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Engaging students in high quality and challenging religious education: Broughton Business and Enterprise College

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Brief description

This example shows how Broughton Business and Enterprise College actively involves students in their learning in religious education (RE) through an imaginative curriculum, high quality teaching and a lively programme of enrichment activities. Exemplars of students' work provide a flavour of their varied and exciting experiences.

Overview – the school's message

'Broughton is a friendly, family orientated school where children are provided with opportunities to experience the joy of success in a caring, dynamic environment. We have many shared beliefs and values which reflect our school culture and we are resolute in wanting the best for each and every child. And we have high standards and high expectations for all, from all.

RE is a fundamental part of the curriculum. It is essential because it allows students to develop enquiring minds and ask key questions related to beliefs, ethics and values. Students are encouraged to think about all aspects of living in a pluralistic society. We expect all our young people to leave with knowledge, skills and attitudes which will prepare them for their adult lives.'

Chris Morris, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

RE at Broughton Business and Enterprise College is a story of success. The [most recent Ofsted report](#) highlighted that: 'Students achieve very well in religious education which, as one student stated, "doesn't tell us what to believe, but makes us think about our values".' This success has been recognised through the award of a national [Gold Standard RE Quality Mark](#) in 2012.



Underpinning the success of RE are the [aims and vision](#) of the department. GCSE provision is excellent, and large numbers of students choose to take RE. Results are well above the national average; but success goes beyond the examination results. The key to achievement is that in RE, the student is at the heart of the

learning. Whether in the classroom, in reviewing and developing the curriculum, or in the provision of a wide range of enrichment opportunities – the student is central.

This high quality is reflected in the way the students describe a typical RE lesson. They highlight four key characteristics:

- **Everyone takes part.** A climate of trust has been created in which students feel confident about expressing their own ideas. They know the importance of thinking for themselves and respecting the opinions of others. Those with strong or no religious belief feel equally able to express their views. Students are given time and resources to ask questions and develop their thinking. On occasions, students become a team of 'experts' on a particular topic and then take responsibility for teaching others in the class. This often involves students with a faith background sharing their experience. Joanne Harris, Head of RE says: 'This makes it real, but it also allows students to see where there is diversity when representatives of the same faith give different responses.'
- **Relevance.** Learning involves looking at situations which affect students now or in their future. Current events from the media are used frequently, students are invited to take decisions about topics they want to explore and they have opportunities to work with local religious communities. Throughout, the students question and discuss their own experience and ideas.
- **The purpose is clear.** Each topic starts with a big question to investigate. Enquiry lies at the heart of the learning. As one student said: 'In RE we really understand what we are doing'. They know the teachers' motto: 'Don't just answer the question; question the answer'.
- **Learning is fun and challenging.** There are a wide variety of approaches to learning including: project work, creative activity, using poetry and visual stimuli, and designing social media pages. A strong emphasis is placed on learning as a



collaborative process and on questioning. As one student said: 'RE is no good if it is not challenging. If you just get facts about religion, you are not learning how to question and it's not proper RE if you don't question.'

How has this success been achieved?

Building on the whole-school focus on effective teaching and learning



RE has embraced the whole-school thinking about teaching and learning. Kagan approaches to collaborative learning ensure that 'students are participants and not recipients of learning'. The approach is embedded in the department's [statement on Teaching and Learning](#).

Using the resources of religion and belief to stimulate students to think

The core aim of Lancashire's locally agreed syllabus is at the heart of the school's practice:

To support students' personal search for meaning by engaging enquiry into the question "What is it to be human?" and exploring answers offered by religion and belief.'

An example of how this approach is introduced from the outset can be found in [this outstanding Year 7 lesson](#). The lesson came towards the end of a unit which had explored the question of 'Judaism: Is it more than just family, food and festivals?'

‘RE is different from other subjects because you’re questioning everything. You’re not doing well in RE if you’re not thinking.’

In drawing together their learning, the students were initially asked to contemplate what they considered to be most important to Jews. Using a series of prompt statements and a bull's eye target they worked in groups to prioritise the ideas. This involved drawing together their learning from the unit, with no right or wrong answers – but very high quality discussion of ideas. The second task asked them to decide which of four visual images linked to Judaism would best represent what they thought was most important.

Building on this evaluation task they considered the words of the Shema and, in particular, the phrase 'with all your soul' as a context for exploring their own ideas about the soul. Another set of evocative visual images were used to enable the students to offer a wide range of different opinions and reflections about how they would define their inner self.

Involving students in designing the curriculum

In promoting the idea that successful RE should involve students actively in their learning, the RE department took advantage of the launch of the revised Lancashire syllabus to work with a group of Year 9 students to 'co-construct' a [unit of work](#) on: [Can life can ever be perfect?](#), looking at the problem of suffering. The students were clear that they wanted to study real situations which would challenge them and help them get involved in the



enquiry. They also wanted opportunities to use their creativity to express their responses to the issue. The students used the planning model in the Lancashire syllabus and, as a result, they were able to get inside the logic of the syllabus itself and understand the distinctive model of enquiry. They then shared this with their peers so the approach was more widely understood.

This practice of involving students in the design of the curriculum has been extended further. One class of Year 8 boys decided they wanted to develop their own approach to the investigation of the key beliefs of Christianity by studying a range of different modern day expressions of the religion.

Providing good opportunities for learning outside the classroom

A key to the success of RE is the wealth of enrichment activities which are offered to students and the way these flow from and back into the classroom practice. The list of examples includes involvement with the following:

- RE Quality Mark (REQM) application – encouraging students to help with the preparation of the bid and the supporting documentation, and on the day of the REQM visit.
- Preston Forum of Faiths – students take part in an inter-faith week exhibition and a question and answer session with local faith representatives.
- Face to Faith Foundation – preparing for video-conferences with other schools around the world and discussing issues related to faith and belief, most recently with a school in Palestine. All students from Year 9 have the opportunity to be involved in an on-line forum. The work is linked to [another unit of work](#) planned jointly with the students on [Religion: A force for peace or a cause for conflict?](#)
- Lancashire SACRE's Youth Voice – students help to review the syllabus and develop ideas about ways of promoting RE with students and parents and carers. They are designing workshops for a forthcoming Youth Conference by developing podcasts of interviews with members of local faith communities on: 'Why RE matters', and 'Where people find their source of spirituality'.
- Anne Frank exhibition - Year 8 students work as ambassador guides showing primary pupils around the exhibition.
- Participation in the annual National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) Spirited Arts competitions.

An effective model of curriculum provision



The RE curriculum is well designed to ensure that it supports the overall approach to the subject by allowing for genuine challenge and sustained enquiry.

In [Year 7](#), RE is taught as part of a Humanities programme with RE-focussed units taught for five lessons a week for two weeks every half-term. One teacher leads all three humanities subjects with their class. In addition there are integrated units to which RE makes a contribution. In [Year 8](#), the three humanities

subjects are taught separately with specialist staff on a carousel programme. Students spend four hours a week on RE for three weeks, four times a year. And in Year 9, students have the more traditional one period a week of RE across the whole year.

At Key Stage 4, the full-course GCSE is offered in an open-option process and take-up is good. All students have a non-examined core programme, which has proved popular. Because of the high quality of the experience of RE at Key Stage 3, students know what to expect and they value the enrichment time to discuss and reflect without the pressure of an examination: RE for RE's sake!

A team approach to teaching

A major strength is the strong team approach to the subject which comes from working within the Humanities faculty. Three teachers are qualified as RE specialists but all the staff within the faculty have had the opportunity to develop their skills in RE. The keys to success are collaborative planning and a shared commitment to enquiry based learning across the humanities team. Time is given to the humanities staff for off-site days to plan and evaluate together. The team of staff is stable and has built expertise over a period of years.

‘I look forward to RE as the thinking always carries on after the lessons.’

The school's background

[Broughton Business and Enterprise College](#) is an average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is about half that found nationally. The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is higher than average and includes Pakistani, Indian and Caribbean students, many of whom speak English as an additional language but are not at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. The school is a specialist college with Leading Edge specialism, in addition to its business and enterprise and modern foreign languages designation. The school was recently awarded a gold RE Quality Mark.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch.