

RE Departmental Curriculum Statement

Curriculum Intent Statement

The RE curriculum at Cowley International College has been designed to be academically rigorous as well as allowing pupils to develop a love of learning. We ensure that every student receives equal access to a curriculum which creates a secure and detailed understanding of religion, philosophy and ethics. Just as important is the development of skills in research, critical thinking, debate and evaluation. Through their studies of RE, pupils will develop their cultural capital through a deep understanding of a wide range of beliefs and worldviews. This is supported by the opportunities provided for pupils to encounter followers of a range of world faiths. Pupils understand the importance of the values of respect and tolerance for all. This does not mean that we shy away from controversial topics. Instead, through debate and discussion, we encourage pupils to listen carefully to the views of others and to consider how they can sensitively argue for their own viewpoint. Our curriculum is developed to ensure learning is relevant to the lives of the pupils we teach, while enabling them to reflect on the deeper questions of human existence. Our department prides itself on the excellent relationships established between staff and students, ensuring our classrooms are places of mutual respect and tolerance.

Curriculum Implementation Statement

All students, regardless of ability or background, study a core RE curriculum in years 7-11. Pupils have one lesson a week in years 7-8, and one lesson a fortnight in years 9 -11. There is also the opportunity for pupils to study RE in greater depth in years 9-13 if they chose RS as a GCSE or A level option. We follow a spiral curriculum where students build on their knowledge and skills, allowing them to re-call and develop knowledge each year and ensuring that pupils are learning more and remembering more. This is reflected in our core RE assessment criteria, which assess both skills and knowledge. Assessments throughout the year are designed so that pupils revisit topics from previous terms and years, ensuring embedded learning. The curriculum is reviewed each year to ensure it continues to be challenging, engaging and relevant for students.

The year 7 curriculum establishes the foundations of key beliefs and teachings in the world religions of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. There are also opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of evaluation through a unit on the sociology of religion.

In year 8, pupils build on the themes studied in year 7 by examining how these beliefs and teaching affect the way religious people live their lives today. Pupils also study two Philosophy units. This allows them to develop their skills of critical analysis, as well as raising aspirations for future GCSE and A Level study.

In year 9, pupils use their analytical skills to discuss the purpose and impact of crime and punishment, abortion, and non-violent protest. These topics allow pupils to apply ethical approaches to global topics.

The final years of the Core RE curriculum uses the knowledge pupils have developed in the lower school to debate a range of ethical and philosophical issues including the afterlife, the problem of evil, euthanasia, human rights, polyamory and animal rights, and alternative religious movements. These topics are explored in more depth for those students who choose to study at GCSE and A level.

At KS4 and A level we follow the Eduqas specification, to ensure a smooth transition. At KS4 pupils complete at study of Christianity and Islam, as well as completing Religious Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the modern world. For the A level course, there are three components: Philosophy of religion, Religion and Ethics and Christianity. Each of these units build on prior knowledge from KS3 and KS4.

The structure of our curriculum ensures that all pupils are able to thrive, regardless of prior knowledge. Pupils are set homework each fortnight which help to ensure the content studied in class is embedded in their long-term memory. The RE curriculum also allows pupils to develop their literacy skills. RE teachers promote high standards of literacy through introducing pupils to complex vocabulary, as well as encouraging students to develop their spelling, punctuation, and grammar in longer pieces of extended writing, pupils develop skills in research and essay writing, which supports their learning across all subjects. The RE curriculum is designed to be challenging for all students, including the most able. All students are expected to achieve the same learning outcomes, including SEND and disadvantaged students. Pupils are taught in ability groups, which ensures that class teachers are able to ensure their lessons are pitched at the right level for each group. The use of SEN profiles supports them in this. Teachers are also aware of who the disadvantaged students are in each group. These students are a particular focus for interventions.

Curriculum Beyond the Classroom

All year 7 students take part in a 'World Faiths Day' at the end of the Summer term. This gives them the opportunity to see how their learning throughout the year is put in to practice by real people in their everyday lives. It also ensures that pupils are exposed to a greater variety of world religions than we are able to cover in our curriculum time. Our strong links with the local Anglican Church provides further opportunities for students to see 'RE in Action'. In addition to this the department are supported for 6 hours a week by a Christian youth worker through the 'Fearless Project'.

Pupils in Year 9 have the opportunity to attend a Philosophy Fair with speaker Billie McCurrie on the topic of Extremism and Radicalisation.

Our RE Ambassadors group is working with local primary schools to deliver sessions on world religions. In the summer term they will lead these sessions during the SACRE RE Day at a local high school.

Our KS4 and A level pupils have access to external speakers throughout the year including Animal Aid, Billie McCurrie, and university webinars, targeting high achievers through the Climb To 9 and Cowley Scholars Programme. Bringing together each of these cohorts gives our KS4 pupils access to sixth form opportunities, whilst also enabling personal development for our A level students.

Subject Expertise

We are proud to hold the RE Quality Mark at 'Gold' Level. This award recognises the expertise and good practice we demonstrate. We are also members of the National Association for Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The network gives us valuable support in staying up to date with the most recent curriculum developments, and in providing CPD opportunities which play a valuable role in enhancing the teaching of RE. We are also part of the NATRE St Helens local group which enables RE specialists in the area to share ideas, resources and to gain access to CPD opportunities. The RE co-ordinator is a member of St Helens Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, ensuring that we are well-connected to this network. We are enthusiastic participants in the whole-school 'innovator' programme, valuing the feedback and training which is brought to us through our innovator rep. Members of the department make use of Facebook forums and Twitter feeds as ways of further developing their practice. Our detailed lesson plans and resources mean that non-specialists feel fully supported when delivering the subject.

Destinations

By following the locally agreed syllabus, we ensure our curriculum builds on and develops from the curriculum pupils studied at Key Stage 2, supporting them in moving from the known to the unknown. Our year 7 curriculum is designed to plug any gaps which pupils may have in their knowledge, while ensuring those who enter with a secure understanding of RE are still challenged. We are continuing to build good links with local primary schools through the St Helens RE Hub which allows us to have a greater understanding of the starting points of students.

During Key Stage 3, we seek to begin to build the skills that will enable pupils to be successful in a variety of subjects – not just religious studies. Pupils are assessed through a range of tasks based on prior and current learning, including longer pieces of extended writing where they demonstrate that they are able to critically analyse and evaluate key ideas, at a level which is appropriate for their stage of the curriculum. These skills continue to be developed throughout the GCSE course, giving a good grounding for study in any humanities A Level. We continue to promote this high level of scholarship at A Level, introducing pupils to themes and concepts which they are likely to come across as a Religious Studies undergraduate. We also take part in the undergraduate schedule of lectures delivered to the Scholars Programme. As a department we encourage pupils to read academic texts to ensure they are well-prepared for university study. Pupils are encouraged to develop aspirations through our links with local academic conferences and universities. As well as theology and religion, pupils have gone to study medicine, politics, law, history and teaching at university level. Our aim is to ensure all pupils leave Cowley equipped for working in a modern, diverse workplace.