

Prayer Spaces & RE



What does RE in Northern Irish schools look like?

Religious Education (RE) is a statutory subject within controlled schools in Northern Ireland - all government funded schools are required to teach it. Schools have to provide RE in accordance with the core syllabus which was drawn up by the four main churches and specified by the Department.

At the national level the statutory requirements for RE are outlined in the **Core Syllabus for RE** whilst the Non Statutory Guidance provides schools with information and practical guidance for planning their RE. The core syllabus for Religious Education has been developed by the four main Christian Churches and outlines statutory Religious Education content at all key stages. **Teachers are encouraged to supplement the core syllabus with further provision which complements the ethos of the school and the society in which we live.**

The RE core syllabus includes Christianity, morality, world religions and a requirement at Key Stage 4 for pupils to study the Christian church from both a Protestant and a Roman Catholic perspective. It provides a common core for the teaching of RE that schools are free to build upon in a way that suits the needs of their pupils and the ethos of the school. This is in keeping with the flexibility provided by the curriculum and gives schools scope to include, for example, additional material on world religions or any other RE related subject matter.

This explains why two neighbouring schools could have different RE syllabi and different approaches to the way they teach RE. Therefore, the best way to find out about RE in a school is to **meet up with the Head Teacher or RE coordinator/Head of department** and discuss it, exploring ways in which a prayer space could enrich what is being taught. This reflects an essential aspect of hosting a prayer space in a school – the importance of building a positive relationship with the school and its staff, and so **connecting the Christian community with the school community to develop trust and mutual understanding.**

Enriching RE with Prayer Spaces in Schools

Here are just a few examples of why RE is important (from the national Non-Statutory Guidance for RE) and how Prayer Spaces in Schools connect with RE:



RE	Prayer Spaces in Schools
Encourages students to explore issues of personal identity by fostering respect for self , for example, development of positive self image through the concept of creation in the image of God. (Key Element: Personal Understanding)	The prayer activities can provide opportunities for pupils to wonder about life, identity, their own beliefs/values and issues of justice and forgiveness. (E.g. Masks, Mountain Series, Empty Plate)
Pupils have opportunity to develop an awareness, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the key Christian teachings about God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), about Jesus Christ, and about the Bible; develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to life;	Pupils learn about Christian beliefs about God, prayer and social action in the prayer space – they also have chance to reflect personally and consider their own spirituality. (E.g. Bubble Tube, Refugee Rucksacks)
Encourages students to explore and respond to the key questions that arise and develop personal awareness in this area. (Key Element: Spiritual Awareness)	Prayer spaces are welcoming and hospitable to pupils of all faiths and none, helping them to reflect on their own beliefs about prayer, faith and spirituality. A prayer space offers pupils the chance to express their responses in a range of ways. (E.g. Hopes and Dreams, Big Questions)
Encourages students to develop a range of skills to promote sensitivity and empathy when discussing religious and moral issues. (Key Element: Mutual Understanding)	The opportunity to experience prayer/reflection encourages respect by giving pupils an experiential understanding of why prayer is important to some people and the different ways people engage with it.
Encourages students to explore and respond to the key questions that arise through discussions on the purpose of life and develop personal awareness in this area. (Key Element: Spiritual Awareness)	A range of prayer activities enable pupils to reflect on their sense of self, their close relationships, living in community and social responsibility. (See Little People, Fizzy Forgiveness, Knife Angel)
Encourages students to explore why those with a religious faith believe they have responsibility, as stewards, to take care of the world and people within it. (Key Element: Education for Sustainable Development)	Prayer activities which focus on issues of justice, helping others and on their relationships enable pupils to consider their emotional and practical responses to other people's experiences. (e.g. Name That Feeling, Bought and Sold)