



## City of York Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

### **Covid-19 Pandemic – DFE Guidance for full opening: schools Implications for Teaching of Religious Education and provision of collective worship**

The Department for Education first published guidance for full opening of schools in September on 17 June 2020. It has been regularly updated since then and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

The section on curriculum expectations sets out three key principles:

#### **1. Education is not optional**

All pupils receive a high-quality education that promotes their development and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

#### **2. The curriculum remains broad and ambitious**

All pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects, maintaining their choices for further study and employment.

#### **3. Remote education**

Where needed, this is high-quality and safe, and aligns as closely as possible with in-school provision. Schools and other settings continue to build their capability to educate pupils remotely, where this is needed.

These principles are followed by a set of expectations which should be met if schools have revised their curriculum following the significant disruption to pupils' education from March to July 2020 and the need to provide education in an environment which supports provision of protective measures to support infection control, or to provide remote education should pupils not be able to attend school for Covid-19 related reasons.

It is clearly noted that substantial modifications to the curriculum may be needed at the start of the year, so teaching time should be prioritised to address significant gaps in pupils' knowledge with the aim of returning to the school's normal curriculum content by no later than summer term 2021.

The guidance also notes that Schools may consider it appropriate to **suspend some subjects for some pupils in exceptional circumstances**. Schools should be able to show that this is in the best interests of these pupils and this should be subject to

discussion with parents during the autumn term. They should also have a coherent plan for returning to their **normal curriculum for all pupils by the summer term 2021**.

Within a broad and ambitious curriculum **up to the end of Key Stage 3**, the guidance states that the majority of pupils should be taught a full range of subjects over the year, including religious education.

At **Key Stage 4**, it should be noted that pupils are legally entitled to receive religious education and the York agreed syllabus places an expectation on schools that pupils follow an accredited course. The arrangements for external examinations in 2021 have yet to be confirmed but the guidance states that, in exceptional circumstances, it may be in the best interests of a year 11 pupil to discontinue an examined subject because the school judges that, for example, they would achieve significantly better in their remaining subjects as a result. Such decisions should be made in discussion with pupils and parents.

**Ofsted** will be making visits to schools during the autumn term but not reporting on them. Such visits will consider schools' curriculum provision both in school and for remote education, if needed. It is currently intended that normal inspections, with full coverage of the intent, implementation and impact of the curriculum, will resume in January 2021.

Religious education provision in schools is regularly supplemented by educational visits and inputs delivered in school by visitors. The guidance allows for **non-residential educational visits**, noting that these should take place only with appropriate protective measures and following risk assessment. Similarly the presence of **visitors** in school should only be accommodated within the conditions permitted by the school's risk assessment.

The legal position of **collective worship** remains unchanged so there should continue to be an act of collective worship for all pupils (except those withdrawn by law). The DfE guidance states that groups of pupils should be kept apart, meaning that schools should avoid large gatherings such as assemblies or collective worship with more than one group. There is also specific reference to restricting singing and musical performance.

### **Conclusion**

SACRE recognises that schools are operating under difficult circumstances and subject to unprecedented pressures and constraints. In line with DfE guidance, it encourages all schools to continue to deliver religious education to all pupils in all key stages as part of a broad and ambitious curriculum, within the parameters set out in the guidance, including entering pupils for examination at the end of Key Stage 4.

As with all other subjects, SACRE recognises that protective measures, risk assessments and the ongoing need to minimise social contacts will mean that pupils will probably not be able to benefit from the full range of experiences schools would normally provide in religious education.

Given the need to maintain protective measures and avoid mixing between groups, or “bubble” of pupils SACRE recognises that large gatherings of pupils to participate in collective worship are not possible. Collective worship should be held in smaller groups such as class or year group bubbles defined by school context and risk assessment. In Church of England Schools, Roman Catholic Schools and other faith schools collective worship should be in accordance with applicable trust deeds. Such schools should seek advice from the appropriate faith body such as their diocese.

SACRE will work to support teachers in adapting provision and resources as appropriate. Further information and resources for teachers of RE to support them at this time can be found on the website of the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) at:

<https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/free-resources-for-you-and-your-pupils/>

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