

Supporting Primary Religious Education: Planning, Observation and Target Setting for Beginning Teachers

This document has been produced by a group focusing on supporting Primary Initial Teacher Education convened by Culham St Gabriels. The group is made up of Helen Sheehan from Sheffield Hallam University , Rhiannon Love from the University of Winchester, Imran Mogra from Birmingham City University, Ruth Flanagan from the University of Exeter, Lizzie Yeomans from Liverpool John Moores and Fiona Moss.

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Introduction

DfE requirements state that all trainee teachers should receive training to develop knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach, relevant to their phase. To help with this there is an expectation that trainees will receive supportive feedback on subject and phase specific approaches (DfE, 2025).

The Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) also emphasises the importance of subject specific training for both trainee and early career teachers. It requires that beginning teachers (those following an initial teacher education (ITE) course and ECTs) should learn how to identify essential knowledge, concepts and skills within a subject and ensure that pupils have an opportunity to learn and master these components, focussing their thinking on key ideas within the subject (DfE, 2024).

Mentors have a key role to play supporting beginning teachers to build their knowledge and understanding and it is recognised that they are entitled to support to develop the knowledge and skills they need to undertake this role (DfE, 2025). To assist in this, the following prompts are intended to help mentors in their discussions with beginning teachers. It is hoped that they will:

- Allow mentors to have supportive conversations with beginning teachers who are planning lessons with an RE focus,
- Offer suggestions for mentors as they observe RE lessons so that observation feedback and reflective conversations focus on subject content and RE pedagogy, and
- Pose questions to help mentors as they guide trainees to write effective targets to ensure that they develop their knowledge and skills in relation to the substantive knowledge and the pedagogical approaches that might be used to teach RE.

These prompts are offered to mentors and ITE tutors, not as a constraining tool or as a checklist, but in the hope that they support effective, focussed discussion to support the teaching of RE in primary classrooms.

References:

DfE. (2024). *Initial teacher training and early career framework*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework>

DfE. (2025). *Initial teacher training: criteria and supporting advice – 2024-2025*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria>.

Planning Primary RE lessons

Key questions for mentors	Possible prompts for mentors
Is the lesson objective clear about the religious or non-religious worldviews to be studied?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a relevant and purposeful enquiry question that has been used to frame the lesson? • Do you have a clear understanding of why they are learning this and why they are learning it now? • Can pupils link their learning to their own experience?
Does the lesson enable pupils to develop their substantive knowledge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the core knowledge that you will be teaching been identified? Do you know what you want pupils to know and remember at the end of this lesson? • Do you understand how this knowledge links to what they have learnt before and what they will be learning in the future? • Is there anything you don't understand or aren't clear about? How will you address this? • Have you identified key terminology and planned how you will introduce this (and checked how you pronounce it – see the SHAP audio glossary)?
Are pupils given opportunities to understand the diversity of religious and non-religious expression and lived experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you aware of diverse beliefs or practices within the tradition in relation to the focus of the lesson? • Are you using a range of resources (videos, images, artefacts) that allow the pupils to see the diversity within the religion or worldview being studied?
Do pupils have opportunities to explore one or more of the ways of knowing (disciplinary knowledge)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the lesson develop pupils understanding of how people find out about religious and non-religious worldviews? • What method of finding out about religious or non-religious worldviews is used in this lesson? What will this tell pupils? What won't it tell them?
Do pupils have an opportunity to reflect on their learning and how it relates to their own personal worldview?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any potential misconceptions (e.g. stereotypes) that might be held by pupils? Are there opportunities to check and correct these if necessary? • Are there opportunities for pupils to express their own ideas and insights? • Are there opportunities for pupils to articulate their own beliefs and opinions? Can they identify the ways in which others may disagree with them and give reasons for this different view?
Are pupils provided with opportunities to make use of their new knowledge and understanding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there time and opportunity for high quality classroom talk giving pupils an opportunity to demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding? • Are there opportunities to provide pupils with feedback on written or verbal contributions to the lesson?

Observing primary RE lessons

Key questions for mentors	Possible prompts for mentors
Does the lesson have a clear RE focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the lesson have a clear objective with a focus on RE activities (rather than it becoming a literacy or art-based lesson for example)? • Does the teaching make it clear how this lesson links to the pupils' prior learning? • Is it made clear to pupils what the purpose of the lesson is and what they will know, understand and be able to remember by the end of the lesson?
Does the lesson enable pupils to develop substantive knowledge in RE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the new knowledge clearly communicated? • Are key terms introduced and clearly defined? • Can pupils link their new knowledge to prior learning? • Does this lesson help them build their understanding of religions concepts over time?
Does the lesson give pupils opportunities to understand the diversity of religious expression and lived experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the lesson avoid reinforcing stereotypes or presenting religions as monoliths? • Are the pupils introduced to different beliefs or practices within the religion or worldview being explored? • Are words like 'many', 'most' and 'some' used (rather than all) when talking about what people believe?
Do pupils have opportunities to explore the ways of knowing (disciplinary knowledge)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where relevant, is it clear from the lesson which 'way of knowing' is being used to explore religion? • Do the pupils have a chance to learn about the limits of the approach used?
Do pupils have an opportunity to reflect their learning and how it relates to their own personal worldview?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are pupils asked to reflect on and answer questions regarding their own views about what they have been learning and explain why they hold this view? • Are they able to express their own ideas and insights based? • Are they given opportunities to recognise how their view might differ from someone else and explain why this is the case?
Are pupils provided with opportunities to make use of their new knowledge and understanding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the pupils have an opportunity to discuss/debate religious themes and concepts? • Are pupils given activities that allow them to apply their learning in news ways? • Is there an opportunity for pupils to be given feedback on their contributions? • Is teaching adapted to ensure the needs of all pupils are met?

Is the beginning teacher sensitive in the way they handle conversations about religious and non-religious worldviews?

- Are religious and non-religious worldviews talked about with respect and understanding?
- Is sensitivity shown to the different religious and non-religious backgrounds of the pupils?
- Does the beginning teacher create a safe space?
- Does the beginning teacher create a brave space?

Target setting for teaching RE

Mentors should consider	Possible prompts for mentors
What is the next step?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the RE specific content more explicit. • Create opportunities for pupils to develop particular skills or demonstrate empathy. • Focus more on helping pupils recognise that they study RE from their own personal worldview? • Create opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge in... • Create opportunities for pupils to develop understanding in... • Create opportunities needed for pupils to develop key skills. • Develop questioning skills and strategies. • Give pupils more opportunities to develop their understanding and use of key vocabulary. • Provide more opportunities for pupils to explore and understand different views. • Does the beginning teacher need to reflect on how they can adapt/scaffold their teaching?
Why is this important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the target clearly build on the beginning teacher's current knowledge, understanding and skills in religious or non-religious worldviews? • Does the target clearly enable the beginning teacher to develop their substantive knowledge in RE? • Does the target clearly enable the beginning teacher to develop their disciplinary knowledge? • Does the target help provide opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their own worldview (personal knowledge)? E.g. Might they become more aware of the assumptions they make in discussions about religion and worldviews? • Does the target help the beginning teacher specifically address the areas of development? • Does the target help the beginning teacher develop their planning and teaching skills? • Does the target support pupils' progress and achievement? • Is the target justified in relation to the curriculum objective/learning objectives? • Does the target support high quality of teaching RE?
What actions are needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the beginning teacher need to explore additional resources and/or develop new teaching activities? • Does the beginning teacher need to look at the use of resources (artefacts/texts/places) to help them teach about belief and practice or review the way they teach key terminology? • Does the beginning teacher need to create opportunities for pupils to recognise and understand the things that influence their own view of the world (e.g. their family, their prior experiences and their own sense of identity)?

Consider:

- Are the actions clearly defined and achievable within the timeframe/context/sequence?
- Do the actions directly support the beginning teacher in meeting the target (or are they too broad or disconnected)?
- Is it clear who is responsible for each action?