

Religious Studies Curriculum Summary

From the earliest years, children are naturally curious about the “Big Questions”. Religious Studies at St John’s provides children with the opportunity to think about these questions and to discover the answers given to them by religious faiths and philosophical thinkers through the centuries. The discursive approach employed in the RS classroom offers children the freedom to explore and to develop their views as well as a vocabulary to express them. Nurturing broad-mindedness, tolerance, and critical-thinking is at the heart of the RS curriculum.

Religious Studies at St John’s aims to:

- Help children to consider different viewpoints and to respect each other, showing kindness, tolerance and interest in the beliefs and opinions of others
- Foster in children a reflective attitude towards values and opinions, helping them to think critically about the moral and spiritual values that they and others hold
- Encourage children to explore, evaluate and express their own sense of identity and belief as well as their responses to ‘big questions’
- Develop critical and flexible thinking skills in order to enable children to justify their opinions as well as to be open to changing their opinion as their understanding develops
- Help children to understand the world in which we live and to recognise religion, culture and society as important ways of expressing and understanding human experience
- Provoke challenging questions about the meaning of life, and give children an opportunity and language with which to explore these questions

RS is taught through discussion, exploration, debate, role-play, story-telling, visits to places of religious importance and the examination of religious artefacts.

Byron House

At Byron House the pupils learn the key concepts and ideas of a different world religion each year as well as other RS-related topics, for example “Caring for our world”, “What is god?” or “People of faith”. The learning can fall in any of the three terms and may change each year, depending on what the other topics covered are. Teachers are enabled to change the topics learnt in order to make a co-curricular experience for the children and to help their learning in RS tie in with their learning in other areas, particularly pupil led topics. The religion studied in each year is used as a grounding for the other topics covered.

Kindergarten

In Kindergarten (KG) religious stories and beliefs are taught and discussed through Assemblies, story time, and through following the children’s interests and responding to their questions. The main religion discovered is Christianity.

Transition 1 (T1) - Judaism

Skills

Understanding Others

- Can recount elements of religious, spiritual and moral stories and other forms of religious expression
- Can recognise and name features of religions and beliefs
- Can recognise religious objects/places/symbols and use some technical words correctly
- Can recognise some religious and cultural symbols

Thinking Ethically

- Can recognise that life involves choices between right and wrong and identify what is of value and concern to themselves

Thinking Critically

- Asks questions about religion and beliefs, making links between their own and other's responses

Expressing Belief

- Can recognise aspects of life which they find intriguing and talk about things that are important to them
- Can say what is important in their own lives using religious material as a starting point and describing their feelings

Transition 2 (T2) - Sikhism

Skills

Understanding Others

- Can describe some religious ideas from stories and some basic religious beliefs, teachings and events
- Can identify how religion and belief is expressed in different ways
- Can describe some religious objects/places/symbols and talk about their significance
- Can talk about cultures other than their own

Thinking Ethically

- Can identify the effects of actions on others when considering moral dilemmas
- Responds sensitively to the values and concerns of others, including those with a faith, in relation to matters of right and wrong

Thinking Critically

- Can identify similarities and differences in features of religions and beliefs.
- Can ask a range of questions about puzzling aspects of life and experience; suggest answers, including religious ones and understand that some questions are difficult to answer.

Expressing Belief

- Can describe experiences and feelings they share with others, including characters in a story with meaning
- Can describe their own beliefs, religious or otherwise

Form 1 - Islam

Skills

Understanding Others

- Can demonstrate knowledge of key religious beliefs, ideas and teachings and their importance
- Can identify different religious practices that demonstrate belonging and know that some practices are characteristic of more than one religion
- Can demonstrate some knowledge of the functions of objects/places/symbols e.g. sacred texts within religious practices and lifestyles
- Can demonstrate empathy towards different socio-cultural backgrounds and people

Thinking Ethically

- Can explain how common/shared beliefs of what is right and wrong affect behaviour
- Can make links between values and commitments and their own attitudes or behaviour

Thinking Critically

- Can identify similarities and differences between religions and beliefs
- Can identify religious symbolism and make links between religious symbols, language and stories and the beliefs or ideas that underlie them

Expressing Belief

- Can identify questions to which there are no universally agreed answers and compare their own and other people's ideas about these
- Are able to talk about the meanings of Christian stories and how they relate to their own experience

Form 2 - Hinduism

Skills

Understanding Others

- Can describe the key beliefs and teachings of the religions studied and the impact of beliefs on individuals, groups and communities
- Can show understanding of ways of belonging to religions, through practices and behaviours
- Can identify religious symbolism and show, using technical terminology, how religious beliefs, ideas and feelings can be expressed in a variety of forms, giving meaning for some symbols, stories and language
- Can describe different socio-cultural forms of religious expression

Thinking Ethically

- Can link beliefs and actions in their own and others' lives and ask questions about matters of right and wrong
- Can suggest answers to ethical questions that show an understanding of moral and religious issues

Thinking Critically

- Can describe similarities and differences within and between religions and beliefs
- Can identify and ask questions, including questions of faith, to which there are no universally agreed answers, suggesting their own answers, making reference to the teachings of religions studied

Expressing Belief

- Can make links between religious stories and their own experiences, considering their own response to key religious ideas (e.g. sacrifice)
- Can ask questions about the significant experiences of key figures from the religions studied and suggest answers from own and others' experiences

Form 3

Skills

Understanding Others

- Thinks about why people belong to a religion and uses examples from different religions to support their thinking
- Can use relevant religious vocabulary to describe different forms of religious, spiritual and moral expression
- Knows, and shows empathy for the fact, that religious practices can vary within a religion, based on different socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds
- Demonstrates knowledge of the function and significance of places/objects within religious practices.

Thinking Ethically

- Understands that different religions approach ethical questions differently
- Considers their own ethical stance in relation to what they are learning

Thinking Critically

- Can say what different practices and ways of life followers of religions have developed, commenting on similarities and differences between the world religions
- Considers others' opinions in relation to their own

Expressing Belief

- Asks questions about things that are important to them and others and suggest answers that relate to their own life

- Can reflect on their own beliefs in relation to the key beliefs and practices of the religion they are studying

Topics

In Form 3, children learn the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). One religion is learnt each term and the pupils link the different elements of each religion through the five key topics: Beliefs, Worship, Belonging, Holy Writings and Festivals. Learning is augmented by visits to places of worship or talks from practising members of the religion and linked to other subjects, such as Music.

Judaism

- Covenant relationship with God
- The Exodus
- Revelation through Moses; Ten Commandments
- Jewish heritage and history
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- The Synagogue
- The Torah
- Kosher and Shabbat Laws
- Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah

Christianity

- Creation, The Fall and Salvation
- Nicene Creed
- Different Christian denominations; their places and style of worship
- The Church
- The Bible
- Baptism
- Pilgrimage

Islam

- Tawhid – the Oneness of God
- 5 pillars of Islam
- Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
- The Qur'an
- The Mosque

Form 4

Skills

Understanding others

- Uses religious language effectively to discuss some of life's big questions, comparing different beliefs about these questions
- Uses religious and spiritual vocabulary to explain different forms of religious, spiritual and moral expression
- Can understand and discuss reasons for practices varying within religions, based on cultural, social and geographical influences
- Can compare and contrast the functions and significance of places/objects within a religion and between religions

Thinking Ethically

- Can discuss ethical matters, using religious sources to support their discussion
- Compares and contrasts their own ethical thinking with that of the religions they have studied

Thinking Critically

- Can explain how beliefs have had different effects on individuals, communities and societies
- Can be critical of others' opinions and use evidence when arguing to support their own opinions

Expressing belief

- Offers personal views, with reasons, on what religion and spirituality mean to them
- Can reflect on personal views about different religious and spiritual beliefs and teachings

Topics

In Form 4, children learn the beliefs and practices of three Eastern religions; Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Again, one religion is learnt each term through the five key topics: Beliefs, Worship, Belonging, Holy Writings and Festivals, and learning is augmented by visits to places of worship or talks from practicing members of the religion. Pupils discuss links and draw contrasts between the beliefs and approaches of the different religions.

Hinduism

- Brahman and the trimurti
- Polytheism
- Atman, samsara, karma, moksha
- Puja - at home and in the mandir
- The Ramayana
- Samskaras - naming ceremony and marriage
- Diwali

Buddhism

- The Story of Siddhartha Gautama
- Four Noble Truths
- Eightfold Path
- Meditation and Monks
- Viharas and Shrines
- Wesak

Sikhism

- The Story of Guru Nanak
- The Caste System
- Sewa
- The Khalsa
- 5 Ks
- Gurdwara
- Vaisakhi
- Is reincarnation real?

Form 5 - 6

In order to prepare those pupils who will sit the examination for senior school, Form 5 begins the Common Entrance Theology, Philosophy and Religion (TPR) syllabus and it is finished in Form 6. The syllabus requires pupils to study only two of the three elements; we cover Theology and Philosophy. The majority of pupils will not sit the examination so the syllabus is enhanced in order to create a more discursive, interactive and independent learning experience using debate, research and independent project work.

In Theology, pupils learn to analyse the Bible from a Christian perspective, understanding Christian views about God's nature, his relationship with the world and human responses to God. Pupils are also encouraged to compare this perspective with their own reading of the texts. Key themes from the stories are then linked to 'big questions', such as the purpose of punishment. In Philosophy, the pupils explore the lives and thoughts of some key influential thinkers, discussing the theories and questions raised. An emphasis is put on tolerance and critical analysis of differing views.

Form 5 Skills

Understanding Others

- Understands and is tolerant of how belonging to a religion may mean different things to different people and may create different beliefs and behaviours
- Can use religious and philosophical vocabulary to show clear understanding of how and why different people express their religious and ethical beliefs
- Demonstrates an understanding of how and why religious, philosophical and ethical beliefs and behaviours can change over time
- Recognises key figures and themes of religious texts and can explain how and why these themes are represented

Thinking Ethically

- Can take into account different ways of seeing the world, environment, society and religions
- Can evaluate their own opinions on ethical dilemmas

Thinking Critically

- Can evaluate different views and reach conclusions when considering big questions
- Can use evidence and examples effectively to support arguments or points made

Expressing Belief

- Expresses personal beliefs and opinions and justifies these opinions with evidence and explanation
- Examines how their belief compares to the beliefs expressed in the topics covered and considers opposing beliefs to their own

Form 5 Topics

- The creation - stewardship of the natural world
- Core critical writing skills
- The creation - religion and science
- The Fall - interpreting scripture
- Cain and Abel - crime and punishment
- The near sacrifice of Isaac – Biblical sacrifice, and the nature of sacrifice today and sacrificial lives
- Moses – vocation
- The Exodus and Passover
- Elijah at Mount Carmel - journalism and fake news
- David and Bathsheba – leadership and morality amongst those in the public eye
- Nathan’s Parable - prejudice and discrimination

Form 6 Skills

Understanding Others

- Can use varied evidence, arguments and examples to show their detailed knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of others
- Uses a wide philosophical vocabulary to show how different people express their religious, philosophical and ethical beliefs
- Can evaluate how different societies and cultures influence religious, philosophical and ethical thought

Thinking Ethically

- Can consider how someone's society, culture, religion or historical time might affect their actions
- Can change and justify their own opinions on ethical dilemmas using evidence and examples

Thinking Critically

- Considers a wide range of beliefs on identity, belonging, meaning, purpose and truth
- Effectively constructs arguments using evidence, examples and logical thinking progressions (e.g. If...then...) and can consider/dismiss counterarguments

Expressing Belief

- Can explain and justify their beliefs using a range of reasons, evidence, reflections and examples
- Can evaluate their own beliefs in light of new information and change or justify their belief accordingly

Form 6 Topics

- The Messiah – fulfillment of prophecies
- Miracles – nature of miracles, miracles claimed today, places such as Lourdes
- Parables - Jesus' ministry
- Plato's life and thought - truth, knowledge and political philosophy
- John Stuart Mill's life and thought - ethical decision-making; utilitarianism, deontology
- David Hume's life and thought - arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil
- Just War Theory - analysis of a chosen war
- Life and Death - euthanasia, abortion, quality vs sanctity of life

Contribution to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education

RS develops SMSC in a wide variety of ways, including:

- Understanding and exploration of a range of religious beliefs and practices
- Giving children a vocabulary with which to explore beliefs and values
- Teaching children about inspirational figures from around the world and how they have affected others
- Exploring moral questions from religious and other points of view
- Working collaboratively
- Listening to one another and respecting the opinions and beliefs of others
- Understanding how religious belief has shaped different communities