Pupils should be given opportunities to develop their skills, and their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions, and use these to raise and respond to fundamental human and religious questions. This should be carried out through the **interrelationship of the three core skills** of the subject.

- **Engaging with fundamental questions** – fundamental questions are human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They have a profundity and intensity that underpins any aspect of study in religious education.
- **Exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practice(s)** – this includes exploring religious stories, sacred texts, lifestyle, rituals and symbolism, which provide insight regarding these fundamental questions and raise further religious and human questions.
- **Expressing personal responses** – this includes relating the issues raised during study to pupils' own experiences and allowing the development of personal responses to, and evaluations of, beliefs, teachings and practice(s) and fundamental questions.

These core skills inform one another and all three should be applied appropriately to the range studied.

Skills

Engaging with fundamental questions

Pupils should be given opportunities to:

- ask, discuss and respond to fundamental questions raised by their own experiences, the world around them and aspects of religion
- draw on their own experiences and on a variety of informed religious and non-religious sources, including other disciplines, in order to gather evidence and develop appropriate arguments
- use problem-solving techniques, critical, creative and intuitive thinking to explore preconceptions, possibilities/explanations
- formulate arguments and justify points of view while recognising that the conclusions are only partial, inconclusive and are open to different interpretations.

Range

Pupils should be given opportunities to develop their skills by focussing on the following contexts for study. These should not be regarded as discrete topics but rather as interwoven areas of study that provide opportunities for pupils to engage, explore, and express ideas and responses. During the course of a whole key stage it would be reasonable to expect every aspect of the range to have been embraced.

Pupils should be given opportunities to develop skills through engaging with:

The world

- **the origin and purpose of life** – why religions value living things and hold positive views regarding the natural world: through contemporary debates about the origin, purpose and sanctity of life and the relationship between the natural world, human beings and God
- **the natural world and living things** – why individual religions acknowledge the importance of taking responsibility for the natural world and living things and implement their beliefs through action, *e.g. life as a gift; sustainability*

Human experience

- **human identity** – why religions believe humans have a unique status amongst living things and the implications of this belief on human behaviour, values, freedom, responsibility and consciousness, *e.g. image of God*
- **meaning and purpose of life** – how and why religion is considered to provide insight into questions of truth, meaning, purpose and value, *e.g. life/death/life after death; good/evil/suffering/hope, etc.*
- **belonging** – how and why individuals, local communities and society express religious identity and demonstrate commitment through worship, celebration, lifestyle, etc.

Exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practice(s)

Pupils should be given opportunities to:

- recall, describe, and explain the religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated
- make and investigate the links between religious beliefs, teachings and practices to demonstrate understanding of a range of religious ideas/concepts
- describe and give explanations for the similarities and differences within and across religions
- explain how religion impacts on the lives of individuals, local communities and wider society, using a range of interpretations
- analyse and interpret the layers of meaning/symbolism within religious stories, rituals, art, dance and music.

Expressing personal responses

Pupils should be given opportunities to:

- communicate religious ideas and concepts using reasoned argument, personal opinions and ideas in a variety of creative ways, *e.g. orally, in writing, and through creative arts*
- explain how what they have learned about religious/spiritual experience and moral decision-making might relate to their own and other people's lives
- appreciate, respect, empathise with and evaluate the viewpoints of others, acknowledging where they are similar to and different from their own
- recognise, explore and reflect on the spiritual side of life
- use a range of religious language appropriately
- use ICT and other means to gain access to information and to communicate religious concepts.

- **authority and influence** – how religious authority conveys ideas regarding revelation, wisdom and truth/interpretation and why this influences believers, *e.g. through sacred texts and religious founders, and historical and contemporary leaders*
- **relationships and responsibility** – how religions demonstrate rules for living, advise on making difficult moral decisions, recommend ways to develop and retain relationships and provide reasons why these are important, *e.g. right/wrong; justice/equality; tolerance/respect; conflict/reconciliation*
- **the journey of life** – how and why religious people take on different roles, responsibilities and commitments at different stages of life, *e.g. becoming an adult/parent/ascetic; participating in pilgrimage, etc.*

Search for meaning

- **non-material/spiritual** – how people explore and express issues, ideas and experiences of a transcendent/spiritual nature and why this spiritual side of life is important to them, *e.g. the nature of God/the soul; religious experience/spiritual dimensions of human experience and truth/meaning/interpretation*
- **knowledge and experience of the non-material/spiritual** – how and why people develop, interpret and act on their religious/spiritual experience, *e.g. relationship with and responses to God; lifestyle/sacrifice; impact of religion/religious commitment on individuals, communities and society; identity/diversity within and across religion.*

National exemplar level descriptions for religious education

The following level descriptions describe the types and range of performance that pupils working at a particular level should characteristically demonstrate. In deciding on a pupil's level of attainment at the end of a key stage, teachers should judge which description best fits the pupil's performance. Each description should be considered in conjunction with the descriptions for adjacent levels.

By the end of Key Stage 2, the performance of the great majority of pupils should be within the range of Levels 2 to 5, and by the end of Key Stage 3 within the range 3 to 7. Level 8 is available for very able pupils and, to help teachers differentiate Exceptional Performance at Key Stage 3, a description above Level 8 is provided.

All statements made within the levels should be read as they relate to Christianity and the other principal religions as identified within the specific locally agreed syllabus.

Level 1

Pupils talk about their own experiences, the world around them and aspects of religion. They recall and respond to some basic religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated. They show some awareness that these aspects of religion are special. They recognise that their feelings, actions and opinions may be similar to or different from those of other people. On occasion, they use simple religious vocabulary appropriately to express their ideas.

Level 2

Pupils ask questions about their own experiences, the world around them and aspects of religion, and suggest some answers. They recall and communicate simply some of the basic religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated. They suggest, in simple terms, why these aspects of religion are important to some people. They talk in simple terms about their own feelings, actions and opinions and those of other people. They use simple religious vocabulary appropriately.

Level 3

Pupils discuss the questions raised by their own experiences, the world around them and aspects of religion, giving their own opinions. They describe some of the basic religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated. They describe how some of these aspects of religion affect believers' lives. They describe their own feelings, actions and opinions, and in simple terms comment on the viewpoints of others. They begin to recognise that religious symbols carry meaning, and use religious vocabulary appropriately.

Level 4

Pupils discuss their own and others' responses to questions about life, the world around them and religion. They describe and begin to explain the religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated. They give specific examples of the ways in which these aspects affect believers' lives and begin to identify the similarities and differences within religions. They explain in simple terms how their own feelings, actions and opinions differ from those of others. They recognise some religious symbols and use a range of religious vocabulary appropriately.

Level 5

Pupils express and justify ideas and opinions about fundamental questions in the light of their investigations and experiences. They make links between the religious beliefs, teachings and practices studied, describing the impact on believers' lives and identify the similarities and differences within and across religion. They explain how their own feelings, actions and opinions affect their own lives, and describe how those of others similarly affect their lives. They use a range of religious vocabulary appropriately and demonstrate a basic understanding of symbolic language.

Level 6

Pupils draw on a variety of informed sources and their own experiences in order to present evidence and develop appropriate responses to fundamental questions. They use their understanding of the links between the religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated to consolidate their understanding of religion and to explain differing religious viewpoints. They explain the relationship between their own beliefs and actions. They also explain the relationship between other people's beliefs and actions. They use a range of religious vocabulary appropriately and demonstrate an understanding of symbolism and symbolic language.

Level 7

Pupils investigate fundamental religious and moral questions from a variety of religious perspectives and begin to draw reasoned conclusions. They apply a wide range of religious concepts to a variety of beliefs, teachings and practices. They accurately explain and justify the reasons for the range of viewpoints held by religious people. They consider the implications of their own beliefs and actions, compare these to other people and draw balanced conclusions. They use a range of religious vocabulary appropriately and are able to explain the symbolic meaning of religious objects, actions and/or language.

Level 8

Pupils investigate fundamental religious and moral questions, evaluate a range of possibilities and draw rational conclusions based on evidence gathered. They demonstrate an understanding of a wide range of religious concepts, including various perspectives on beliefs, values and traditions within the religions studied. They evaluate the various aspects of religion and explain how these affect the lives of individuals, communities and society. They investigate the religious concepts studied, evaluating their own and other people's viewpoints through reasoned argument and evidence. They use a wide range of religious vocabulary appropriately and demonstrate a developed understanding of symbolic language.

Exceptional Performance

Pupils acknowledge that fundamental religious questions are often complex and that answers are often partial and inconclusive. They analyse and give reasons for the different perspectives held concerning the beliefs, values and traditions of the religions studied, recognising the differences between religions and appreciating the tension of unity and plurality within each religion. They have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the behaviour and beliefs of adherents of various faith systems. In relation to the religious and moral concepts studied, they express well-considered opinions of the viewpoints of others based on in-depth investigation. They use an extensive range of religious vocabulary appropriately and demonstrate a well-developed understanding of symbolic language.

Outcomes for religious education

The following outcomes for religious education are non-statutory. They have been written to recognise the attainment of pupils working below Level 1. Religious Education Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 align with the Foundation Phase Outcomes 1, 2 and 3.

Foundation Phase	Religious Education
Foundation Phase Outcome 1	Religious Education Outcome 1
Foundation Phase Outcome 2	Religious Education Outcome 2
Foundation Phase Outcome 3	Religious Education Outcome 3
Foundation Phase Outcome 4	Religious Education Level 1
Foundation Phase Outcome 5	Religious Education Level 2
Foundation Phase Outcome 6	Religious Education Level 3

The religious education outcomes describe the types and range of performance that pupils working at a particular outcome should characteristically demonstrate. In deciding on a pupil's outcome of attainment at the end of a key stage, teachers should judge which description best fits the pupil's performance. Each description should be considered in conjunction with the description for adjacent outcomes.

Outcome 1

Pupils recognise themselves, familiar people, places and objects in pictures/stories and show knowledge of daily routines. Pupils use words, signs or symbols to communicate observations about familiar religious stories and artefacts. With encouragement, pupils begin to communicate about how they feel and about experiences such as visits to special buildings, festivals and celebrations.

Outcome 2

Pupils respond to open questions about their feelings and experiences ('what?', 'where?'). They offer their own ideas, sometimes making connections/predictions. Pupils handle and explore artefacts and show some knowledge of special people, books, and places of worship. They respond to stories and events, past and present. They begin to identify with the feelings of others as portrayed in religious stories and events past and present.

Outcome 3

Pupils can remember significant events in the past and anticipate events in the future. Pupils offer independent ideas and observations about things that concern them in their lives. Pupils communicate their developing knowledge of religious stories, events and objects and show some appreciation that these are special. Pupils are increasingly aware of and are sensitive to the needs of others and understand that living things should be treated with respect and shown concern.