

Religious Observance - Time for Reflection Guidance for Schools

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CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 2
Aims	Page 2
Equality	Page 3
Frequency of Religious Observance	Page 3
Chaplains	Page 3
Rights of Parents	Page 3
Denominational Schools	Page 3
Early Learning and Childcare Settings	Page 4
Characteristics of Effective Religious Observance	Page 4
Information on RO and examples of good practice	Page 5

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE - TIME FOR REFLECTION GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

Introduction

The Scottish Government considers that Religious Observance (RO) makes an important contribution to pupils' development, promoting the ethos of the school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. Schools are encouraged to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds.

Religious Observance is defined as "community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community."

Whilst the Scottish Government and its partners use the term Religious Observance, some schools may feel Time for Reflection is considered more appropriate by the school community. This guidance therefore applies to Religious Observance and to Time for Reflection.

Religious Observance is a whole school activity: members of the school community, including staff, pupils, parents and representatives of faith and non-faith communities may take part. Opportunities should therefore be accessible to all faith and non-faith communities.

Scotland is a society with a long standing Christian tradition, however Religious Observance should be developed in a way that reflects and understands the increasing range of faiths and beliefs of those in school, and in the local community. It should be sensitive to traditions and origins but it must be equally sensitive to individual needs and beliefs where these come from a faith or non-faith perspective.

Within schools there is a diversity of religious beliefs and practices and it is important that all staff and pupils can participate without compromising their religious belief or stance. There should be opportunities for pupils, at all levels, to play a key role in planning and preparing Religious Observance events. Pupils should have opportunity for reflection both individually and collectively and to search for meaning and self-understanding. They can also encounter different beliefs and points of view to make sense of the diverse society in which we live.

Religious Observance has an important part to play in the development of the learners four capacities, as a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor. It should provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on and develop a deeper understanding of the worth of each individual and their contribution to the school and wider communities. Religious Observance makes a contribution to the ethos and life of the school as it can influence how children and young people develop values and behaviours.

Aims

The aims of Religious Observance are:

- to promote the spiritual, personal and reflective development of all members of the school community
- to express and celebrate the shared values of the school and the local community
- to contribute to the development of the four capacities within Curriculum for Excellence - successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Equality

A core part of this guidance is the principle of respect for others. The diversity of beliefs and traditions in our school communities provide an important context in which pupils can learn about what is important in the lives of others. This guidance is compliant with the 2010 Equality Act.

Frequency of Religious Observance

Religious Observance needs to take place on a sufficiently frequent basis to have an impact on the spiritual, personal and reflective development of the school community. Scottish Government guidelines state that schools should provide Religious Observance opportunities several times in the year in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community. The emphasis should be on the quality of the experience. The school community should be involved in determining the frequency. Religious Observance does not need to be whole school assemblies but can incorporate group/class events.

There should be a clear distinction between assemblies devised for Religious Observance and assemblies for other purposes such as celebrating success. These might include opportunities for class, year, stage or whole school Religious Observance, as well as, involvement by pupils, staff, parents and others including school partners such as school chaplains and other faith/belief or non-faith leaders in planning and presentation.

Religious Observance should be regularly evaluated by the school. It would be good practice to share with the Parent Council planned opportunities for Religious Observance. School handbooks should describe the provision of Religious Observance and explain arrangements for those who wish to exercise their right to withdraw a child or young person from Religious Observance.

Chaplains

Chaplains are a resource and can offer spiritual and pastoral support to schools and their communities. Discussion between senior staff and chaplains should explore the planning and implementation of Religious Observance to ensure the needs of the school community are met. Chaplains can only work in a school at the invitation of the Head Teacher and their core task is to assist the school in achieving its roles and objectives. Many schools in West Lothian are served by chaplaincy teams. These teams will include lay members as well as ordained clergy.

Rights of Parents

Under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, parents have the right to ask that their child be withdrawn from Religious Observance. Parents should be informed about this right and given sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision. Pupils who are withdrawn from Religious Observance should be given a worthwhile and relevant alternative activity. In no circumstance should a child be disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from Religious Observance.

Denominational Schools

All schools will provide an environment where every child and young person is able and confident in expressing their faith and values. Denominational schools place a particular emphasis on the teaching of their faith and values through the school ethos and the religious

education programme. Young people will be invited to lead and participate in prayer and reflection in classrooms and at assemblies. Specific support and guidance for developing Religious Observance in denominational schools is available through the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

Early Learning and Childcare Settings (ELCs)

There is no formal requirement for Religious Observance in ELCs. However, ELC classes may take part in Religious Observance opportunities as part of the whole school community. There are many existing opportunities to help children develop an early awareness of different religious and cultural groups and their traditions.

Characteristics of Effective Religious Observance

Pupils should be able to participate comfortably in Religious Observance experiences. Attention should be given to quality of seating, lighting and the overall environment. It is recommended that a smaller space be available for private reflection or other events. Good planning is important in order to engage pupils' interest. The Head Teacher, staff, chaplains, pupils and visitors from the community can all lead and contribute to Religious Observance. Through interesting and appealing contexts, pupils should be able to consider and reflect on a range of issues that relate to their experience.

Effective Religious Observance should link with the beliefs and values of the school and local community. All should be able to take part without compromising their own personal faith stance. There should be an open and reflective atmosphere enabling pupils to be relaxed. To enhance the mood of respectful attentiveness, consideration should be given to music, presentation and procedures for entering and leaving the area. Silences can be powerful and enable pupils to have space to respond.

School communities will:

- Promote Religious Observance in line with the whole school ethos encouraging a mutual respect for all religions
- Ensure that sufficient Religious Observance opportunities are provided in a well organised and relevant manner
- Ensure all pupils have the opportunity to be involved in whole school and small group Religious Observance experiences
- Develop links with community leaders including chaplains, chaplaincy teams and other community leaders
- Include the whole school community, including pupils, staff and parents in the development of quality Religious Observance activities and events
- Use self-evaluation approaches and the school improvement plan to ensure arrangements for Religious Observance are regularly reviewed and continually improved taking account of the views of staff, parents, pupils and partners.

“Overall, effective Religious Observance is active, engaging, challenging and thought provoking. It supports children and young people in the development of their own set of beliefs and values and it allows them the opportunity for deeper reflection about the beliefs and values of others. This enables each and every individual to gain a sense of his or her own place in the world”.

Curriculum for Excellence, Briefing 16.

Information on Religious Observance and examples of good practice:

- Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper 16 : Religious Observance Time for Reflection
<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/cfe-briefing-16.pdf>
- Curriculum for Excellence – Provision of Religious Observance in schools
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2017/03/curriculum-for-excellence-religious-observance/documents/f7eefbc9-3de3-4d7e-9cf2-5f8130887fa1/f7eefbc9-3de3-4d7e-9cf2-5f8130887fa1/govscot%3Adocument>
- Scottish Government - Guidance on the statutory basis for local authorities to provide religious education and religious observance in Scottish schools.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/curriculum-for-excellence-religious-observance/>