

How does Discovery RE support the Welsh Curriculum?

Introduction

Welsh education is going through a period of considerable change, with an extensive review being undertaken led by Professor Graham Donaldson, 'Successful Futures' which is going to have a major impact upon the Welsh curriculum.

“The children and young people of today are entering a fast-changing world that is increasingly competitive, globally connected and technological advanced. Schools are having to prepare our young people for jobs that have not been created and challenges that we are yet to encounter. This will require a renewed commitment to improving both the skills and knowledge of our young people, as we raise standards in our transformational curriculum. Education has never been more important. Education reform is our national mission.”

Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education

Five areas of learning (AoLE) have been identified:

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Wellbeing
- Humanities
- Literacy, Languages and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology

RE is in the Humanities section of the curriculum, with 'Pioneer schools' across Wales have been charged with developing the curriculum. The Humanities AoLE have identified what matters in RE and through exploring 'what matters' about the Humanities, pupils will study the past and present, and imagine possible futures, and will learn about people, place, time and beliefs.



“Pupils will:

- understand historical, geographical, political, economic, religious and societal concepts.
- explore their environment to further develop their sense of place and wellbeing.
- engage in learning experiences about rights, values, ethics, beliefs, religion, philosophy and spirituality.
- consider, explore and make informed choices regarding sustainability and the impact of their actions.
- positively contribute to their community and critically engage with local, national and global issues to become a responsible citizen of Wales and the wider world.”

<https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s13137/6e.%20WG%20Humanities%20Report.pdf>

The curriculum is described as transformational, more relaxed and the aim is to develop more rounded pupils, with more emphasis being placed on health and wellbeing, making sure Welsh youngsters are ready to play a full part in life and work. The new curriculum is less about ticking boxes and more about ensuring pupils are “ethical, informed citizens” who better understand the world we live in which are developing inquiring minds, allowing pupils to make sense of and engage with the world around them.

How does the curriculum link with Discovery RE? - The pedagogies (teaching approaches)

Discovery RE is an enquiry-based approach to Religious Education, a different enquiry for every half-term (6 per year) focusing on one religion at a time.

The aim is to deepen children’s critical thinking skills through greater subject knowledge and also to allow their own spiritual development. This links directly to the message of the Cabinet Secretary who want to, “raise standards in our transformational curriculum” and with the Humanities AoLE.

Discovery RE is a set of detailed medium-term plans for RE from Reception to Year 6 where Christianity is taught in every year group, with Christmas and Easter given new treatment each year, developing the learning in a progressive way. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism are also covered. Humanist perspectives are added when appropriate in some enquiries. Each enquiry unit demands the equivalent of 6 lessons, but teaching time could be blocked over perhaps 3 half days to enhance learning. Each enquiry has a learning objective which shows the learning over the enquiry and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development opportunities are mapped throughout as is each enquiry’s contribution to Values Education and Health and Wellbeing area of the curriculum.

Discovery RE recognises the importance of questions with each enquiry starting with a key question (an overarching enquiry question) with each section of the enquiry supported with a series of teacher questions, with opportunities for children/young people to ask the ‘Discovery RE Owl’ their own questions. Discovery RE idea is that the Owls are sources of wisdom and each year group has their own owl.

Discovery RE are currently working with a Pioneer School to trial Discovery RE materials, where some have been translated into Welsh.

With the enquiry approach to teaching RE, Discovery RE is perfectly placed to deliver the requirements of the new emerging Welsh curriculum.

www.discoveryschemeofwork.com



How does it relate to Estyn guidelines?

Estyn states that 'The Common Inspection Framework' are:

1. Standards
2. Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
3. Teaching and learning experiences
4. Care, support and guidance
5. Leadership and management

The following sections breaks down in detail the Estyn framework and explains how they links to Discovery RE.

1. Standards

Discovery RE supports this through an enquiry-based approach to Religious Education, a different enquiry for every half-term (6 per year) focusing on one religion at a time. The aim is to deepen children's critical thinking skills through greater subject knowledge and also to allow their own spiritual development. Discovery RE studies Christianity in every year group with a spiral developmental approach, Christmas and Easter being given different treatment each year to deepen understanding.

In the Foundation Phase Discovery RE offers the opportunity to study three religions; Christianity in every year group as well as Judaism and Islam, with Discovery RE recommending the study of Christianity plus just one other religion per year group to save children getting muddled.

In Key Stage 2 Discovery RE offers enquiries on Christianity (in every year group) and Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism– so by the end of Key Stage 2 Christianity and the five other principal religions will have been studied.



Standard 1.1 and 1.3 are further supported through Discovery RE assessment process. Discovery RE suggest a colour-coded system, end of key stage age-related expectations for KS1, lower KS2 and upper KS2. This is similar to the RE Council non-statutory framework for RE (2013).

End of Key Stage colour-coded descriptors in Discovery RE

| <p>“WORKING AT” expectation.</p> <p>Most children are expected to reach these expectations.</p> | <p>GREEN DESCRIPTORS</p> <p>Personal resonance with or reflection on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concept / belief underlying the subject matter of the enquiry Child’s own thoughts, opinions, belief, empathy. | <p>BLUE DESCRIPTORS</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of the subject matter of that enquiry (subject knowledge)</p> | <p>RED DESCRIPTORS</p> <p>Skills of evaluation and critical thinking in relation to the big enquiry question</p> |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>End of Key Stage 1 (Year 2, Age 7, ‘old’ Level 2)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can tell you / talk about what concepts like belonging, commitment, kindness, forgiveness mean to me in my world I can verbalise and / or express my own thoughts | <p>I can recall facts about the religions / beliefs I have studied, begin to use the religious vocabulary and start to explain the significance and meaning of the facts, practices etc.</p> | <p>I can start to think through the enquiry question using some facts and am beginning to see there could be more than one answer.</p> |
| <p>End of LOWER key Stage 2 (Year 4, Age 9, ‘old’ Level 3)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can tell you / talk about the concept / belief e.g. belonging and start to relate this to the people I am studying e.g. Jews. I can express my own opinions and start to support them with rationale. | <p>I can recall facts about religions I have studied, select the facts that are most significant to the enquiry and start to explain their relevance / importance.</p> | <p>I can apply my knowledge to the enquiry question and give an answer supported by one or more facts.</p> |
| <p>End of Key Stage 2 (Year 6, Age 11, ‘old’ Level 4)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can explain how the concept / belief e.g. forgiveness resonates in my own life and can also see this might be different for other people because of their religion/beliefs I can express my own thoughts etc having reflected on them in relation to other people’s. | <p>I can recall facts about religions and explain differences in practice and interpretation within and between religions / belief systems.</p> | <p>I can weigh up evidence and different arguments / aspects relevant to the enquiry question and express my answer, supported with evidence / rationale.</p> |

There are 3 age-related expectation descriptors for each enquiry in each year group. These expectations (working AT, TOWARDS and BEYOND) give guidance for assessing each of the 3 aspects of learning involved and made explicit in Discovery RE. Schools can, of course, use the language of their choice to describe these expectations (e.g. developing, secure, exceeding) in order to ensure RE is in line with the school’s system.

The 3 aspects of learning are colour-coded:

Green: personal resonance with or reflection on...

Blue: knowledge and understanding of...

Red: evaluation/critical thinking in relation to the enquiry question.

This colour coding runs through the planning and activity sheets so the teacher can see which activity is focused on which aspect of learning, and follow this through in the expectation descriptors (Working TOWARDS, Working AT and Working BEYOND) and in the exemplification. This will make it easier to link teaching with learning outcomes, as RE is a complex subject to assess.



2. Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Discovery RE, with its enquiry model, is well suited to be a key contributor to this process. Each enquiry has a big enquiry question: e.g. What is the best way for a Sikh to show commitment to God? and this is explored with a 4-step process:

Engagement (How can I relate to the underpinning concept in my own world?)

Investigation (What do I need to learn about the religion in order to answer the big question?)

Evaluation (How well can I apply this knowledge to the big question using critical thinking/ evaluation skills?)

Expression (Can I express what difference this enquiry has made to me, my thinking and my starting point?)

Discovery RE belief is that using an enquiry-based model well, children's critical thinking skills can be developed, their motivation to learn increased, and their knowledge and understanding of, and empathy with people and their beliefs, religious or otherwise, will be enhanced.

Further evidence of how Discovery RE can contribute to pupils engagement can be found on the website www.discoveryschemeofwork.com

3. Teaching and learning experiences

Discovery RE uses a range of teaching styles to engage the pupils, focusing upon high expectations in a structured progressive scheme of work. An example of this is the planning for Christmas which highlights the progression, challenge and high expectation of pupils.

Theme: Christmas

Concept: Incarnation

Reception: Key Question – What is Christmas?

Year 1: Key Question – What gifts might Christians in my town have given Jesus if he had been born here rather than in Bethlehem?

Year 2: Key Question – Why do Christians believe God gave Jesus to the world?

Year 3: Key Question – Has Christmas lost its true meaning?

Year 4: Key Question – What is the most significant part of the nativity story for Christians today?

Year 5: Key Question – Is the Christmas story true?

Year 6: Key Question – How significant is it that Mary was Jesus' mother?
Do Christmas celebrations and traditions help Christians understand who Jesus was and why he was born?



4. Care, support and guidance

Discovery RE (as highlighted above) uses a colour-coded assessment system, end of key stage age-related expectations for KS1, lower KS2 and upper KS2. There are 3 age-related expectation descriptors for each enquiry in each year group. These expectations (working AT, TOWARDS and BEYOND) give guidance for assessing each of the 3 aspects of learning involved and made explicit in Discovery RE. Schools can, of course, use the language of their choice to describe these expectations (e.g. developing, secure, exceeding) in order to ensure RE is in line with the school's system.

5. Leadership and management

Discovery RE has a clear strategic approach to the teaching of Religious Education with the importance of Religious Education being that "religion provokes and answers questions about what it means to be human arising out of and relating to different spiritual and cultural traditions. As all religions are concerned with human transformation, religion enables its adherents to understand the world in terms of a transcendent dimension to life. Consequently religious education is a focus within the curriculum for:

- Provoking challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, issues of right and wrong, the nature or reality, beliefs about God and what it means to be human.
- Developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions, and other world views, which offer answers to such questions.
- Enhancing pupils' awareness and understanding of religious beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression, as well as the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.
- Offering opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development by encouraging pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and question of meaning. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.
- Encouraging pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging and enabling them to flourish individually within their communities, as citizens in a plural society and global community.
- Developing respect and sensitivity to others, in particular those with faiths and beliefs different from their own, to combat prejudice and promote discernment. Religious education thus has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and life-long learning." (4th Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Wolverhampton).

By investing in Discovery RE schools are purchasing a resource that is tried and tested which has a track record of improving Religious Education provision in schools. Our research shows that 94.5% of the Church of England schools using Discovery RE have gained 'good' or 'outstanding' grades in the SIAMS Reports since implementing Discovery RE. Discovery RE is not just for Church school is for all schools and further Discovery RE Success Stories can be found on the website <https://discoveryschemeofwork.com/news/success-stories/>

Discovery RE has a commitment to free update policy. In reality it means that Discovery RE has a 'Resources Pledge'. We regularly update the website, booklist and BBC Learning Clips suggested in planning, to ensure availability. Please see www.discoveryschemeofwork.com click on resources and to let us know if you find a link has been moved and we will source an alternative for you as soon as possible.



Teacher's Workload

In light of the document entitled, 'Reducing Workload A Guide for Teachers & Headteachers' (Reference www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Reducing%20workload%20-%20English%20poster.pdf) Discovery RE supports teacher by providing them with having "high quality resources and schemes of work in place and ensure that they are easily accessible." This is supported through independent evaluation and evidence collated from a study of the impact of Discovery RE upon English schools. The principles can be applied to Wales.

As stated earlier, Discovery RE studies Christianity in every year group with a spiral developmental approach, Christmas and Easter being given different treatment each year to deepen understanding.

Most year groups then have a choice of which other religion to study alongside Christianity, meaning that it is possible to enable children to encounter all 6 principal religions by the end of Key Stage 2 (11 years old)

Year 1 Christianity plus Judaism

Year 2 Christianity plus Judaism OR Islam

Year 3 Christianity plus Hinduism OR Sikhism

Year 4 Christianity plus Judaism OR Buddhism

Year 5 Christianity plus Hinduism OR Sikhism (whichever was not taught in Year 3)

Year 6 Christianity plus Islam

As Discovery RE is medium term planning it is perfectly possible to move planning between adjacent year groups and differentiate accordingly. If this is done then all the enquiries for the specific religion should be moved to the other year group, not just one or two.

Discovery RE is a thoughtful and creative set of RE planning for the whole Primary school, Reception to Year 6. We hope it makes teachers' lives easier and short-cuts the planning process, freeing them to design exciting and challenging teaching/learning activities for each lesson/enquiry.

Discovery RE and Digital Competency Framework

A separate document entitled 'Digital Competency Framework links to enhance the enquiry approach of Discovery RE' has been written highlighting where Discovery RE links to the development of ICT skills.

Training implications of the new Welsh Curriculum

The new Welsh curriculum places great emphasis on professional learning and Discovery RE can support this process to allow schools to become learning organisations, creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff.

Discovery RE provides a commitment to delivering high quality training for teachers from experienced consultants. When you purchase Discovery RE, a training package is available, which will up skill and equip teachers to teach the new curriculum. Discovery RE offer a website to Discovery RE users as an ongoing hub of support. People are welcome to contribute. Termly newsletters, fresh articles and additional resources are added regularly. Alerts are sent out via email.



We do our best to offer ongoing support to schools using Discovery RE by:

- Offering each school a mentor, always on hand to answer any questions and offer support and advice
- Giving password-protected access to the Discovery RE Community Area on the website (the login details will be sent via email)
- Termly newsletters including updates and more teaching/learning ideas

Conclusion

Our belief is that, using an enquiry-based model well, children's critical thinking skills can be developed, their motivation to learn increased, and their knowledge and understanding of, and empathy with people and their beliefs, religious or otherwise, will be enhanced.

This approach takes very seriously the philosophy that children are free to make their own choices and decisions concerning religion and belief. RE does not try to persuade but rather to inform and develop the skills with which evaluation can take place.

Discovery RE uses a four-step enquiry model - The four steps are: Engagement, Investigation, Evaluation and Expression

These steps allow for an enquiry based learning experience that starts in the child's own world, takes them on a journey into the world of religion and challenges them to think evaluatively about big questions, before reflecting on and expressing their own thoughts. It lends itself to independent work, small and whole group work and a wide range of exciting teaching and learning opportunities. Discovery RE embraces the need to challenge and extend children individually whilst encouraging skills of reflection and empathy.

Discovery RE is a thoughtful and creative set of RE planning for the whole Primary school, F1/2 to Year 6. We hope it makes teachers' lives easier and short-cuts the planning process, freeing them to design exciting and challenging teaching/learning activities for each lesson/enquiry.

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