

REC Suggested Code of Conduct and Practice for Teachers of RE

Demonstrating respect for diversity and promoting equality: religious and non-religious belief in schools

Teachers are influential people and it is important that this influence is exercised in a professional and responsible manner, particularly in relation to religious and non-religious beliefs.

All teachers operate within the framework of human rights legislation. The following principles are offered for teachers to support them particularly when working with religious and non-religious beliefs.

Principles

Exemplifications

1. Respect persons. One hallmark of a professional teacher is sensitivity to pupils. Irrespective of their religious or non-religious beliefs, every pupil should be treated equally out of respect for their dignity as a human being.

Learning is planned in a way that allows pupils to express opinions in confidence e.g. collecting anonymous comments on post it notes which are then shared by the class

Before involving any pupil from a particular religious or non-religious background as a 'living resource' teachers consult with them, and ideally their family, to make sure they are comfortable to take on this role, to agree how their contribution will help learning and to check that they are knowledgeable enough to do this successfully

Teachers always allow pupils to withdraw from answering a question and/or participating in an activity if they feel compromised, being careful also not thereby to draw attention to such pupils

2. Value reason-giving. Schools are places of critical engagement and respectful, vigorous debate where no belief is above the requirement of reason-giving. Pupils should be encouraged to think

The teacher's careful use of the 8 level scale in planning lessons allows pupils to employ skills of evaluation and encourages them to be

<p>skilfully about, and to take responsibility for, the beliefs that shape their behaviour and attitudes so that they continue in or change their own beliefs through lifelong critical reflection.</p>	<p><i>reflective learners.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers' planning creates opportunities which allow pupils to challenge and reflect through the use of thinking skills activities such as 'Mysteries' and 'Community of enquiry'</i></p>
<p>3. Practise reciprocity. The Golden Rule, "treat others as you would like to be treated", is a principle which is widely shared across human communities. When handling beliefs in school, teachers should treat other religious and non-religious beliefs as they would like their own beliefs to be treated in the same circumstances.</p>	<p><i>Teachers include the Golden Rule as one of the ground rules for RE lessons negotiated at the start of each year with every class</i></p>
<p>4. Accept contestability and value self-awareness. Beliefs are always contestable; the teacher should recognise that they may be controversial and should frame their language accordingly. This entails a willingness to be self-aware, particularly in relation to the way in which the teacher's own beliefs impact on his or her approach to teaching and learning.</p>	<p><i>The word 'we' is used with caution by teachers eg 'Because we believe in God....' is never appropriate as teachers cannot assume belief, even in a faith school context.</i></p>
<p>5. Be open. Appropriate openness about what a teacher believes can be a professional asset. This means being prepared to answer questions about and talk about his or her own beliefs when that is appropriate (an important professional judgment) in a way that enables pupils to develop in their own learning.</p>	<p><i>Before sharing their response or belief with students teachers routinely ask themselves, 'Will this help the learning?' They also consider prefacing their thoughts with 'My comments/beliefs are no more important than those of anyone else in this room/group', and are receptive to pupils' critical evaluations of their responses</i></p>
<p>6. Promote fair and accurate representation. Where people of diverse beliefs meet, there is opportunity for both conflict and co-operation. To promote cooperation, teachers should treat diversity as an opportunity to work with others in the shared task of achieving</p>	<p><i>Teachers' planning allows their students to work with members of different groups within the same religion or non-religious belief eg ask the same questions to Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Teachers consider how they present religious or non-religious beliefs, ensuring they avoid</i></p>

excellence in teaching and learning. Teachers should strive for fair and accurate representation of religious and non-religious beliefs by drawing on sound scholarship and by including a range of authentic voices.	<i>the phrase 'Hindus believe...' or 'Jewish people worship by..' preferring 'Some ...' or 'Many ...'.</i>
7. Demonstrate vulnerability. In a culture where open debate and hard questions are encouraged, teachers will often find there is much that they do not know. Professionalism in these circumstances means being open to the discussion moving into challenging territory and being willing to learn.	<p><i>It may be appropriate for teachers to adopt the role of 'learner' alongside pupils thus modelling that to be adult means to accept that you don't always have all the answers. The words 'I don't know' can be powerful in the RE classroom especially if they are followed by the questions 'Is there an answer?' and if so, 'How could we find out?'</i></p> <p><i>In many case, teachers should be, in the words of Philosophy for Children, 'the guide on the side' rather than 'the sage on the stage'.</i></p>
8. Promote balance. The search for truth is central to education. When dealing with a controversial issue, you should encourage consideration of a balanced range of views, even if you find this uncomfortable on occasion.	<i>Teachers provide pupils with cards with a wide range of comments and views and ask them to rank order them, justifying their own ideas to others in the group.</i>

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