

➤ RE in Action: the impacts of good teaching and learning

Introduction: a showcase for good RE

This book intends to provide all teachers of RE with some interesting examples of practice from the 'final user' in RE: the pupil.

Wouldn't it be good to see examples of children aged 4–14 doing work in RE that enabled them to gather rich knowledge of different religions? Wouldn't it be good to look at pupils' work that clearly showed what progress looks like in the subject? Wouldn't it be good to see how our age-related expectations and outcomes for RE translate into actual examples of what children write in RE? Wouldn't it be good to show inspectors that our school RE teachers and leaders are confident and clear in the ways in which they describe the impacts of their teaching? Potentially, this book contributes to all these key areas.

The book intends to address some longstanding issues in RE around achievement and assessment. It does so through the exploration of over 40 pieces of pupils' work and through the analysis of the kinds of learning tasks that have enabled these pupils to demonstrate their achievements. You will also find pointers for how teachers can suggest meaningful ways in which pupils might further develop their knowledge, understanding and engagement.

In recent years, teachers of RE have been given no active leadership from the Department for Education (DfE) about how to assess the subject, and this has led to very diverse approaches to all the big questions about outcomes, achievement, marking, recording and reporting RE. Of course, in a short book like this it isn't possible to solve these complex issues, but by focusing on individual pieces of work we intend to show what good RE looks like in ways that will make all teachers of the subject think carefully and reflect on their own practices. RE Today also publishes *Assessment in RE: A Practical Guide*, edited by Fiona Moss and Stephen Pett (ISBN: 9781910261293).

What kinds of examples? Variety, balance, learning, creativity

The work we have chosen here is very varied. From pupils aged 4–14+, and from dozens of different schools all over the country, the items we selected reflect the wide scope of RE: work about Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jewish people and non-religious people, as well as some examples on ethical and philosophical themes, is included. There is a lot of boys' work, and a lot of girls' work. Some of the work samples come from within different faith communities, and other examples are from outside any faith. Some of the case studies are very much about the skills of reasoning and argument; others look at reflective, creative and expressive skills applied to RE. Some of the material is focused on developing key disciplinary knowledge. We have taken a great interest in what pupils do with the rich knowledge offered in the RE classroom, and also in the skills of personal engagement and expression that they build and use through RE. The writing team is very aware of the diversity of teaching styles, school settings and syllabuses that have led to these examples being produced, and we think that is an asset to the book. Some teachers may react to some of the items by saying, 'I would never do that.' Fine – those may be the examples from which you can learn the most.

It's also really significant that these are not all excellent examples of RE. We have chosen some where the age-related standards with which we work have been exceeded by young people who are very capable. But we also feature a lot of work that is 'ordinary good' RE. This is important: sometimes projects that seek to exemplify RE can over-reach the possible achievement of most children and young people. We hope you will see that we have tried to 'keep it real' in this book, and showcase good practice that is possible in the day-to-day world of classroom life and at the sharp end of RE where time is tight, specialist staffing not all it could be and everything has to be done in less than an hour a week.

Readers will see that we do not feature tests here. Although many of our interests in creating the book have been to do with assessment, we don't take the view that testing pupils in RE is where most help is needed in the subject. Setting a simple low-stakes knowledge test is a straightforward thing to do, and teachers may need less help with this than other aspects of the questions about achievement. Instead, here we hope you will find and recognise deep learning that matches the ambition of RE to challenge pupils' thinking, to urge them to put their knowledge of religions and worldviews to use in expressing ideas clearly and connecting their learning to widening and deepening understandings of the place of religion and belief in the modern world.

No good RE unless pupils think for themselves

This all means that one key feature of the book is its focus on lesson ideas and learning activities as well as on outcomes and impacts. We hope readers will see clear progression in RE through the examples here, but we think it likely that teachers may gain as much from reading our examples in relation to the business of creating well-formed tasks. To give one example, we have some work from pupils responding to their introduction to Old Testament Prophets. It would be straightforward, and not without merit, to ask them to create a factsheet or knowledge organiser of their own to include the 20 most significant pieces of information they had learned about a prophet or prophets. But the example featured here uses the question 'Does the world need prophets today?' This question can't be answered well without a rich contextual knowledge, but its premise is that pupils will deploy their knowledge in a judgement task, without a final correct answer, engaging with what they have learnt in ways that demand much of their own thinking.

There is a school in Derbyshire where the RE departmental motto is 'You haven't finished your RE until you have given reasons for your own view.' When we consider questions about RE outcomes, impacts and assessment, as this book certainly does, then it is easy for the debates to slither towards scores, data and statistics. This book sees achievement in RE as characterised, above all, by thoughtfulness from pupils, and seeks to describe the impact of the subject in the light of that key insight.

Is there time to assess RE well?

Of course the questions about marking, recording and reporting on the subject are still valid and significant, and schools are finding fresh, lightweight, fair and manageable routes to credit what every pupil achieves in the subject that are not data-heavy or over-dependent on marking huge volumes of work. Primary teachers, who have to mark 30 pupils' work in ten subjects, or secondary teachers, who may see many hundreds of RE pupils each week, well know that some systems of recording achievement built for English or Maths are top-heavy to the point of impossibility for subjects like RE – or Music, PE or Art. Subject leaders need to be assertive about what is valid, fair and manageable here.

Outcomes and impact: what have we used to describe achievements?

At RE Today we have wide experience in RE project work (for example, in Understanding Christianity) and in writing agreed syllabuses (in partnership with over 50 SACREs in recent years). From all of our work in this area, we have developed approaches to describing RE achievement that fit smoothly with the current language of inspection ('What is the impact of learning?' is the inspectors' key question). We seek to balance the knowledge pupils gain in RE with the development of their skills in handling information, understanding diversity and expressing reasoned views of their own. This has led us to include in the book the grid on the next page, which specifies outcomes for most pupils for the ages of 7, 9, 11 and 14, in a progressed way. We have used this grid in our descriptions of the achievements of pupils throughout the book, and we offer it to teachers as a well-worked and carefully designed description of the impacts in learning that RE seeks where standards are good and planning is secure.

Support for the book and the processes of judging the impact of RE

We have created an online support section of the RE Today website for this book, which showcases the examples in the book in ways that can be shared with colleagues. PowerPoint sequences and paper handouts of key sections of the book are available for purchasers to use in their own schools. For details of this, see www.retoday.org.uk/reinaction