

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE - PROVISION OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS – MARCH 2017

Introduction

1. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (“the 1980 Act”) continues to provide the statutory basis for local authorities to provide Religious Observance (RO) in Scottish schools.
2. This guidance clarifies the current position regarding the provision of RO and supersedes that previously contained within Circular 1/2005 and the letter of 22 February 2011. It reflects Curriculum for Excellence and applies to all primary and secondary schools, including special schools. It is intended to assist local authorities and schools in the planning and delivery of RO. It should be read in conjunction with the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Briefing Paper 16 – Religious Observance (Time for Reflection), which supports planning and delivery of RO in practice. <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/rme26-religious-observance.aspx>
3. It should further be read alongside paragraph 6 of schedule 1 of the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, which provides for what a school’s handbook should say about how the school plans and provides its curriculum, including RO.
4. The policy on Religious and Moral Education (RME) in non-denominational schools and Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools (RERC) is covered in separate guidance, issued February 2011.

Terminology

5. Religious Observance is defined as follows:

“Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school’s community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community”.

6. We recognise that whilst the 1980 Act uses the term Religious Observance, and as a consequence both Scottish Government and its partners (e.g. Education Scotland) use the same terminology, schools may feel that a different name for the events that meet their Religious Observance requirements will be more appropriate to their individual context and culture. For example, in a non-denominational school, the use of the term ‘Time for Reflection’ might be considered more appropriate by the school community. This term is also used in other contexts, such as in the Scottish Parliament. Thus this guidance uses the term Religious Observance (RO) but the guidance is equally applicable to ‘Time for Reflection’.
7. Religious Observance is a ‘whole-school activity’, by which we mean members of the school community, including staff, pupils, parents and representatives of faith and non-faith groups and communities, may take part.
8. Where the term ‘parents’ is used, this includes guardians and any person who is liable to maintain or has parental responsibilities in relation to a child or young person or has care of a child or young person.

Diversity

9. Scotland is a society with a longstanding Christian tradition. However, Scotland has for many generations also been home to other faith and belief traditions, never more so than at present. Scotland remains a country where people continue to be welcomed and we can expect Scotland to become increasingly diverse in the range of faith and belief traditions represented. RO in schools needs to be developed in a way which reflects and understands this diversity. It should be sensitive to our traditions and origins and should seek to reflect these but it must equally be sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith/belief or non-faith perspective.

Approach

10. RO has an important part to play in the development of the learner's four capacities: a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and an effective contributor. It should also provide opportunities for the school community to reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual, and their contribution to the school and wider communities.
11. The Scottish Government welcomes the tradition that, in Roman Catholic denominational schools, Catholic Liturgy will largely shape the nature and frequency of RO activities in the classroom and in the wider school community. So, at times, children and young people will be invited to participate in, and sometimes to lead, prayer and reflection in classrooms and at assemblies. At other times, to honour particular occasions or feasts, chaplains will lead school communities in the celebration of Mass and other forms of liturgical celebration.
12. In the same way, we expect that schools with other faith affiliations will plan and deliver RO activities in ways which are shaped and influenced by the denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted.
13. In recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage, non-denominational schools are also encouraged to draw upon the rich resources of this tradition when planning RO. However, school communities typically include pupils and staff from a variety of faiths and belief perspectives, and this must be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of RO without compromise to their personal beliefs.
14. At present in non-denominational schools, whole-school assemblies are the most likely context where RO might take place. There should be a clear distinction between assemblies devised for the purpose of RO and assemblies for other purposes such as celebrating success. The precise form will be determined by each school's policy within the local authority's framework, but these might include opportunities for class, year, stage or whole-school RO as well as involvement by pupils and others, including school partners such as school chaplains and other faith/belief or non-faith leaders, in planning and presentation.

Faith/Belief Representatives

15. The Scottish Government values the important and varied contributions that chaplains and other representatives of faith/belief or non-faith groups can make to the life of a school, through involvement in RO as well as sometimes in acts of worship, religious and moral education and a broader pastoral role. Headteachers are encouraged to engage in full discussion with any such representatives they wish to be involved in the planning and the implementation of RO. When such representatives are involved in supporting RO, their own beliefs should be respected and they should not be asked, or expected, to compromise them.

Frequency of Religious Observance

16. RO needs to take place sufficiently frequently to have an impact on the spiritual development of the school community. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance.

17. It is important to balance the frequency which would have a positive impact on children and young people with the need to ensure that the experiences are meaningful and inclusive. Every school should provide opportunities for RO several times in a school year, in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community. This will require careful planning, and the school community as well as parents and carers should be involved in making decisions about frequency. We recognise that many primary schools value weekly RO as part of their regular assembly programme and will wish to continue with this.

Communication

18. As explained in Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper 16, school handbooks should describe the provision of Religious Observance and also explain arrangements for those who wish to exercise the parental right to withdraw a child or young person from Religious Observance. To support parents in making decisions about Religious Observance, schools are expected to set a clear rationale for the approach taken and to involve parents and children and young people in decisions about the Religious Observance programme.

19. The Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (paragraph 6 of schedule 1), makes provision for what a school's handbook should say about how the school plans and delivers its curriculum, including RO. That includes:

- how a pupil's parents will be consulted about what pupils learn at the school;
- how a pupil's parents will be informed of any sensitive aspects of learning;
- how a parent can arrange for a pupil to be withdrawn from RO.

20. The Scottish Government's 'School Handbook Guidance' explains the Regulations and can be accessed at the following link:
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/09/8694>

Right to Withdraw

21. There is a statutory provision in section 9 of the 1980 Act for parents to withdraw their children from participation in RO. This right should always be made known to parents and their views respected. Parents should be provided with sufficient information on which to base a decision about exercising this right.
22. The Scottish Government considers that RO complements other aspects of a pupil's learning and is an important contribution to pupils' development. It should also have a role in promoting the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. Schools are therefore encouraged to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds.
23. There is no equivalent statutory right to withdraw afforded to children and young people. However schools should include children and young people in any discussions about aspects of their school experience, ensuring their views are taken into account. Doing so is in line with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and is especially relevant as children and young people become older and take more responsibility for their own learning.
24. Where a parent chooses a denominational school for their child's education, they choose to opt in to the school's ethos and practice which is imbued with religious faith and religious observance. In denominational schools, it is therefore more difficult to extricate a pupil from all experiences which are influenced by the school's faith character.
25. Where a pupil is withdrawn from RO, schools should make suitable arrangements for the pupil to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity. In no circumstances should a pupil be disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from RO.

Religious Observance and Worship in schools

26. As mentioned at paragraph 10 above, where a school community is continuous with a faith community (such as in a denominational school) worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school.
27. When members of a non-denominational school community wish to have opportunities for organised acts of worship, Headteachers should consider these requests positively and make suitable arrangements if possible. Such events may be distinct, although it is likely that they will be complementary to the school's provision of RO.

Facilities

28. Consideration should be given to providing appropriate facilities in schools for RO. Locations need to be considered in the light of the size and diversity of participating groups. Locations for RO should be considered in the planning and design of new and

refurbished school buildings, to provide facilities which meet school and community needs.

Support

29. Education Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, Briefing Paper 16 sets out the most up to date advice and guidance around the planning and delivery of Religious Observance/Time for Reflection. <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/rme26-religious-observance.aspx>

30. The Scottish Catholic Education Service offers guidance and exemplar materials to support denominational schools on aspects of RO and School Chaplaincy. www.sces.uk.com

Conclusion

31. Local authorities and schools are invited to work with school communities to plan and deliver high quality RO, in line with this guidance and CfE Briefing Paper 16 in particular, and taking into consideration the requirements of the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. Schools should use their self-evaluation and the school improvement plan to ensure arrangements for RO are regularly reviewed and continually improved, taking account of the views of staff, parents, pupils and partners.