li> <li>■ <i>Synthesising information from a range of sources</i></li> <li>■ <i>Grouping ideas into paragraphs introduced by topic sentences</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using appropriate connectives</i></li> </ul>
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Put themselves in another person's shoes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Using drama techniques, e.g. exploring situations through role-play</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using active reading strategies</i></li> </ul>
Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Suggest and appreciate a range of meanings for words, stories, symbols and actions in religions</li> <li>■ Make inferences and deductions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Exploring how to engage with texts in different ways (visualising, relating to own experiences, annotating, etc.)</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using inferential and deductive skills</i></li> </ul>
Analysis and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Weigh up evidence</li> <li>■ Consider the authenticity of evidence (validation)</li> <li>■ Explain the strengths and weaknesses of an argument</li> <li>■ Consider alternatives</li> <li>■ Make an informed choice and explain the implications of that choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Recognising bias and objectivity; distinguishing facts from hypotheses, theories or opinions</i></li> <li>■ <i>Evaluating the reliability and validity of information</i></li> <li>■ <i>Justifying a point of view</i></li> </ul>

(continued)

Components	What pupils need to be able to do	What aspects of literacy need to be taught to enable pupils to develop these skills
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support ideas with sound reasons and evidence</li> <li>■ Organise a logical argument</li> <li>■ Recognise paradox and understand its place in religious argument</li> <li>■ Deduce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Constructing complex sentences to link one idea with another</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using connectives which link ideas across a text</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using reading strategies to support deduction</i></li> <li>■ <i>Using appropriate texts</i></li> </ul>
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify values and ideas shared by people of different faith communities</li> <li>■ Link distinctive ideas to create an understandable, coherent picture of the religions of the world</li> <li>■ Draw conclusions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Integrating information from a range of sources into a coherent form</i></li> <li>■ <i>Recognising the conventions of the text-types used in RE, e.g. text structure; and connectives used to link ideas</i></li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Express themselves clearly</li> <li>■ Express ideas, information, thoughts, feelings, conclusions</li> <li>■ Use technical terms</li> <li>■ Listen to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Using vocabulary which relates to key concepts in RE</i></li> <li>■ <i>Listening for specific purposes and being able to recall or summarise key points, in order to raise questions or challenge ideas</i></li> <li>■ <i>Organising information clearly and appropriately, depending on purpose and audience (orally, in writing, in visual/chart form)</i></li> </ul>
<p>*KWL = three-column grid entitled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do I already know about this topic?</li> <li>- What do I want to know about this topic?</li> <li>- What have I learned about this topic?</li> </ul>		<p>** QUADS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questions</li> <li>- Answers</li> <li>- Details</li> <li>- Source</li> </ul>

A religious education demands a wide range of skills so that pupils come to appreciate and understand the nature of religion. In fact, because of its content, it is often pre-eminent in developing thinking based on abstract concepts such as suffering, or good and evil, and in asking fundamental questions about human existence.