

GATEWAY DOCUMENT 3.4

Effective collaboration with parents/carers over the ethos of RE and the issues it raises

WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

Students have values that come partly from homes and families. Any teaching in RE must take this into account and try to build synergies between discussions at home and in school. Teachers should try to make it clear to parents that RE actively promotes values of truth, justice and respect for all – key elements of *REsilience*. If parents are kept informed about RE they are more likely to engage in discussions with their children, thereby bringing an extra dimension to students' understanding of RE-related issues, including contentious ones.

KEY QUESTIONS

What classroom challenges might arise in RE?

Working in harmony with some parents/carers may be difficult and, in some instances, seem impossible because some parents:

- may lack confidence in the ability of teachers to teach accurately about religious traditions they are not members of and have not studied in any great depth;
- may be suspicious of schools and a society that seems hostile to religious and moral values;
- may express negative or racist views about certain religious/cultural groups;
- may not wish their children to learn about faiths/cultures other than their own.

Also, some students may be members of families who hold views at variance with the mainstream orthodoxy within their wider religious community.

How can teachers address such challenges?

The most important principle is to avoid disengagement from parents, even when their views and attitudes may be at odds with the aims of RE.

Some of the tactics that can be helpful in addressing the challenges are to:

- clarify any possible misunderstandings about RE, e.g. that it is educational and not confessional (the *Code of Practice for Teachers of RE* could be a useful resource here). However, it must be understood that for some families the very fact of RE's impartial and pluralist approach will cause it to be seen as hostile to the true religion as defined by a that family;
- give consideration to students' varied interests, learning styles and preferences to design learning experiences which encourage them to think for themselves;
- discuss religious beliefs and practices with parents and carers (when appropriate);
- invite parents/carers to key RE events in school, including visits out to places of worship;
- set up informative RE displays at open days and parents' evenings
- encourage the parents/carers of different students to discuss RE issues together.

NEXT STEPS

Signposts for further reading

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/_arc_SOP/Page8/DCSF-00804-2008

Learning together to be safe. A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism, DCSF (Please note: the document is prefaced with the statement that this publication should not be considered to reflect current policy or guidance)

RE in English Schools: Non-statutory Guidance (2010)

www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/subjects/a0064886/religious-education-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010

Signposts for further resources

<http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/content/blogcategory/50/80/> *Everyone matters in the classroom. A practice code for teachers of RE* (2009) RE Council of England and Wales.

www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR013.pdf Engaging Effectively with Black and Minority Ethnic Parents in Children's and Parents' Services:

<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-engaging-young-muslims-in-learning.pdf> Engaging young Muslims in learning, Learning Skills Council.

Signposts for further action

The school should consider:

- learning about the possible tensions within and between the communities served by the school;

- having a clear policy for RE which is available for parents/carers, outlining what is taught as well as parents' right of withdrawal (see *RE in English schools. Non-statutory guidance* above);
- the possibility of inviting parents to contribute to RE lessons, whether they are members of faith communities or have no religious belief, if they are willing to share their experiences as appropriate.

Parents need to be clear that the ethos and values of all maintained schools should reflect a commitment to work in the best interests of the students at the school and the local community and this involves sensitivity towards and responsiveness to the religious and cultural diversity of students, their families and the wider local community.