



Review of Religious Education & Collective Worship

West Byfleet Junior School, West Byfleet, Surrey

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Introduction

This partnering review was conducted on behalf of Surrey County Council, at the request of the Surrey Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), as part of its statutory obligation to monitor the provision for Religious Education and Collective Worship in county maintained and voluntary controlled schools. The RE subject leader had contacted SACRE through the Surrey Primary RE subject leader networks to set up the visit.

West Byfleet Junior School is a 3-form entry school that shares a boundary with West Byfleet Infant School. The school benefits from good links with their local church, St. John's: the Vicar, Reverend Dr Keith Elford accompanied the visit and both he and the school spoke warmly and positively about their partnership and the church's support of the school. The current headteacher, Mr Ben Wasserberg and the RE subject leader, Ms. Heather Libby, both joined the school at the start of the previous academic year. On finding that the newly revised Surrey Agreed Syllabus for RE was not being implemented, they quickly began the task of ensuring that this took priority, creating a long term plan for the school that focused not just on coverage of units, but also making sure that staff understood the importance of the 'Golden Threads' and thematic units in helping pupils to make links across their learning. The RE subject leader has taken a proactive approach to supporting staff with their planning and provided appropriate CPD for staff through staff meetings. She also regularly highlights religious celebrations and current religious issues through the school newsletter.

The school's March 2025 Ofsted report states: *'The school has undertaken considerable work to review the curriculum. Staff have identified the important knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn. School-wide training equips staff to deliver this well-planned curriculum in a systematic way. Staff explain information clearly. Teachers routinely check what pupils know and remember. Staff identify and address misconceptions appropriately. They use questioning effectively. This helps pupils access and understand new content. ...Occasionally, the school does not ensure that teaching routinely develops pupil's vocabulary and understanding effectively. Where this happens, it limits pupils' progression through the curriculum. The school should ensure that teachers check and develop pupils' understanding of subject-specific vocabulary securely so that pupils deepen their knowledge of the curriculum.'*

During the course of the visit, an assembly and two part-lessons were observed, some pupil work was briefly audited and pupils interviewed, as well as discussions held with the Headteacher and the RE subject leader about their views and experience of the Agreed Syllabus. Both acknowledged that much work had been undertaken, including a school-wide focus on vocabulary, and that the syllabus provides some challenges for teachers in terms of subject knowledge. We are hugely grateful to the school, the staff and the pupils for their generous welcome and their enthusiasm!

Religious Education

On the [school's website](#) there is clear evidence that the school uses the Surrey Agreed Syllabus and values it as a subject as part of their curriculum: *'In today's interconnected world, learning about different religions equips children with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate an increasingly global society. Religion continues to hold cultural significance in shaping the traditions, laws, and values of many countries. By studying world religions, our pupils develop a deeper understanding of the festivals, beliefs, and practices that influence the lives of billions, enabling them to engage meaningfully with people of all faiths and backgrounds.'*



Religious Education at West Byfleet Junior School is more than an academic subject—it is an opportunity for children to explore the lives of real people, their friends, neighbours, and fellow citizens. Through a rich and inclusive curriculum brought from the Surrey Syllabus, we strive to inspire a sense of curiosity and respect, helping children appreciate the beauty of diversity within their own communities and beyond. Our goal is to prepare pupils for a harmonious future by equipping them with the tools to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with others. By fostering sensitivity and open-mindedness, we aim to nurture individuals who can contribute positively to a

multicultural world. At West Byfleet Junior School, we believe that RE is essential in shaping not just informed learners but compassionate and responsible citizens ready to make a difference.'

It was clear from what SACRE witnessed that these aspirations are not just words; there was evidence in the classrooms, in the teaching and in how the Headteacher, the RE leader and pupils spoke about the syllabus and the learning. The school's long term plan is clearly visible on their website ([Religious Education - West Byfleet Junior School](#)) along with other key documents for RE. SACRE was pleased to see that RE is taught by class teachers to their own classes, which enables them to draw more easily on prior learning in RE, and places where it connects with other curriculum subjects. This was especially evident in the Y3 lesson that was observed. The school also places a high priority of taking pupils out to visit places of worship, linked with the units of study, as part of their 'Righteous Enrichment' programme. It was evident from the conversations with pupils that these visits were a highlight for them!

The timing of the SACRE visit coincided with the introductory lessons of 2 thematic units: in Y5, 'What does it mean to live a good life?' and in Y3, 'How do people use creative ways to express their beliefs?' Both lessons were very much focussing pupils' attention on the specific vocabulary they would need for the unit, and engaging pupils' personal worldviews with the big questions at the heart of the unit.

In Y5, paired peer discussions centred on ideas relating to what a 'good' life is – and whether a 'happy' life is the same or different. Pupils engaged philosophically with this question, drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs to help them to consider answers from their own **perspectives**, which was an important key word in this lesson. They drew up lists of what 'good' and 'happy' lives might consist of, which should help them later in the unit when they are reflecting on how people from religions and beliefs that they have studied might answer the question, 'What does it mean to live a good life?' Pupils were articulate and engaging with the visitors and with each other, and demonstrated respect for each other's views and ideas.

In Y3, the class teacher led a very skilful discussion around their key word **express**, using carefully selected images which showed how different people might be choosing creative ways to express something about themselves e.g. dance, art, words etc. The final image showed people singing, but there were significant clues in the picture (hymn books with crosses on; stained glass windows; subtle choir robes) that meant that many children interpreted that these people were Christians. Children had previously made stained glass windows themselves as part of an Autumn term unit 'How can artists help us to understand what Christians believe and do?' so this was a great retrieval practice image. The lesson was well-paced and contained an appropriate mix of discussion, quick responses on whiteboards and then a final piece of work which would capture the thinking shown in the lesson. This was modelled well using a visualizer and a familiar 'My turn-Our turn-Your turn' strategy to scaffold learning.

It is clear from what SACRE members saw, heard and experienced that RE is a strength in the school, and that the school is addressing the areas for development raised by Ofsted about vocabulary in RE as well. The RE subject leader regularly has time off-timetable time to monitor learning, address any issues and support staff. SACRE took note of the school's concerns about teacher subject knowledge, which we know is shared by other settings – and with other subjects! The school is to be commended for its robust approach to the RE curriculum, and for the RE subject leader's commitment to the wider RE community in Surrey through the RE subject leader networks.



Collective Worship

The school website states that all pupils, unless parents have requested that they should be excluded, take part in a daily act of collective worship: [Collective Worship - West Byfleet Junior School](#), although the school agrees that this should be monitored more closely. There is a weekly timetable of assemblies led on a rota by the headteacher, other staff and a weekly singing assembly. All staff are present for the weekly celebration assembly on a Friday.

During the visit, SACRE observed an assembly led by the PPA music teacher, Mr Broadbent, who leads both upper and lower KS2 singing assemblies. These assemblies focus on the shared experience of singing together, with some comments about the meaning of the words. Singing is clearly also a strength in the school, evidenced in the

termly concerts that take place, and in the enthusiasm of the singing that SACRE members witnessed. The children sang 2 songs 'In the world of my tomorrow' and 'I can go the distance', which had very appropriate words for pupils with all faiths and beliefs or none. The children were quiet and respectful throughout. The teacher leading the singing assembly referenced some of the words with pupils to help them to think more deeply about what they were singing, but the SACRE group felt that it might have been even more effective to ask some open-ended questions for pupils to reflect on e.g. 'I wonder what you might miss if it wasn't there tomorrow?' or 'I wonder why it's important for the future that we care for the world now? – how does this song help us to find some answers?' or 'I wonder what challenges you might be facing at the moment – and what, or who, might help you to rise above them?' Having attended recent collective worship CPD, Ms. Libby is working with the wider school on ways to ensure that these singing assemblies have a spiritual dimension to them. This is clearly a work in progress, and SACRE's advice as part of the visit was welcomed.

In the follow-up discussion with the headteacher, SACRE was reassured that the school plans collective worship across the school year, drawing on events in the calendar, ways of linking assemblies with the school's values, as well as responding to immediate need e.g. water safety, but also acknowledged that not all of these occasions would include deep and insightful spiritual reflections. This reflects the reality that daily collective worship / spiritual reflection is a challenge felt by many schools with busy timetables and increasing expectations for their time. SACRE's guidance '[Time to Reflect](#)' was recommended to the school as a document that might help once the revised version is uploaded (late Summer).

In the conversations with children, they talked very enthusiastically about the regular 'Open the Book' assemblies, supported by the Vicar, Reverend Keith Elford – they clearly loved being able to be actively involved in these events.

Audit of pupils' work & conversations with pupils

SACRE was also privileged to meet with some children from across the school who spoke enthusiastically about their learning in RE, articulating how important they thought the subject is in helping them to understand people in their school, about how different beliefs would help them welcome a new person into the class, people they might meet, and in the world of work later in life. Without exception, they all spoke about the impact of visits planned for each year group to places of worship were in making their learning more real – it is clear that the school's new minibus will be well-used in enabling this to continue!

All units of work in the books could easily be traced back to the agreed syllabus and work was a good mix of writing, diagrams, annotated pictures and comments / thoughts. The work that SACRE was shown from the observed year 3 lesson also showed evidence of the learning that had taken place in the lesson, and of pupils' own personal knowledge in thinking about creative expression.

Areas for development

SACRE took away some thoughts from the visit about possible ways to support teacher subject knowledge e.g. through the provision of knowledge organisers to support units of work, or videos that could be accessed. SACRE can also be emailed with specific questions through the clerk: surreysacre@cofeguildford.org.uk.

The visit raised some recommendations about collective worship going forwards:

- Ensure that spiritual reflection is included in collective worship; it need only last a few minutes and may, for some, include prayer. This needs to be carefully worded to allow pupils to opt in or out as they feel comfortable.
- Build collective worship around what you as a school consider to be 'of worth', drawing where helpful on ideas and stories from Christianity, other religions/beliefs and ideas from the RE curriculum. On days without a phase assembly, consider conducting a brief class reflection in order to meet the requirements for daily collective worship.
- Consider adapting the Diocese of Guildford's [collective worship resources](#) to save time, including their 'wondering' questions to support pupils' individual reflection. There are also materials to support reflection in classrooms.

Conclusions

West Byfleet Junior School, through its dedicated and enthusiastic subject leader, and with the support of senior leaders, is well-placed to build on its successes and SACRE wishes to congratulate the school on its excellent RE provision. It is a real strength of the school, and a valued part of the curriculum for both teachers and children, clearly implementing the statutory requirements of the syllabus, and enhancing pupils' personal development. The teachers make good use of the agreed syllabus and the non-statutory guidance, especially demonstrating the importance of talking and visits as part of RE. We are delighted to have witnessed such good RE and commend the school for all its efforts.