

Special Educational Needs at KS3 and KS4

Introduction to the Pilot Materials

Monitoring visits to a sample of Birmingham's special schools during 2016 and 2017 revealed that teachers and carers in special education are finding it particularly difficult to deliver the statutory requirements for Religious Education. The monitoring also revealed concerns that some SEND children are more vulnerable to the pressures that fuel radicalisation. We are therefore committed to provide specific materials to support children and their teachers in these schools and settings. **These materials have now been updated in line with the current 2022 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.**

The initial provision that follows is the result of a series of working parties held in early 2017. The group was led by Simone Whitehouse-James, Partnership Adviser for RE with Birmingham LA, Fr Peter Conley from Christ the King, Birmingham representing SACRE, Kay Stephenson from Uffculme School, and Sophie Gray, SEND adviser for The Music Service, Services for Education, Birmingham providing specialist support from teachers on the ground.

The National Curriculum Inclusion statement states that lessons should be planned to address potential areas of difficulty and remove barriers to pupil achievement. The steering group reminded us that many teachers and SENCOs in mainstream are looking to differentiate the SACRE lesson materials as well as those specialists in:

- speech language and communication needs (SLCN),
- cognition and learning including moderate and severe learning difficulties (MLD, SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)
- social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- sensory and/or physical needs.

Given that the potential problem identified through the monitoring of radicalisation of teenage children, and that this is initial rather than general provision for SEND, a decision was made to concentrate on KS3 and KS4 materials. We chose to differentiate some of the most popular units available to teachers from the RE Resources. The two specialists have worked on the same units and lessons to provide a model of how we believe differentiation can be applied to different levels of SCLN, MLD, SLD and PMLD.

Kay Stephenson worked towards the needs of children similar to those with MLD and SCLN in her care and explains:

KS3 – Being Human

Along with many other concepts in RS teaching, the idea of exploring what it means to be human can be a complex one to get across to students who think logically and literally. When considering how this lesson could be taught, the film clip offers an engaging visual stimulus for the initial discussion and demonstrates the kind of human activities which a particular robot can perform. This discussion can then focus on the differences between humans and robots, using a Venn diagram to provide a visual

representation of similarities and differences, before transferring the students' ideas onto a group/class mind-map. Before asking students consider their

own life timelines and futures, they could discuss what 'Pepper' (the robot in the film clip) might answer if asked what 'she' would be doing in ten years' time, before repeating the exercise with an adult or, if appropriate, another student.

The intention of these activities is to scaffold the creation of the students' own personal timelines and to underpin the concept of 'Being Human' and the purpose of human life.

KS3 – Money, Money, Money

This is a lesson, which I taught from the original exemplar and then adapted for teaching at a future date. As my students benefit from 'concrete' activities to help with abstract concepts, an activity involving the physical handling of (facsimile) money is suggested to begin the lesson along with a set of images showing items that the students would be interesting in buying. The purpose of this activity is to reinforce the concept of money as a tool, allowing students to handle 'money', compare amounts given with one another and think about how they would use it before introducing the discussion about whether there are some things (love, friendship) that cannot be 'bought' and how money can be used fairly. Students can respond using symbols or drawings if that is more appropriate.

The religious teachings can be tackled in small groups as single questions or several, with support as necessary. Images and statement cards may make them more accessible.

The final activities are differentiated further to offer alternative ways of engaging with the learning objective, from justifying opinions with a written, reasoned answer to sorting images into 'Things that money can/cannot buy'.

The film clip is suggested as a plenary activity, to show how some religious faiths approach the question of using money.

KS4 – Belief and Dress: The Hijab

Rather than embarking immediately on the idea of 'modesty', I thought it would be helpful for students to think about why people wear certain clothes such as uniforms, before moving on to why people choose to wear certain clothes for special occasions such as weddings, activities such as sports, or in accordance with religious practices. The use of images is crucial in helping to understand that clothes make us identifiable for all sorts of reasons.

The film 'Feminism and the Veil' (from Truetube) is suggested as it is relatively short (in comparison to the TED Talk in the original) but also because it shows young women with views from both sides of the argument.

Finally, if appropriate, the question of modesty can be addressed and whether or not people should be allowed the wearing of such clothes in society. It may be sufficient

for some students to recognise that people of some religious faiths adopt particular dress codes to show that they belong to that particular group.

KS4 – Hindu Parable

This is a lesson I taught to a KS4 group and then adapted for use at a future time, taking into account how the students responded. To introduce the lesson, I used a sorting activity, instead of the original newspaper article, as I felt that the students in my particular cohort needed short statements in order to think about what is true and what isn't. The first activity is not particularly original but does lead to discussion about the concept of honesty. The original story of 'Mahendra and the Seeds', as used in the original exemplar, is quite lengthy and proved to be challenging for my students. So this version simplifies and shortens the original (although it could perhaps be simplified further if necessary) and I added images. Many students will also benefit from the use of symbols which can also be included at various points.

The final part of the original exemplar, worked well, particularly when students thought about people they knew personally with those attributes. For some students, images of famous people who may be thought to have these characteristics provide extra food for thought.

Please note that Kay's differentiated presentation contained many striking images which would arrest children's attention. We are unable to distribute the pictures for copyright reasons, but an attached resource enables you to find and download the pictures within the classroom.

Sophie Gray has experience of SLD and PMLD children and further differentiated the lessons to suit these more complex needs. She says:

I am a special school music teacher and SEN/D adviser to Birmingham Music service. SEND is my speciality – R.E. is not. I found the process of writing/adapting plans for those with SLD, and particularly PMLD, challenging but fascinating.

I realised from the beginning of the process that focussing on the dispositions might be the most effective way to adapt and find the essence of each plan and I have done this where appropriate. The act of linking a topic or story with a religion/religions, sometimes in quite an abstract narrative, I knew would be very problematic to make accessible for those, particularly with profound needs. I wanted to find a way to ensure the lessons were meaningful but without losing the original key concepts. Through the process I have discussed the ideas with other pmlD teachers, and RE specialists in special and mainstream education to ensure the plans were accessible, but also that the key religious concepts were not lost.

Where possible, the plans are broken down twice from the original into PMLD/Sensory and SLD versions, to help cater for all pupils.

It occurred to me also that these plans could, and should, be explored for a longer period (where appropriate). Some of the plans could be used over two or more lessons. Some over a whole term.

KS3 – Being Human

I found 'Being Human' by far the easiest to adapt for those with sld and particularly pml. I think this was mainly due to the fact that the lesson is about the essence of 'being human'. This is a concept that can be explored in whichever way is meaningful to the pupils we are teaching/thinking about. It can be totally subjective and there are less abstract concepts that need to be linked or understood. For the more sensory plan I focussed on the ideas of 'expressing joy' - through sound/music making and '[being modest and] listening to others'. The main concept in the plan here is developing a sense of self and other which is an important goal generally for those with SLD/PMLD. Through the plan, sound and music making is used to inspire, and promote intentional actions and interactions. The idea of playing the whole piece but breaking down into single sounds/rhythms for the interaction section of the plan is based on personal experience but also on the Sounds of Intent framework of musical development – <http://soundsofintent.org/>. For those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, focusing on single sounds (and potentially simple patterns) is far more effective when trying to initiate a sound or musical interaction.

There are also many opportunities for multi-sensory engagement in the plan, with visual, aural stimuli and options of touch/taste and smell to enrich/deepen the experiences and potential learning.

KS3 – Money, money, money

The next plan I attempted was 'Money, Money, Money'. I found this one much more complex and challenging to make accessible. Many pupils in Special education with SLD/PMLD will have never used or handled money and some will have no concept of what it is or what it is for. The concept of 'friends', also for some will not be possible/easy to grasp. Linking the concept of money and its uses and the idea of fairness is also challenging in this context.

Through discussion with the group we decided it would be best to really simplify the concepts and just introduce money and the idea of giving to those with less. I then also did a plan for PMLD which was based around the senses and feeling money, the sound money makes, and the physical act of giving money to receive something else, something that money can buy which is desirable to them (as far as is possible/appropriate). The objects here should be new versions of something they like, or food, so it is not confusing and so it is a more realistic experience. Though many may not grasp this concept, the action of handing over money and receiving

something in return is a ritual that they can be involved in, even if just at the (supported) physical level of participation.

KS4 – Divine Truth/Parables

Divine truth/Parables was fairly easily adapted for those with SLD who can understand the concept of 'truth'. I started the session by giving examples of lies or falsehoods in a way that is relevant, thought-provoking and can be understood by the students. For example if one of the pupils loves a certain band, and all (or most) of the pupils know this, then the lesson could start with a statement on the board, read out by the teacher 'Emma does not like One Direction'. This can be communicated in whichever way is best – signing, communication in print etc. So the concept of truth is presented in a way which is accessible. A simplified version of the story is then delivered, spoken/signed and using communication in print/pictures on a power point. The concept of truth in the story should now be more accessible and meaningful to the students, as they should have a clear(er) idea of it in their heads.

KS4 – Hijab

I found the Hijab lesson plan also very problematic initially. The idea of modesty is not one that is always understood by students in special education, and the concept of linking a style of dress with a religion and also understanding the complexities of people's reactions to the Hijab is a quite a sophisticated and multi-layered notion – difficult to teach and adapt for those with SLD and PMLD.

After discussion in the group I/we decided to concentrate on broadening out the concept to uniforms, some religious, some not, and also introducing the idea of clothing – what are you wearing today? Why? Then looking again at those in religious dress, including the Hijab. The lesson also has a more multisensory element with opportunities for students and staff to try on different religious outfits and listen to music from those religions.

** Please note that 'Communication in print' has been used for some of the materials here – many are just examples of how it might be used, but it can be used for all symbols/pictures etc.

Conclusion

I found the process of researching and adapting these plans quite enlightening. I do think that the concept of 'religion' and the linking of a spirituality to certain ideals/stories can be a complex one, often too complex for those in special education (particularly those with SLD/PMLD). But I also feel that all children (and people) can experience wonder in the world around them, and find joy through interaction and a shared connection with others. So even if the theological/philosophical ideas are not fully explored or grasped, a shared sense of community, a connection through

interactions, and opportunities to experience awe and wonder are extremely important and valuable to all students, including those with the most profound needs, in special education.

Birmingham SACRE hopes that the following resources which are being offered free of charge to users will encourage others to follow Kay and Sophie's lead.

Paul Davies and Simone Whitehouse-James