



# Our Religious Education, Faith & Beliefs Policy

## **UN CRC Article 14**

Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights.

Adopted: September 2025  
Due for Review: September 2029

### **Context:**

The origins of Whiteabbey Primary School were established in 1839 by Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church. We operated as a church school until we became a government-controlled school in the 1930's when we became *Controlled* by the government and as such established with a Christian Ethos, delivering free education for all our children, irrespective of background and inclusive of our children, of all faiths and none.

Today we continue to operate in Whiteabbey Primary School with non denominational, Christian values and ethos where we can offer the possibility for a pupil to be celebrated as a Catholic or as a Protestant while also recognising there are lots of our pupils from other faiths, or from no religious belief at all. This aim of recognising diversity, and not neutrality, remains at the core of our approach to faith and beliefs.

The aim of Part 1 of this policy is to clarify how and why Whiteabbey Primary School delivers Religious Education (RE). The aim of Part 2 of our policy is to articulate why and how as a school established with a Christian ethos we demonstrate and live out this ethos on a daily basis.

## **PART 1 – RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN WHITEABBEY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **The legal requirements for RE:**

The current legal requirements for RE are based on the Education Act (NI) 1947, which was added to by the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, and further developed by the Education (NI) Order 2006. This order legislated for an updated RE Core Syllabus, after a review had been carried out between 2003 and 2006, by the four main denominations in Northern Ireland. The current Department of Education RE Core Syllabus was approved and implemented from 2007 and remains the current requirement for teaching RE.

### **Outcomes for our pupils:**

RE is taught in Whiteabbey Primary School because it is a legal requirement in the curriculum, but also because it is a topic that helps pupils better understand:

- the broad range of beliefs and practices in their school and their local community, as well as globally,
- the importance of religious practices in people's lives,
- how religious festivals or customs are often used to mark key times such as weddings, funerals and rites of passage,
- the place of religious writing, artefacts and buildings in their local environment,
- their own beliefs, attitudes and values,
- how ethical and moral choices are made,
- religious references in popular culture, as many stories, songs, films, paintings and plays include references to religious stories, practices and ideas.

Through their learning in RE, our pupils will have the opportunity to develop their understanding of themselves and others, through:

- recognising their own needs and the needs of others through a recognition of their own worth,
- celebrating life, becoming increasingly aware of personal events, festivals and celebrations and exploring the common elements of Faith and Belief,
- communicating their awareness and understanding of Faith and Belief in a variety of ways, for example, through talking, writing and the arts,
- reflecting on their own life and others' lives with aspects such as opportunities for stillness, awareness of belonging, and awareness of others' needs,
- being helped to manage emotions and behaviour,
- encouraging active engagement in learning.

The study of RE can also be another aspect of the curriculum through which our pupils can more widely develop:

- an inclusive, caring and charitable ethos within our school,
- respect for difference and celebration of diversity,
- empathy,
- thinking skills (including inquiry, evaluation, analysis and reflection),
- the ability to express ideas and opinions,
- self-confidence and self-esteem,
- responsibilities and the consequences of actions,
- wonder and curiosity about the world,
- understanding of what makes life better for other people.

### **Approach:**

Religious Education is simply learning about religions. It is not about trying to support an assumed faith or to try and convert pupils or help them develop a particular faith. Our teachers deliver content in an objective way, stating, for example, 'Christians believe...' or 'Buddhists believe' and not in a confessional way ('We believe...').

Whiteabbey Primary School takes an inclusive approach to RE, teaching mainly aspects of Christianity in keeping with our ethos and the required *RE Core Syllabus* in each primary school year group. Once our core curriculum is taught during the summer term we will also study, at an age appropriate level, other major world faiths and beliefs from P3 to P7. After our core curriculum is taught, we will then introduce one of the following world faiths in each year group:

**P3: Islam**

**P4: Hinduism**

**P5: Sikhism**

**P6: Judaism**

**P7: Buddhism**

Our teachers have flexibility in addressing these religions and other minority religions during other Year Groups reflecting the population of our children. Festivals of other religions may also be celebrated at the appropriate time throughout the school year if reflective of the class population.

Where possible, we aim to develop simple connection points between faiths and beliefs. This is not to deny difference, but to allow for similarities to be acknowledged. This might include practices / ceremonies about growing up, festivals and celebrations, and approaches to prayer. Our children can then become aware of how practice of Faith and Belief might be different, but understand how there are often shared themes.

While many families may not practice any religion, the study of faiths and beliefs prompts questions about human experience generally, which, in an age-appropriate way, we will aim to explore in class.

### **Arrangements for teaching RE:**

RE will be timetabled from P1 to P7 and taught on a weekly basis in our school as a discrete subject. Local external visits to places of worship and cross curricular links to other subjects in the Northern Ireland Curriculum are to be encouraged throughout the school year.

### **Overview of the content:**

We as a school will base our teaching on the required *RE Core Syllabus* using resources from a variety of faith and secular providers. Schemes of work for RE are established and followed by our teachers and RE is included in medium and short term planning.

### **Provision for pupils who are opted out of RE:**

RE and Collective Worship, by law, must take place in school, however our pupils' participation is not mandatory. Pupils under 18 cannot excuse themselves from RE and Collective Worship, but our parents may request to 'opt out' their children using the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/WPSREWithdrawal> .

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, Article 21 states: (5) If the parent of any pupil requests that the pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attendance at Religious Education or collective worship or from both, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance in accordance with the request. Additionally, Regulation 6 and Schedule 3 of the Education (School Information and Prospectuses) Regulations (NI) 2003 requires schools to publish information in their prospectuses about RE provided at the school and any arrangements for the exercise by parents of their rights of withdrawal.

Being opted out of RE or collective worship should not lead to the pupil feeling they are being ostracised or punished. Our teachers need to take into consideration:

- available resources within the year group, specifically space and staff,
- the numbers of pupils being withdrawn,
- the length of time pupils are being withdrawn,
- the activity pupils are being withdrawn from.

## **PART 2 – FAITH & RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN WHITEABBEY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The role of Christianity in society has changed, and while, for some people, they are attracted to the Christian elements of a controlled education, for others, it may seem dated, or out of place. The aim of this part of our policy is to clarify how and why Whiteabbey Primary School approaches collective worship.

### **The legal requirements for collective worship:**

The legal requirements for 'collective worship' in schools were first set down in the Education Act (NI) 1947. Collective worship was:

- to occur each school day
- to be for all pupils together (unless this was impracticable)
- not to 'be distinctive of any particular religious denomination'.

The Act also states:

- parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship, and do not need to give a reason for this,
- 'the school shall be open to pupils of all religious denominations for instruction other than religious instruction' and that 'no pupil shall be excluded, directly or indirectly, from the other advantages which the school affords'.

'Collective worship' was undefined in the Act, however practice in Whiteabbey Primary School is for collective worship to be a Christian act of worship, usually based in our individual classes or Key Stage assemblies and can involve:

- a Christian prayer like a grace before break or lunchtime,
- a Christian song, Bible reading, or a short talk or film with a Christian teaching point.

Regularly in our school collective worship is also expressed through 'assembly time' or 'Hymn Practice'. Our assemblies are an important part of our school community life and have both religious and non-religious elements. Sometimes, in line with our school ethos and values, we have a visitor to our assemblies, who is a representative of the local Christian churches or charities we support. Their talks are always age appropriate and mindful that our children come from a variety of faith backgrounds and none. We do not allow our speakers to invite our children to make a declaration of their faith.

As a school with a Christian ethos, we also hold a Christian focused after school club called *Scripture Union*. This is an optional time when our children can learn more about the stories from The Bible and join in with praise and prayer in an age appropriate way.

**Religious services:** We hold a religious service a few times a year for Harvest, Christmas and Easter. We recognise how these are different to assemblies in school and are optional for our pupils to attend. Nevertheless, our whole school is invited to these events, and we want everyone to feel welcome. We aim to make these events as inclusive as possible.