

# ➤ An introduction to assessment in RE in primary schools

Often when I talk to RE subject leaders in primary schools they tell me that they don't assess in RE. Generally this is not true; teachers in their schools are giving feedback to pupils regularly about their learning in RE. What they mean is that they don't have a formal accountability system for recording progress in RE. Feeding back to pupils is the first and most important step in RE and from this accountability systems can follow.

## What matters most

The purpose of assessment in primary RE is to ensure that pupils improve what they know, understand and can do regarding the different aspects of RE they are studying. There are different ways of achieving this depending on whether you are teaching 5- or 9-year-olds. Whatever strategies are being employed it is the formative strategies, those that go on in the classroom, that are of most importance.

In order to support the assessment conversations that go on in the classroom each class teacher needs to be confident of what they are teaching. The key parts of a unit of work, what a pupil needs to know, understand and do, need to be understood by the teacher. This enables them to plan successfully and also to adapt their planning and teaching to respond to the assessment information they are receiving from individual pupils and their class as a whole.

## A series of strategies

There are a whole series of strategies that teachers use in order to formatively assess in the classroom, to ensure that pupils know what they can do and what they need to do next. Teachers need to ensure

pupils understand what they need to do, perhaps by sharing outcomes and success criteria, and find different ways of then eliciting evidence of achievement, perhaps through discussion, targeted questioning, listening in to small-group work, marking, and/or low-stakes testing – all the things that teachers do naturally every lesson. Strategies that are used need to be realistic and not time-consuming, part of everyday teaching and learning.

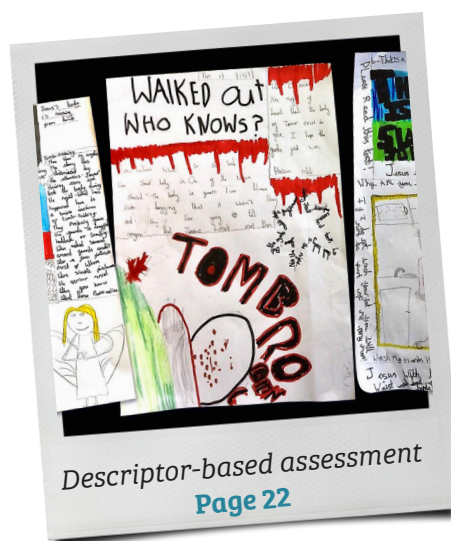
Summative assessment, or assessment for accountability, does have a part to play in the assessment of primary RE but it should be a secondary concern to the formative assessment in the classroom. Formative assessment should be embedded as a first priority. Summative assessment in primary RE is a way of looking at pupil progress over time, of ensuring that no significant groups or classes are falling behind and that pupils are on track to achieve unit or end-of-year or end-of-key-stage outcomes.

Historically there has been a danger that when making a judgement on a pupil's progress in RE, teachers have been unsure how to judge pupils and have ended up making judgements based on a pupil's ability in English. If teachers are confident in what needs to be learnt in a unit and have been informally using lots of formative assessment strategies as part of everyday teaching and learning, putting information into a summative assessment system should not be an issue. The teacher can use their knowledge of the pupils and their professional judgement to record how pupils are achieving.

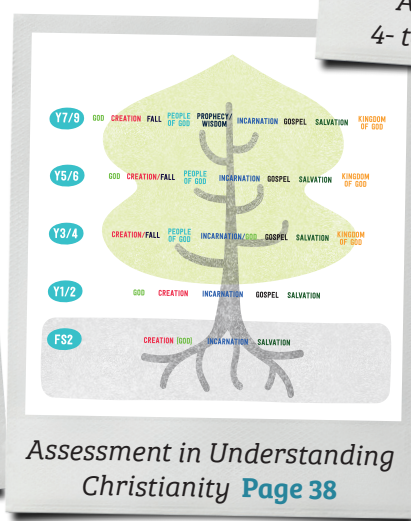
Most primary school RE currently uses a descriptor-based system. Bearing in mind the purposes of summative assessment in RE in the primary school, a simple system seems to be wisest. There are several suggestions in the rest of the book but I favour a system that allows teachers to use the assessment language used by other subjects in the school, e.g. emerging, expected and exceeding; or beginning, working within and secure; or entering, developing and secure. At the end of a unit of work simply ask teachers to use what they know about how pupils have achieved in this unit and make a judgement on their learning against the unit outcomes. On one piece of paper or a spreadsheet record the names of pupils against each of your categories, e.g. *emerging*, *expected* or *exceeding*, in relation to that unit of work. This is a quick record that enables a subject leader to gain a picture of the whole school. The subject leader should then sample by choosing one or two teachers to talk to and ask about one or two pupils, looking at their work and discussing them with the teacher.

## Using this book

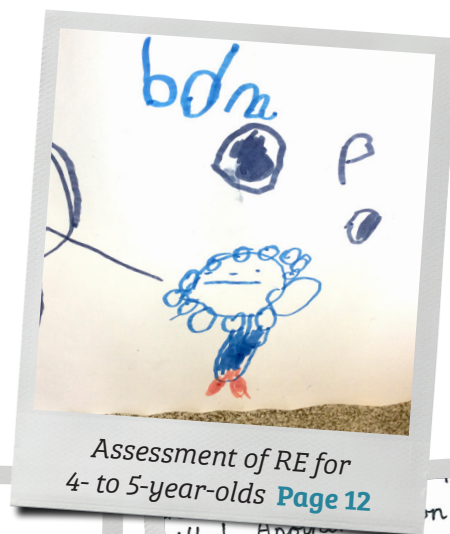
As you peruse the strategies outlined by different teachers in the rest of this book you will find a variety for both formative and summative RE that are currently being used in schools and classrooms. Consider the examples in the light of your own RE assessment needs; weigh up the different systems and consider how they might work in your own school. Don't be tempted to focus only on the chapters written by primary teachers; we have much to learn by looking at methods used by different phases.



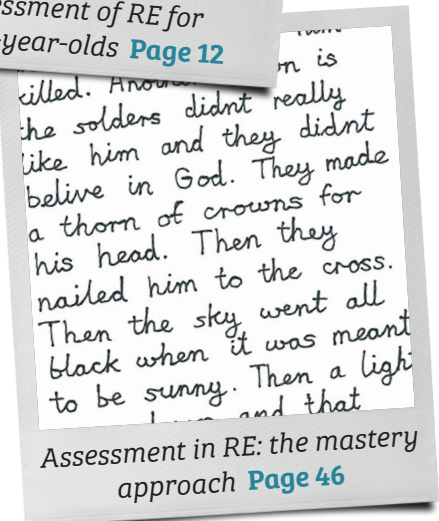
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