

EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN SCHOOLS****1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The content of this policy confirms the exploration of beliefs and values as a core area of the curriculum. This would normally be delivered through a school religious observance programme although it is recognised that schools may use a different name for this area which is deemed more appropriate to the context and culture of that school. It should be reflective of “real-time” events and circumstances of the school, the local community as well as global issues (For the purpose of this policy document the description religious observance will be used.)
- 1.2 The need for a stated policy arises from the review on the Scottish Government advice notes (February 2011) on religious and moral education and religious observance.
- 1.3 The advice notes reinforce the Government’s firm belief that there is a clear place for religious observance in all schools and brings guidance in line with the Curriculum for Excellence.
- 1.4 Curriculum for Excellence has been established to allow our young people to develop an awareness of the values on which Scottish society is based and help them to come to their own conclusions on matters of faith, social justice, human rights and on personal and collective responsibility. This policy statement guides Headteacher partnership working with churches and others in defining the place and nature of religious observance in schools and the role of the school Chaplain.
- 1.5 It is acknowledged that some content of religious observance may be secular representing the wide range of beliefs held in a given community.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 To ensure that religious observance is relevant and appropriate to children’s experience this policy aligns with Curriculum for Excellence and is based on shared values and an aspiration that all children, educated in denominational and non-denominational schools, should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
- 2.2 **Religious observance** is “activity which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.” Spiritual development ‘includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one’s dignity as a person’ (Religious Observance Review Group)

Religious observance is not about the promotion of religion or a specific religion in schools but should take account of all recognised religions, or none, within the school catchment area.

- 2.3 **Religious and Moral Education** - Religious and moral education enables children and young people to explore the world's major religions and views which are independent of religious belief and to consider the challenges posed by these beliefs and values. It supports them in developing and reflecting upon their values and their capacity for moral judgement. Through developing awareness and appreciation of the value of each individual in a diverse society, religious and moral education engenders responsible attitudes to other people. This awareness and appreciation will assist in counteracting prejudice and intolerance as children and young people consider issues such as sectarianism and discrimination more broadly.
- 2.4 **Religious Worship** is the free response of an individual and community to what is considered worthy of worship; involves three elements: belief, desire to worship and the commitment to life stances; is an organised act of worship based on the assumption that those present share these elements; lies within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religious groups, chaplains and religious leaders
- 2.5 Many of our school communities are characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices reflecting a range of religious and other stances. It is important that all pupils and staff feel free to participate with integrity in the forms of religious observance devised by their school without compromise to their personal convictions. This can best be guaranteed by involving a range of people from the school and community in the preparation, planning and the presentation of the assembly or other gathering. There should be appropriate pupil involvement in this process.
- 2.6 This diversity means that forms of religious observance may differ from school to school. Schools are encouraged to make decisions based on local needs and circumstances. Full consultation should take place with all interested parties on how religious observance can be implemented.
- 2.7 In recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage, schools are encouraged to be sensitive to our traditions and origins and seek to reflect these but must be equally sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith or a non-faith perspective.
- 2.8 It is recognised that in denominational schools, there is a distinctive emphasis on nurturing the faith of pupils in line with denominational core values. This is achieved through the school ethos, Religious Education and in particular religious observance. In denominational schools organised acts of worship are considered appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school and will continue to feature in religious observance. Specific support and guidance for developing religious observance in denominational schools is available to schools through the diocesan Advisory Service and the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

3 RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCE AND WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS

- 3.1 Regular assemblies or other gatherings for religious observance provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on and develop, a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual and the shared values of the school community.

- 3.2 Schools identify and promote values such as ‘honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and concern for others’ as common shared values in our society. It is also true that different communities hold values that are particular to their own tradition. These values should be acknowledged, the right of people to hold them should be respected and pupils should be encouraged to reflect on these values and the life stance which they represent.
- 3.3 Within the context of a school community, shared values give a sense of belonging and help to underpin all aspects of its life. The process of understanding and developing the shared values should involve pupils, staff, parents, churches, other faith communities and the wider community in which the school is set. Participation in the process is an essential element in terms of ownership of the agreed values.
- 3.4 Scottish Borders Council supports the following statement (Religious Observance Review Group)
- “Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community’s faith in the focus of worship, may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the Review Group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, non-religious groups, chaplains and other faith leaders.”*
- 3.5 Religious observance in denominational schools will continue to include opportunities for organised acts of worship as part of both the formal and informal curriculum.
- 3.6 Members of a school community, including pupils, parents and representatives of faith groups and the wider community, may wish to have opportunities for organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum of the school. Headteachers are encouraged to consider these requests positively and make suitable arrangements where possible and appropriate, in addition to the requirements for Religious Observance. Pupils may be invited to participate in organised worship.

4 ASSEMBLIES AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

- 4.1 *In recognition of Scotland’s Christian heritage, schools are encouraged to use the rich resources of this tradition when planning religious observance. Many school communities contain pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment. This should be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith stances.” (SG)*
- 4.2 Non-denominational school assemblies are the most common vehicle for delivering religious observance. A clear distinction must be drawn between assemblies devised for the delivery of religious observance and assemblies which support other purposes. Communicating day-to-day administrative arrangements and information about extra-curricular activities at an assembly is important for the life and work of the school. However, this must be kept separate from occasions that are specifically set aside for religious observance. It is important for those organising and leading religious observance that its overall integrity and purpose are kept

distinctive and not compromised by the inclusion of routine administrative announcements.

- 4.3 Whilst the precise form of religious observance will be determined by each school's policy within SBC's policy framework, these can include opportunities for class, year, stage or whole school observances with involvement by pupils and others, including school chaplains and faith leaders, in planning and presentation.

5 FREQUENCY OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

- 5.1 *Religious observance needs to take place sufficiently frequently to have an impact on the spiritual development of the school community. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance.*" (SG)
- 5.2 There is a need to balance the frequency, which would make a positive impact on children and young people with the need to ensure that the experiences are valuable and inclusive. Religious observance requires careful planning by schools. Government guidance suggests that every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year, in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community. We recognise that many primary schools value weekly religious observance as part of their regular assembly programme and will wish to continue with this. The school community should be involved in making decisions about frequency. Whilst ensuring that religious observance is sufficiently frequent, the emphasis should be on quality of the experience for pupils rather than quantity.

6 CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

- 6.1 In order to ensure that religious observance is of a high quality those planning and leading it should consider the following:–
- 6.1.1 - **Location:** It is important that every attempt is made to ensure that pupils can participate comfortably in religious observance assemblies. Seating, ventilation, lighting and sound are important considerations in ensuring that pupils can give their full attention to what is being presented. In addition, to take account of the fact that religious observance may at times be organised on a group basis, schools should also look to have a smaller area available. This space could also be available for organised acts of worship or private reflection.
- 6.1.2 - **Leading:** The Headteacher, staff, chaplains, pupils and visitors from the community or organisations can all make effective contributions to religious observance. Sharing the leading brings many benefits such as offering a range of perspectives on a variety of issues for pupils to consider. Good planning and clear expectations are important to ensure that the experience appeals to pupils and engages their interest.
- 6.1.3 - **Sensitively Exploring Issues:** Religious observance should invite pupils through an interesting and appealing stimulus to consider and reflect on a range of issues that relate to their experience. As in good teaching the stimulus for reflection should look to draw on:
- Incidents which occur in the life of the school or in the local, national or international communities,
 - A programme of values which the school wishes its pupils and staff to reflect upon
 - The annual cycle of religious festivals.

- 6.1.4 - **An Open and Reflective Atmosphere;** Religious observance should take place in an atmosphere where pupils feel relaxed and open to learn from what is being said and done. In order to achieve a mood of respectful attentiveness, assembly leaders should consider the appropriate use of music, presentation media and sensitive lighting, and procedures for entering and leaving the area. Silences can be powerful and offer a space for individual pupils to begin their response to what has been shared.
- 6.1.5 - **Pupil participation:** Schools should actively seek the involvement and participation of pupils in the planning and delivery of religious observance activities. This could be done through active engagement with pupil councils.

7 CHAPLAINS

- 7.1 Scottish Borders Council values the important and varied contribution that Chaplains and faith group leaders make to the life of our schools, as a resource person and as someone who can offer pastoral and spiritual support.
- 7.2 Many schools in Scottish Borders have a Chaplain or, if more appropriate, a chaplaincy team. Secondary schools should endeavour to have a Chaplaincy team which represents their pupil base. A Chaplaincy team does not need to be composed exclusively of ordained ministers. The discussion between Headteachers, Chaplains and faith group leaders must be based on the premise that the way in which religious observance in schools is implemented should be justifiable on educational grounds. The role of the Chaplain should be made clear and be regularly reviewed in discussion with the Headteacher. Chaplains and faith group leaders work in school at the invitation of the Headteacher but it is important that expectations are clear and explicit. Some Chaplains may be asked to draw upon material from sources including stories from other religions. Where Chaplains are not comfortable with this, their stance should be respected and other members of the religious observance team should plan and implement the assembly or other activity when material from another tradition or faith is being used.
- 7.3 An approach seeking to convert an audience to one faith or another is not appropriate during religious observance.
- 7.4 Schools may have Chaplaincy teams which could include representatives from a range of traditions who co-operate with other members of staff and pupils in the planning, preparation and presentation of acts of religious observance. Each member of the Chaplaincy team will be able 'to draw on the rich resources of their own religious tradition. These resources can be used by the group responsible for religious observance as stimulus material relevant to the school community's experience and understanding'.

Further details in Appendix 2 – A Role for the School Chaplain

8 THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS AND PUPILS

- 8.1 Under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, there is a statutory provision for parents to withdraw children from participation in religious observance. This right should always be made known to parents and their wishes respected. Parents should be provided with sufficient information on which to base a decision. Scottish Government Ministers consider that religious observance complements religious education and is an important contribution to pupils' development. It should also

have a role in promoting the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. Schools are therefore encouraged to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds.

- 8.2 Headteachers are encouraged to meet any parents wishing to withdraw their child to ensure they are clear about the schools policy on religious observance. In particular, parents should be reassured that religious observance in Scottish Borders schools adopts an open and respectful approach and does not seek to compromise the beliefs of any pupils or their families.
- 8.3 Where a child is withdrawn from religious observance, schools should make suitable arrangements for the child to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity. In no circumstances should a child be disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from religious observance.
- 8.4 Pupils, from the age of 12, have the right to request that they withdraw from participation in religious observance if they are deemed mature enough to make such a request. Discussions should take place with parents, the pupil and school staff to consider the request. In most cases the parent view would prevail unless the school considered there was a significant child welfare issue e.g. participation would cause the child psychological harm.

9 NURSERY CLASSES

- 9.1 There is no formal requirement for religious observance in nursery classes. However, there are many opportunities to help children develop an early awareness of different religious and cultural groups and their traditions. By marking significant cultural celebrations and exploring shared values as well as matters of common concern, children can build up a sense of their own uniqueness. In this way their journey of spiritual development begins. Such activities provide important foundational experiences for young children on which primary and secondary school can build.

10 EQUALITY ACT 2010

- 10.1 Central to this policy is the principle of respect for others. Religious, cultural and personal characteristics permeate and enrich the life and work of our schools. This diversity of belief and tradition provides an ideal context in which pupils can learn what is important in the lives of others. The approach to religious observance in this policy recognises and welcomes diversity and promotes respectful understanding. This policy will be implemented ensuring compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

11 MONITORING

- 11.1 Schools should review their plans for religious observance on a regular basis, taking account of this policy and consult within the wider school community in relation to content, frequency and location of religious observance.
- 11.2 The Authority and school personnel will share responsibility for monitoring and evaluating at school level the implementation of this policy for religious observance.

References :- The Religious Observance Review Group (RORG);
The Scottish Government's February 2011 Guidance (SG). See Appendix 1.

12 REVIEW

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed on a three yearly cycle by a senior education officer nominated by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning or his delegate.
- 12.2 If appropriate, a report will be submitted to the Education Executive to request changes to the policy.
- 12.3 The first policy review will be in 2015.

2 VERSION CONTROL

Name of Document: Religious Observance in Schools		Version Number:
Approved by: Education Committee		
Date first approved: 13 March 2013	Date of Review: Within 24 months of date first approved	
Name of officer responsible for the review:		
Changes to the policy		
<i>Paragraph No:</i>	<i>Wording that changed</i>	<i>Reason for change</i>