

What does highly effective RE look like?

The SIAMS schedule (2013) for VA schools asks the question:

How effective is the religious education?

I worked with a group of local leaders in RE who have either had their RE judged outstanding in a SIAMS inspection and/or have the RE Quality Mark to try and distil the key aspects of practice that characterise the most effective RE in Church of England schools.

To begin with teachers talked about their own practice sharing from their own perspectives about what makes for highly effective RE. They were then asked to look at some SIAMS inspection reports to draw out the characteristics of outstanding practice. Here are their top three observations!

1. The leadership, including headteacher and governors are fully on board in terms of the importance of RE

The teachers explained that being an enthusiastic subject leader was not enough! They felt that even if they were passionate about RE and attended CPD, that unless the leadership of the school were supportive and understood the importance of the subject, then the most effective practice would not occur. Some felt that high effective RE occurred when headteachers and governors understood the purpose of RE (in terms of religious literacy) and when they could see the huge contribution of RE to whole school issues such as literacy. Many felt that unless the leadership team valued RE, then they would be unable to access CPD or have a budget for new resources.

2. RE is clearly defined in terms of its purpose and contributes to the wider ethos of the school

The teachers felt that RE should promote the Christian values of the school, and thus link with other aspects of school life. However, they also said that the top priority for RE was for pupils to have a good understanding of religion and belief. Thus, there was a balance between ensuring RE was primarily about religious literacy, but also contributing to the Christian ethos through for example RE Days and links to collective worship. They felt sometimes this was hard to achieve.

3. The enquiry based process is understood by both teachers and pupils allowing for deep exploration of religions and beliefs

The teachers felt strongly that the best approach to pedagogy in RE was one based on an enquiry approach. They felt that this approach enabled theological and philosophical questioning to take place, and that the social outworking of religions and beliefs could be explored. They talked about the enquiry process enabling children to become confident and eloquent in talking about religion and belief. They gave examples of how the enquiry process allowed in depth exploration to take place and moved away from superficial learning. One characteristic of schools with the Gold RE Quality Mark or an outstanding SIAMS grade for RE was that pupils were able to talk about the learning journey they were taking part in for RE. They were able to articulate how they were approaching a 'Big Question' and the evidence they were compiling through an enquiry to be able to answer the question.

Below are some examples of ways in which the enquiry process can be recorded. These are taken from Corton CE Primary, Dereham CE Infant and The Bishop's CE Primary. There are more examples online here:

http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/files/1314/6850/7615/Impact_PPT_June_2016.pdf



Dereham Infants records the learning journey in scrapbooks. Children's responses are stuck into the class book.

At The Bishop's they have created RE working walls which tell the learning journey story. Pupils work is added through the enquiry, and the wall is used as a stimulus for discussion in the engage stage of the process.



At Corton, the stages of the enquiry process are clearly displayed, with samples of pupil work to show how the learning journey has progressed.