

Subject: Religious Education

Subject Leader: Rebecca Conn-Pearson

Department aims:

Through relevant and engaging subject content, students learn about and from religion to understand the complexities of faith and draw from it their own conclusions about belief and what it means to them. Staffed by vibrant and dedicated staff, the department's main aim is to engage students in understanding religious and ethical issues and to encourage them to make informed decisions about the beliefs and values they hold. Our overarching aim is to encourage students to think for themselves, guided by beliefs common to those of all faiths and none.

We passionately believe that students should be skilled enough to make informed decisions about their own beliefs, values and ideals. To this end, we encourage students to make their own informed choices in every lesson. We encourage independent thinking through a series of ethics-based units of learning, including myth busting about terrorism, Human Rights and their violations and a study of the Holocaust through the story of Anne Frank.

Pupils

Through their lessons in RE pupils will:

- Learn about the key beliefs and practices of the six major world religions.
- Apply their learning on religious beliefs, teachings and practices to real-life situations.
- Evaluate commonalities between religious traditions.
- Demonstrate religious literacy through the use of key concepts and terminology.
- Develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.
- Acquire deeper understanding of why religious believers do as they do.
- Judge the value of spirituality in the modern world.

Staff

- Promote debate, discussion and sharing of personal viewpoints.
- Encourage all learners to think for themselves.
- Foster respect for religious traditions
- Encourage understanding of the value of all world views, even if they are different from our own.
- Meet statutory requirements relating to religious education

In Years 7 and 8, students follow a programme of study based around elements of the Stoke-on-Trent Agreed Syllabus for RE. They learn from a range of religion-specific units including Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism. Around half of students' curriculum time in RE at KS3 is Christianity-based, reflecting the local and national communities in which Birches Head Academy is located. Islam is the second religion that is progressed throughout students' time at Birches Head Academy, again reflecting the community here at the Academy and in Stoke-on-Trent itself.

The Year 7 curriculum is based around the story of “The Island”, an experiential approach to Religious Education developed by RE AST Sue Phillips. Students find themselves marooned on a fictional island, cut off from the rest of the world and in charge of a large community. They have to make a series of key decisions about how society on the island will function, planning leadership, celebrations and events to mark significant events in their community’s history. This unit engages students in decision-making, creativity, analysis and deeper thinking, encouraging all to achieve. It also ‘sets the stage’ for learning about and from religious practices and beliefs, enabling all students to link religious beliefs to the thought processes they went through at significant points in this topic.

Years 8 and 9:

In the latter half of Year 8 students follow an ethics-based curriculum, learning about and from topics such as Human Rights, racism and terrorism. This enables them to deepen understanding of world-issues, whilst learning how to apply religious viewpoints and ideas to current and historical events. This continues into year 9

KS4 (Years 10 & 11):

Religious Studies is an option for both year 10 and 11. Students who opt for Religious Studies follow the Edexcel Religious Studies Specification B: Beliefs in Action, centred around the beliefs, teachings and practices of Christianity and Islam.

50% of this specification is dedicated to the central beliefs and practices of Christians and Muslims, providing a solid foundation for further study. This specification includes other engaging topics, such as Crime and Punishment, Peace and Conflict, Matters of Life and Death and Marriage and the Family.

Religious Studies GCSE is right for you if you:

- Are interested in learning more about religious beliefs and practices.
- Enjoyed the year 8 and 9 topics of prejudice and discrimination, terrorism, the Holocaust and social justice.
- Prefer subjects where you are encouraged to develop your own point of view, while considering a range of different opinions.
- Enjoy topics that allow you to study current affairs and your views on them.
- Enjoy debating and arguing!

Pre-requisites

Students opting for GCSE Religious Studies should have a keen interest in learning about a range of different viewpoints. They should be prepared to develop their discussion and debate skills through learning about Christian and Muslim views on a wide range of issues. Preferably, students will have a good understanding of how to structure an argument and how to develop their answers in detail.

What will you study?

At GCSE, you will study two units:

Paper 1: Christianity. This unit covers the following topics:

Matters of Life and Death: What are the origins of the universe? Is life special? Should abortion be allowed in all situations? Why is euthanasia illegal in the UK? What happens when we die? Is the environment ours to destroy?

Marriage and Family Life: Is marriage important in 2018? Why is divorce becoming more common? Is sex only for within marriage? What is family life like in 2018? Should contraception be readily available to all? Why should all genders be equal?

Christian Beliefs: Why are there different groups of Christians? Did God create the universe and people? Was Jesus God? What did Jesus do? Can Jesus save people? Do Heaven and Hell really exist? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Living the Christian Life: How do Christians worship? What is life as a Christian really like? Is prayer really a way to contact God? Why are Christmas and Easter celebrated? Is the Church relevant in 2018?

Paper 2: Islam. This unit covers the following topics:

Muslim Beliefs: What do different groups of Muslims believe? What is Allah like? Were prophets really messengers of God? Are holy books really the word of God? Do we believe in angels? Is there such a thing as fate? What do Muslims believe happens when we die?

Living the Muslim life: What does Muslim life look like? Why are the Five Pillars important to Muslims? How and why do Muslims celebrate special religious days? What do Muslims do to commemorate the history of their religion?

Peace and Conflict: Does Islam really mean 'peace'? What do Muslims do to promote peace worldwide? Why is there conflict in the world? Can it ever be right for a Muslim to go to war? Can war ever be justified, for religious reasons or at all? Should weapons of mass destruction ever be used?

Crime and Punishment: What is justice? What causes crime? Why do good things happen to bad people? What are fair punishments? Is it always possible to forgive? Should everyone, even criminals, have human rights? Should UK law allow the death penalty?

Assessment

Paper 1: One exam at the end of year 11, 1 hour and 45 minutes. Paper 2: One exam at the end of year 11, 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Course enrichment

As part of your study on Christianity and Islam, you will have the opportunity to visit places of worship. You will also be visited by external speakers to develop your learning of key topics in greater depth.

Where could GCSE RS take you?

Studying RS doesn't mean that you will go on to be a priest, nun or RE teacher (unless you want to, of course!) The skills and abilities you develop through GCSE Religious Studies will show to future employers that you understand and appreciate different viewpoints, religious and otherwise. Studying GCSE RS shows that you have a good level of literacy and are able to put forward your point articulately and with sensitivity to others. GCSE RS prepares you well for further study of Philosophy, Theology, English, Classics and History. In terms of employment, RS looks good to employers in any area, as it demonstrates an understanding of different people and sensitivity to their beliefs and practices.

Currently, Religious Education is delivered to those who have not opted for it through weekly activities during tutor time. There are also a series of off-timetable days that incorporate religious themes each half term.

Religious themes are also shared in assemblies throughout the year for all year groups, tying in with religious festival days and commemorations such as Holocaust Memorial Day. In 2018, HMD was marked with starter activities each lesson including survivor testimony, poetry and readings. From September 2018, students who do not opt for Religious Studies at GCSE level will study a non-examined 'Religion and Ethics' course for one hour a week.

How can I help support my child's learning in RE?

Students are encouraged to purchase revision guides sold in school, these can be used to revise both years 10 and 11.

Exam practise books are available for KS4.

Useful websites:

Edexcel Religious Studies (from 2016) <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/religious-studies-b-2016.html>

GCSE Bitesize (Choose Christianity and Islam): <https://www.bbc.com/education/examspecs/zy7spbk>