

Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (RPE) Curriculum Summary

From the earliest years, children are naturally curious about the “Big Questions”. RPE 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 RPE classroom offers children the freedom to explore and to develop their views, as well as vocabulary with which to express them. We promote a philosophical approach to teaching and learning and foster the skills of critical thinking throughout.

RPE 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

Core knowledge elements are interwoven with constant questioning, comparing and contrasting of the different belief systems that pupils study, considering how they approach “big questions” and current affairs. This promotes a holistic understanding of how faith, culture, history and geopolitical location can affect people’s beliefs and actions. Nurturing broad-mindedness, tolerance, and critical thinking is at the heart of the RPE curriculum. All the while, pupils are asked to reflect on their own beliefs. RPE is taught through discussion, exploration, debate, role-play, storytelling, visits to places of religious importance and the examination of religious artefacts. The knowledge of Christianity is a thread that runs through all year groups.

Pupils are assessed according to the four key skills in RPE: Knowledge; Understanding Others; Thinking Critically; Expressing Belief.

Pre-Prep

In the Pre-Prep RPE is referred to as “Religion and Worldviews” in order to reflect the nature of how it is taught to the children. Religious stories and beliefs are taught and discussed through assemblies, story time, and through following the children’s interests and responding to their question. The pupils learn the key concepts and ideas of at least one world religion each year as well as other RPE-related topics, for example “Caring for our world”, “What is god?”, “Why do we have rules?” or “What is right and wrong?”. The learning can fall in any of the three terms and may change each year and is often pupil-led. 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 Religion and Worldviews tie in with their learning in other areas. There are also clear links taught between the skills acquired in the RPE curriculum and the E4L curriculum. The religion studied each year is used as a grounding for the other topics:

Kindergarten – Christianity

T1 – Judaism

T2 - Islam

Prep School

Beyond Pre-Prep, the subject is referred to as RPE. Again, in order to reflect how it is taught. Across a year group, pupils will learn one or more major world religion, one discrete philosophical concept, and one ethical approach. They will learn about philosophers from different religious, cultural, and historical settings, and will consider how these philosophers approach the concepts that they are discussing.

Form 1 - Christianity; Metaphysics (Mind/Body); Life and Death/Eschatology; Sacred Stories

Skills

Knowledge

- Can describe the key beliefs, practices and places of worship of Christianity
- Can recall religious stories from a number of different religions, including Christianity
- Can discuss different approaches to life after death

Understanding Others

- Understands that not everybody agrees about what happens when we die
- Can consider how someone's belief about mind/body might affect their behaviours and practices
- Appreciates that many religions tell stories to explain their beliefs

Thinking Critically

- Can identify similarities and differences between religions and beliefs
- Can consider different views on a philosophical or ethical problem

Expressing Belief

- Can talk about the meanings of Christian stories and how they relate to their own experience as well as recount formative stories of their own experience.
- Asks questions about things that are important to them and others and suggest answers that relate to their own life
- Voices opinions on the topics covered

Form 2 – Sikhism; Social contract theory; Politics (Martin Luther King); Truth; Pilgrimage

Skills

Knowledge

- Can describe the key beliefs, practices and places of worship of Sikhism
- Can describe the Caste System used in Ancient Hindu culture and the racial segregation system that Martin Luther King opposed. Can recall an outline of MLK's life and work
- Can discuss different opinions on the nature and source of truth

Understanding Others

- Contemplates why people choose to follow religious practices
- Recognises that cultures and societies differ and change across geopolitical and historical periods
- Acknowledges that not everybody experiences the world with the same privileges

Thinking Critically

- Can describe similarities and differences within and between religions and beliefs
- Can evaluate the merits and flaws of different societal and ethical systems

Expressing Belief

- Reflects on their personal views about different beliefs and teachings
- Can identify and ask questions, to which there are no universally agreed answers, suggesting their own answers
- Expresses opinions on different societal and ethical ideas, giving reasons for their answers

Form 3 – Islam; Buddhism; Environmental ethics; Creation; Good/Evil

Skills

Knowledge

- Recognises the major environmental ethical stances and can apply them to different ethical dilemmas, particularly global warming and animal testing
- Can outline a number of creation stories from diverse religions and viewpoints
- Can describe the key beliefs, practices and places of worship of both Islam and Buddhism, and compare and contrast these elements

Understanding Others

- Knows, and shows empathy for the fact, that religious practices and beliefs can vary within a religion, based on different socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds
- Thinks about why people belong to a religion and uses examples from different religions to support their thinking
- Understands that different religions and belief systems approach ethical questions differently

Thinking Critically

- Can consider different views, including those that differ from their own, and reach conclusions when considering big questions
- Can identify ethical dilemmas and consider the rights and wrongs of different courses of action

Expressing Belief

- Examines how their beliefs compare to the beliefs expressed in the topics covered and considers opposing beliefs to their own
- Offers personal views, with personal experience as explanation
- Considers their own ethical stance in relation to what they are learning and expresses their opinion

Form 4 – Hinduism; Judaism; Prejudice and discrimination; Determinism; Ontology; Identity

Skills

Knowledge

- Understands what prejudice and discrimination are and can discuss different sorts of prejudice and discrimination
- Discusses different opinions on dualism/monism and can explain how this affects beliefs in an afterlife, free will and determinism
- Can describe the key beliefs, practices and places of worship of both Hinduism and Judaism, and compare and contrast these elements across all religions studied up to this point

Understanding others

- Can understand and discuss reasons for practices varying within religions, based on cultural, social and geographical influences
- Compares different reasons for believing different things
- Can explain how beliefs inform how people think about different ethical, societal and philosophical dilemmas

Thinking Critically

- Can be critical of others' opinions and use evidence when arguing to support their own opinions.
- Can identify ethical dilemmas and evaluate the rights and wrongs of different courses of action

Expressing belief

- Clearly expresses their own beliefs, using personal experience as explanation
- Compares and contrasts their own ethical thinking with that of the perspectives they have studied, articulating the differences

Form 5 – Christian theology; Atheism; Humanism; Utilitarianism; Arguments for the existence of God; Crime and punishment

Skills

Knowledge

- Identifies various religious and atheist views on creation, science, and arguments for/against the existence of God
- Can define the ethical theories of utilitarianism and deontology, and articulate how they may be applied to different ethical dilemmas
- Understands different aims of punishment and how different punishments fulfill these aims
- Can outline some different punishment philosophies implemented by different countries

Understanding Others

- Understands and is tolerant of how belonging to a religion or belief system may mean different things to different people and may create different beliefs and behaviours
- Can take into account different ways of seeing the world, environment, society and religions when forming arguments
- Demonstrates an understanding of how and why religious, philosophical and ethical beliefs and behaviours can change over time

Critical Thinking

- Can plan arguments and use evidence and examples effectively to support points made.
- Can apply different ethical theories to ethical questions

Expressing Belief

- Clearly articulates personal beliefs and opinions and justifies these opinions with evidence and explanation.
- Can evaluate the coherence of their own opinions on ethical dilemmas in relation to other philosophies.

Form 6 – Epistemology; Liberty; Life and death; Just War Theory; Politics; Problem of Evil

Skills

Knowledge

- Uses a wide philosophical vocabulary to define and explain Plato's, Descartes' and Locke's views on epistemology
- Can recall the Just War Criteria and examine how they apply to a war
- Can outline and explain Plato's allegory of the cave, discussing both truth and society, comparing it to the politics of the UK
- Can articulate John Stuart Mill's beliefs about liberty, perhaps referencing Hobbes and Rousseau

Understanding Others

- Can use varied evidence, arguments and examples to show their detailed knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of others
- Considers a wide range of beliefs on identity, belonging, meaning, purpose and truth
- Can consider how someone's society, culture, religion or historical time might affect their beliefs and actions

Critical Thinking

- Effectively constructs arguments using evidence, examples and logical thinking progressions (e.g. If...then...) and can consider/dismiss counterarguments
- Can use empirical data to support ethical theories when approaching ethical questions

Expressing Belief

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

Contribution to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education

RPE 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