

Professional learning resource:

Assessing progress and achievement in Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools

Introduction

This paper builds on the [Principles and Practice: Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools](#) (RERC) paper. It should be used alongside the national guidance in [This is Our Faith](#), provided by the Scottish Catholic Education Service <http://www.sces.uk.com>.

Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools is distinctive because of its focus on the faith development of children and young people within the context of a faith community. Religious Education is designed to engage learners in an educational process which, showing fidelity to God and the person, will assist them to develop their knowledge and understanding, develop their skills and exemplify and foster the beliefs, values and practices of faith.

The aim of this guidance paper is to highlight how, through planning for learning, teaching and assessment, schools can evidence the aims as outlined in the Principles and Practice: Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools paper and *This Is Our Faith*.

Within Roman Catholic schools, it is recognised that children and young people will be at quite different places in their journey of faith development. The purpose of assessment in religious education is not to measure the progress of that faith journey. Assessment in Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools supports the development of important skills and attributes which enable children and young people to engage in meaningful reflection and a deepening understanding of the Catholic faith and their personal response to God's invitation to relationship. Such skills and attributes, if well developed through religious education, will support the learning of all children and young people in Roman Catholic schools whether they belong to the Catholic faith or not.

Rigorous, reliable and challenging assessment in religious education supports children and young people to reflect on their own personal search for meaning and truth in life. It helps them to understand what it means to be a person of faith in relationship with God and with other people. High quality feedback on their responses supports children and young people to develop skills of critical reflection and personal awareness alongside a deepening knowledge and understanding of Christianity. To benefit learners, assessment in religious education needs to capture evidence of and provide feedback on:

- the extent of children and young people's knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, of other denominations of Christianity and of other world religions in the local and global context

- the quality of children and young people's personal reflections about what it means to live in faith and relationship with God
- the extent which children and young people demonstrate and continue to develop their beliefs and values through positive actions and contributions to their community.

As children and young people progress in religious education they will be able to demonstrate this learning well in a range of contexts.

The purpose of this document is to support professional learning and reflection on assessing progress and achievement in Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools by providing:

- further information on the significant aspects of learning
- an outline of what breadth, challenge and application look like.

It is designed to support quality assurance and moderation activities in planning for progression and approaches to managing assessment.

The significant aspects of learning in Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools

The [Principles and Practice: Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools](#) paper outlines the important and unique features of learning through religious education which should be experienced by children and young people in all Roman Catholic schools in Scotland.

Children and young people in Roman Catholic schools are entitled to learning experiences which support them to feel secure and confident in who they are in relation to self, God and others. Most importantly, they are entitled to be supported in their journey of faith and discovery by adults who engage with them through questioning and sharing conversations which encourage reflection and critical thinking and which lead to personal growth. *This Is Our Faith* further supports effective planning for religious education through ensuring that the experiences and outcomes for Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools are embedded within the core learning for each stage. The guidance also supports effective learning of appropriate aspects of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Further guidance on this approach can be found in the Education Scotland resource [Planning for Learning, Teaching and Assessment in RERC](#).

Successful learning in religious education encompasses knowledge and understanding and skills alongside the development of beliefs, values and practices. The guidance for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools supports assessment by helping to identify significant aspects of learning including:

- a deepening knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith
- understanding the relevance of the Catholic faith to questions about truth and the meaning of life
- fostering the values, attitudes and practices compatible with a positive response to the invitation to faith
- developing the skills of reflection, discernment and critical thinking
- being able to make well informed moral decisions
- feeling nurtured through engagement in prayer as an individual and as part of the school and parish community
- being able to understand and appreciate significant aspects of other Christian traditions and major world religions
- making a positive difference to self and the world by putting beliefs and values into action.

The experiences and outcomes for religious education are presented using the eight organisers known as 'The Strands of Faith'. These act as a framework through which children and young people encounter the significant aspects of learning. Learning through the strands of faith is not a linear process. Each will be visited time and time again as children and young people increase their understanding, grow in maturity and strengthen their skills and abilities to respond to the high level concepts within the curriculum framework.

This is best presented as a circular template:

Mystery of God, In the Image of God, Revealed Truth of God, Son of God,

- Our sense of God's presence in our lives
- Creation
- Questions about our ultimate destiny
- Humans made in the image and likeness of God
- Made for relationship with God and others (true fulfilment & happiness found)
- Vocation to Love
- God as a Trinitarian community of Father, Son & Holy Spirit
- Revelation and Covenant
- Jesus is the Son of God
- Incarnation
- Salvation and Redemption (New Covenant)
- How Christian life is sustained
- Christ continues to be present through Sacraments
- Christ continues to be present through the Church (including role & structure of Church)
- The Marks of the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic)
- Scripture is the Inspired Word of God
- Teachings of the Church (Tradition and Magisterium)
- The ongoing mission of the Holy Spirit
- Prayer (personal and communal)
- Mary the Mother of God
- Liturgical practice
- Christian Heritage
- Living Gospel values
- Building the Kingdom of God
- Other World Religions

Signs of God, Word of God, Hours of God, Reign of God,

As teachers work with this framework they will understand the spiral nature of the learning which is encompassed within the strands of faith. The contexts highlighted in the centre of this circle should be explored again and again through a range of teaching and learning approaches and in ways which are appropriate to the maturity and understanding of learners at each stage. Exploring the strands of faith in this way provides rich opportunities for increased depth, progression and application of learning as children and young people grow and develop. The very nature of faith, beliefs and practices as they are intertwined with daily living means that the significant aspects of learning in religious education are interconnected. Each aspect needs to be further explored and understood in the light of the guidance contained in *This Is Our Faith* and through approaches that encourage learners to make the connections across learning so that they understand better the relationships between faith, practices, traditions, values and issues and the need to respond through an informed moral conscience. Learning in religious education builds on and connects with children and young people's learning in the context of family and the wider parish community. Effective planning of learning therefore takes good account of the different roles and responsibilities within this home – school – parish relationship.

What do breadth, challenge and application look like in religious education?

Well-planned learning, teaching and assessment of religious education provides opportunities across the significant aspects of learning for children and young people to enjoy breadth, challenge and the application in new and unfamiliar contexts of what they have learned. Staff make use of a variety of learning approaches and activities, in keeping with the principles of curriculum design outlined in *Building the Curriculum 3* and the guidance in *This Is Our Faith*, to afford children and young people such opportunities. These opportunities are provided within the contexts of learning in religious education, interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of the school and personal challenges in school and across the parish. Children and young people will take an active part in planning, managing and assessing their learning, using high quality, relevant and challenging resources. This is extremely important since this curriculum area specifically invites children and young people to bring aspects of their personal self into their learning to deepen their reflections on big questions of meaning, value and purpose in life. A positive ethos and mutually respectful relationships are crucially important for successful religious education. Only in a supportive and nurturing environment will children and young people feel confident in sharing personal responses through dialogue about faith and belief. Teachers and other adults working within the context of religious education see this opportunity as a unique privilege through which they extend a very personal invitation to children and young people and deepen their own understanding of themselves and of the Catholic faith through sharing in the learning journey.

Breadth

Breadth in religious education relates to:

- increasing knowledge and understanding across all eight strands of faith to ensure a coherent understanding of faith and life
- learning experiences which exemplify and develop the four pillars of the Catechism: faith professed, faith celebrated, faith lived and faith prayed
- the development of skills to research, interpret, analyse and reflect on what it means to make moral decisions with an informed conscience.

Through such a broad approach, children and young people will deepen their understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and the challenge to live life in all its fullness, which lies at the heart of the Catholic faith. Their learning in religious education takes them into the wealth of scripture, liturgy and Church doctrine which are the heritage of Catholic Christianity. Learners are invited to participate meaningfully in sacramental celebrations and encouraged to develop their own moral and social conscience. Through such breadth of learning children and young people are offered opportunities to witness their faith and deepen their relationship with God through their words, deeds and prayers.

In line with the principles of personalisation and choice, children and young people should be supported to plan aspects of their own learning in religious education. Teachers, parents and others supporting religious education should encourage children and young people to broaden their learning through investigating wide-ranging sources of Church doctrine and through appropriate opportunities to experience prayer, reflection, meditation and liturgy. As well as learning about Catholic Christianity from a personal and broadly local perspective, children and young people should widen their learning to see how the teachings of the Catholic Church relate to national and global contexts.

Challenge

Challenge in religious education relates to:

- developing an understanding of the ways in which the strands of faith interlink to support a coherent picture of Catholic Christianity
- strengthening awareness of self in relation to faith development and making a personal response to God, demonstrated in written and oral reflections and through participation in prayer and liturgy
- confidence in expressing a personal commitment to put personal beliefs and values into practice
- interpretation of increasingly complex sources and viewpoints, including in terms of variety, length, style and language

- expressing and drawing on appropriate sources to support a well-informed personal response to religious and moral issues
- weighing up evidence, arguments and viewpoints from different sources to support a conclusion
- developing and demonstrating increased independence in skills, including planning and conducting increasingly complex learning with minimum teacher support
- using questioning to improve discussion skills and respond to others' views
- analysis of increasingly complex scenarios and abstract concepts.

Learning in religious education should be interactive. Children and young people are challenged in their learning when they are expected to think critically about how living through faith can give meaning and purpose to life. As they mature in their own understanding of the importance of faith, beliefs and values, religious education will challenge them to reflect on how the beliefs and practices of others in their school and community relate to their own experiences of faith and life. Learning should include regular opportunities for classroom discussion in pairs and small groups. It is important that learners are given freedom and time to tease out issues and concepts and asked to explain and justify their views. Such discussion supports the reflection which is necessary to strengthen understanding of faith professed, faith celebrated, faith lived and faith prayed. Children and young people should work independently and in groups to investigate Church teachings, faith celebrations, rituals and prayer. This enables them to develop independence in research and to engage on a personal level with the information and ideas they encounter in religious education. Class visitors can introduce challenge through presenting a wider range of perspectives for discussion and further research and reflection. Learning beyond the classroom through retreats and visits across the local parish and further afield are an important dimension of learning within religious education. Meeting and learning with children and young people from other parishes and communities can also add challenge to the learning. Effective use of information and communications technology can provide access to learning about wider aspects of faith which children and young people might not easily encounter in their local community. Increasing use of information and communications technology can add challenge to the learning as children and young people develop the skills necessary to become discerning about the wealth of information available.

Application

Application in religious education relates to:

- the ability to articulate a personal response to God and the invitation to live a life of faith
- meaningful participation in faith celebrations, rituals and prayer
- engagement with the community of faith in home, school and parish

- demonstrating commitment through acts of charity and service to communities, locally and globally
- understanding the relevance of the Catholic faith to everyday human life and experience
- critical thinking leading to effective analysis and interpretation of religious symbolism, texts, scripture and Church teachings to consider how these relate to religious and moral issues
- comparing and contrasting the implications of different viewpoints, practices and actions
- being able to imagine and understand the consequences of people's beliefs and actions.

Using information and communications technology to present viewpoints and evidence in different ways enables children and young people to apply their learning in religious education to new and unfamiliar contexts. Spiritual and emotional responses to religious and moral issues and concepts can be explored and presented through, for example, drama, art, dance and music. Creative and persuasive oral and writing skills are important for enabling learners to explore and share their developing understanding and awareness with others. Encouraging children and young people to be creative and intuitive when expressing their emotional and spiritual responses is an essential aspect of religious education. It supports them to apply their own beliefs and values and can evoke a sense of awe and wonder. Learners can apply their developing knowledge and understanding of Catholic Christianity to support their understanding of and respect for the religious beliefs, practice and traditions of other Christian denominations, other world religions and stances for living which are independent of religious belief. Teachers need to be aware of the spectrum of beliefs and faith commitment amongst learners in Catholic schools to ensure that all children and young people find religious education meaningful and relevant.

Planning for progression through breadth, challenge and application in religious education

The framework of experiences and outcomes for religious education provides a rich resource for staff to plan contexts which are challenging, relevant and motivating. The core learning within *This Is Our Faith* provides a clear structure to support planning for progression in Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools which teachers and others supporting religious education should use to support their planning. The spiritual development which is at the heart of religious education is a complex and holistic process. Progression through the strands of faith as outlined at each level is not linear. In planning learning which supports progression, teachers and learners will visit and revisit each of the strands of faith many times. Planning for progression will ensure that as learners grow in maturity and understanding they will encounter deeper levels of meaning within the strands

of faith and further their knowledge of how the strands of faith interlink to provide a coherent understanding of the Catholic faith. Progression in learning should be evident in the ways that children and young people demonstrate breadth, challenge and application through the significant aspects of learning as detailed within *This Is Our Faith*.

Transitions in religious education

At times of transition, and particularly from early years establishments to primary school and primary to secondary school, staff need to ensure that children and young people keep moving forward at an appropriate pace. Faith formation begins first and foremost in the home and with the family. At all stages it is therefore important to ensure that children and young people's faith background and their engagement with the wider community of faith are valued, supported and built on.

This Is Our Faith maps out progress in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and practices from the early level through to the end of S3. Progression through the senior phase to the end of S6 is under development. Staff at both sides of the transition should work together to agree what children and young people have achieved. This includes collaborative moderation of assessment evidence. It is important that both those gathering information and those receiving it have a shared understanding of the form and purpose of the evidence. Effective communication is key. At points of transition learners require support to identify their strengths, achievements and future learning opportunities. Wherever possible, children should be involved in making decisions about what information accompanies them in their transitions.

Pupil profiles at the end of P7 and the end of S3 are an important part of managing an effective transition process. Profiles should contain clear statements of what has been achieved in religious education. At all transitions, children and young people should be supported to select relevant evidence of their personal response to faith professed, faith celebrated, faith lived and faith prayed.

Managing assessment in religious education

Assessment should be planned as an integral aspect of learning and teaching. It should provide a summary statement of progress made and inform next steps in learning. Good practice in assessment in religious education involves the learner in the decisions about when and how assessment will take place. Assessment should be proportionate to learning and support children and young people in knowing how to improve.

Through discussion with their teachers, parents, others who support religious education and their peers children and young people know the extent of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, Christianity more generally and other world religions.

They should be aware of any significant gaps or misunderstandings. They evaluate their ability to think critically and apply learning to new and unfamiliar situations. They reflect on how well they have demonstrated their personal beliefs and values through their words and deeds. Assessment includes ongoing and periodic reviews of progress across the experiences and outcomes. Experiences and outcomes should not normally be assessed in isolation. Staff should plan learning and assessment which brings together a number of experiences and outcomes to assess children and young people's developing knowledge and understanding as well as their personal response to God.

Range of assessment

Assessment should be responsive to the learning experiences, open to unexpected forms of evidence, and managed collaboratively with the learner. The range of evidence should contribute to developing a holistic view of learners' progress. Children and young people should be encouraged to draw in evidence of learning outside of school to support judgements about their overall progress. Over time a range of assessment evidence will be gathered which illustrates how well and how much has been achieved.

Through high quality learning experiences in religious education children and young people develop values and attributes such as empathy and respect and deepen their understanding of God, self and others. Such experiences contribute significantly to personal development and spiritual wellbeing. The impact of this kind of reflective learning can be best assessed by the learner. It would therefore be valuable in religious education to include a learner-led record, such as a journal or blog, as a central aspect of assessment. For young children, parents can be encouraged to support learners in developing this journal and evidence might be in the form of photographs or artwork along with statements about the child's feelings and responses to experiences. Prompts such as *I can, I think, I feel, I wonder* can support this process well and lead to increasingly independent reflection which enables children and young people to share this aspect of their learning with parents, teachers and others. This sort of evidence of critical thinking and reflection effectively supports children and young people's personal growth which is an important aim of religious education.

Assessment evidence gathered in the course of learning might include observing a learner's contribution to a discussion, a piece of written work, a test, a verbal or written personal reflection on learning, a poster or a presentation using ICT. The actual record of the learning may be something written by the learner in the course of learning, a comment by the teacher, note of success criteria achieved, or evidence of self or peer-assessment. A sample of evidence brought to moderation is likely to include a range, if not all, of these things. The accumulated evidence should contain examples of the range of contexts explored through the learning across a level and the range of skills applied and developed. Evidence may also originate in interdisciplinary learning. Such examples might include a

spoken or written commentary on a piece of artwork inspired by a religious belief, practice or artefact, or a drama performance based on a religious or moral stimulus.

Holistic judgements about achieving a level in religious education

Assessing progress through and achievement of levels should be based on holistic judgements of the quality and quantity of evidence gathered over time. Individual pieces of work cannot provide evidence of achievement of a level. Evidence gathered over time should demonstrate children and young people's increasing ability to make informed, mature responses to God's invitation to relationship. Personal faith commitment is not being assessed in any shape or form. The [Principles and Practice: Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools](#) paper gives guidance on this:

'Approaches to assessment will take account of:

- knowledge and understanding of key aspects of Catholic Christian faith, including an awareness of other Christian traditions and other world religions
- each child and young person's responses (for example through self-evaluation) which demonstrate broader and deeper understanding, through critical analysis, moral reasoning and discernment
- their awareness of ways in which they put their beliefs, values and attitudes into action.'

(P & P RERC p 4)

Quality assurance and moderation

Moderation is a necessary and valuable way of ensuring that standards at different levels are interpreted and understood in a consistent way across schools in Scotland.

Staff should engage in regular moderation of how they evaluate children and young people's learning. Collaborative moderation supports staff in developing their understanding of what can be expected of children and young people at each level. This gives parents confidence that standards are shared and agreed across the profession and not set by an individual teacher. School clusters or associated schools groups should provide regular opportunities for moderation activities. Early years and primary staff and likewise primary and secondary staff should meet together to discuss learning and assessment evidence.

Teachers may draw on a range of helpful tools and resources to support their moderation activities. These include the [NAR flowchart](#) and [Curriculum for Excellence: Making good assessment decisions 3-18](#). Good assessment decisions in religious education will be supported by evidence which demonstrates:

- that children and young people have met appropriate success criteria
- how staff and learners have assessed work
- appropriate breadth, challenge and application across a level
- the extent of children and young people's knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, of other denominations of Christianity and of other world religions in the local and global context
- the quality of children and young people's personal reflections about what it means to live in faith and relationship with God
- the extent which children and young people demonstrate and continue to develop their beliefs and values through positive actions and contributions to their community.

Monitoring and tracking progress in religious education

Children and young people need to know how well they are progressing in developing the range of knowledge and skills required for successful learning in religious education. Monitoring and tracking should relate to learners' progress in the significant aspects of learning which relate to knowledge and understanding, skills and beliefs, values and practices.

Knowledge and Understanding

Knowledge and understanding within Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools is based first and foremost on the sources of Catholic Christian belief and practice. These sources are **Sacred Scripture**, especially the Gospels, and the **Tradition** found within official documents of the Catholic Church. Children and young people will also develop a wider knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world religions as appropriate to their local context.

Skills

Within Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools, children and young people develop a range of skills to enable them to interpret and respond to their own experiences and the teachings of the Church. They acquire a coherent understanding of faith and life and apply their learning to make moral decisions with an informed conscience. They demonstrate respect for others and demonstrate an increasing capacity to participate in faith celebrations, rituals and prayer. Effective tracking and monitoring of skills development supports learners in continuing to deepen their understanding of what faith is and the impact faith has on themselves, their families and communities. Monitoring and tracking should support progression in the skills to reflect on issues of belief and morality, analyse arguments and justify conclusions. These skills are central to enabling children and young

people to articulate well their own developing beliefs and values and to demonstrate these in positive ways. This should be evident in the profiles through which children and young people share and celebrate their achievements in religious education.

Beliefs, values and practices

Regular reflection upon the impact of the message of Catholic Christianity on children and young people's own beliefs, values and practices is an important aspect of Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools. The quality of such reflection is enhanced through appropriate experiences for prayer, reflection, meditation and liturgy both individually and in communion with others. Effective monitoring and tracking supports children and young people to reflect on the impact of their engagement with the faith community in home, school and parish as well as their participation in acts of charity and service. As children mature, their developing beliefs and values and how they express them will also mature and they will revisit concepts and ideas explored at an earlier stage. The personal, emotional and spiritual nature of learning in religious education will lead them to do so time and time again throughout the journey of life.

Next Steps

Practitioners are encouraged to use this document to support professional dialogue through quality assurance and moderation activities. It may be used by individuals to inform reflection on practice and plan for improvement in approaches to supporting learners in their progress and achievement.

Feedback on this work in progress is welcomed and can be provided through '[Assessing progress and achievement professional learning resource](#)'. This will help inform on-going work on annotated exemplification of achievement of levels.