



I need to run an RE day

Most schools are required to teach Religious Education to students. For many this will normally involve a weekly RE lesson but some schools increasingly put on RE Days. These involve students stepping out of the normal timetable and spending a whole day on a particular RE theme. This guide will explain how RE Days are organised, how schoolworkers can organise or contribute to them and where to find helpful resources.

▶ Starting points

▣ Religious Education in schools

RE has been a part of the basic curriculum for schools almost from the beginning of modern day education. What began as 'scripture' lessons 100 years ago has now evolved into a subject that explores spirituality and values in a range of world religions.

However, the legal requirements for schools to teach RE vary hugely depending on the way the school is managed and set up:

- Local Authority maintained schools (still the majority of primary and secondary schools) are required to teach RE up to the age of 16, although parents have the right to withdraw their child from these lessons. The school must follow the agreed syllabus set down by the Local Authority.
- Voluntary aided schools, most often Catholic or Anglican schools, must provide RE in accordance with the terms by which they were established.
- Private fee-paying schools are not under any requirements to provide RE, although many of them have a religious background and therefore do so.
- Academies, a new type of secondary school involving private sponsorship, are also not under any requirement to provide RE, although again almost all will do so.

In addition, school sixth forms, unlike sixth form colleges, are legally required to provide RE for students up to the age of 18.

▣ How much time should schools give to RE in the curriculum?

There are no prescribed allocations of time for RE. When Lord Dearing produced his final report into The National Curriculum and its Assessment (1993) he made some recommendations which assume appropriate time allowances for RE, and for practical purposes these are widely recognised as 'markers'.

Dearing's recommendations were:

- Keystage 1: 36 hours a year
- Keystage 2 and 3: 45 hours a year
- Keystage 4: 5% of total curriculum time

These are not requirements for schools, more a guideline that they might follow.

❖ Why do schools hold RE Days?

The varying requirements for providing RE, and the pressures on the curriculum, mean that some schools have adopted RE Days as a way of fulfilling legal requirements for RE. Two or three days a year, often towards the end of the term, fulfill their obligations and leave the weekly timetable free for other subjects. This is especially common in school sixth forms.

Other schools, perhaps the majority, see RE days as an addition to their normal provision for RE. The equivalent, for example, of an English trip to the theatre or a geography field trip. They give a chance to explore a subject in more depth and include input that might not be possible in normal lessons: including input from external speakers like Christian schools workers.

Some RE Days may take place away from the school premises in a different environment. However, most remain in the school and use the same classrooms and halls.

❖ What kind of involvement can schools workers provide?

An RE Day is a great opportunity for Christian schools workers to make a significant and positive contribution to a school. There are at least three kinds of input commonly given:

1. Local schools workers or youth workers helping run an RE Day that is organised by the school: the RE Department organise the theme and programme and invite a schoolworker to help with some of the work. This could be supporting some of the group work during the day or leading a session.
2. Local schools workers or youth workers take on the organisation and running of an RE Day for a school. The schools workers develop the content and lead the day through, with teachers present but not involved in input. This may or may not be a paid service.
3. A professional full time organisation providing Christian RE Days is booked to run a day in a school. These organisations travel all over the country and are used to running RE Days. Normally the school will have to pay for this kind of service. Local schools workers can be involved in recommending the right organisation and helping on the day.

👉 Topics and themes

❖ What kinds of issues work well in an RE Day?

The biggest question facing anyone organising an RE Day, whether they are teachers or schools workers, is what the day should be about. Finding the right topic that will get students interested, allow plenty of discussion and keep interest levels high, is vital.

In deciding what topic to cover, questions to think about include:

- is this an opportunity to cover in more depth something already that is part of the curriculum?
- is creating interest in the topic of RE as important as covering something that is within curriculum?
- what is appropriate for the age group?
- is the RE Day close to a particular festival or time of year that could give rise to a theme?

- does the topic allow different opinions to be shared and so create interesting debate and interaction?
- is the topic themed around a particular faith (Christians and justice) or a more general topic with reflections from a range of faiths (justice and religion)?

Examples from RE days held by Christian schools workers and organisations, are included below. They include the age group of the students, although it's worth noting that many subjects can be adapted to suit younger or older students:

- **Religion and the body (body theology):** How the Christian faith sees the human body, including disability, difference between the sexes and the concept of the 'self' (sixth form).
- **Christmas:** Different ideas and view about the meaning of Christmas. (keystage 1, 2 or 3)
- **Evil:** What is evil? Can people be evil. How does Christianity deal with evil. Can we prevent or stop evil? (keystage 4)
- **Justice and the developing world:** How our lives affect others. The Christian view of justice. Examples of bringing justice. Helping the developing world. (keystage 3 and 4)
- **Freedom:** What is personal freedom? Modern day slavery. The Christian theology of freedom. (keystage 3)
- **Death:** What happens after we die? Ideas about the future life. Visions of heaven and hell. Do our ideas about the future affect how we live today? (keystage 4 and sixth form)
- **Purpose and meaning in life:** What is the purpose of life? Does it matter? Religion and purpose? Does faith make you happier? (keystage 3)
- **Peer pressure:** does faith help resist peer pressure or is it the ultimate example of following the crowd? (keystage 4)
- **What do we believe?:** Exploring what the student group believe about faith, God and the world. Opportunities through the day allow students to debate and try to persuade others of their views.

There are obviously hundreds of potential topics. Choosing the right one will involve taking into account the needs of the curriculum, the students and the resources you have available. Some further possible topics include:

- **Religion and an emotion:** how does Christianity deal with anger, love or revenge, for example.
- Provocative questions that can set the scene for a range of debates and input. For example, **'Would you rather be Katie Price or Mother Teresa?'** could be the setting for a day looking at peer pressure, celebrity, purpose in life and many other relevant topics.
- Other topics can come from films. For example, a sixth form RE Day run in Luton used the film **'Children of Men'** to explore Christian ideas about the future. Other films used include 'Tsotsi', 'Man Dancin', and 'Whalerider'.
- Other subjects may be linked to current events. Approaching a general election, an RE Day could look at how **different faiths could or should vote**. Can a Christian be a Conservative or Labour or Liberal!

In general, the more provocative and interesting the topic, the better the RE Day. Subjects like 'what is evil' are far more likely to engage students than an day entitled 'Christians and forgiveness', though they may

cover some of the same material.

Further on in this guide, you will find details of where you can get other ideas and resources for RE days. Although they are limited, they will help you get started in planning. Another useful strategy is to visit organisations who are already running RE days and get the benefit of their advice and experience. Seeing another RE Day in action is a helpful way to get ideas and inspiration for your own day.

▶ Running an RE day

✦ Different structures for the day

How you plan an RE Day will depend not only on the topic you choose, but also on the resources and staff you have available. In the resource 'Spiritual Engagement' (see later in the guide on how to get hold of this essential resource), Lat Blaylock and David Skinner suggest 4 different approaches.

1. All together through the day: students stay in one room throughout the day and the activities vary between individual tasks, small group work and input from the front. All the students are engaged in the same activity at the same time. Best for smaller groups.

2. All together at the beginning and end of the day, with different activities in between: students start and end the day with a session all together, and then visit different activities/seminars/sessions in rotation. All the students cover the same material, but in a different order. Works with larger groups where a big space is not available through the day.

3. Working in two halves: the day is split into two main activities and students do one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Helps manage larger groups whilst still maintaining a 'big event' feel.

4. Seminar style format: a general theme is covered but students can choose through the day which seminar/activity to attend. Gives maximum choice to students and works well for larger numbers.

✦ Different types of input in RE days

RE Days can be a break from the normal timetable and normal styles of teaching. There is the opportunity to engage students in lots of different kinds of input that might not normally be possible in the confines of an RE lesson. Some of the approaches that work best include:

- ‡ Surveys: finding out what students think about a topic.
- ‡ Art: using art to explore or express spiritual ideas and themes.
- ‡ Drama: creating drama to illustrate ideas by students or inviting a professional external drama group to perform.
- ‡ Debate: opportunities for students to disagree, form opinions and have their point of view heard.
- ‡ Group work: challenges, discussion, games and other activities that can be completed in smaller groups.

Some RE Days have also used film as a way of exploring an issue. This works especially well with older groups. For example, in November 2006, a sixth form in Luton held an RE Day based on the film 'Man Dancin', a contemporary retelling of The Passion. A local cinema and arts centre was used as the venue and the film was shown in full at the beginning of the day. Following the screening, the day was split into 1 hour seminars and workshops taking on some of the themes from story. In this particular case, the film's director also spoke, as a special guest.

✦ Practical points

Planning an RE Day is a complex and challenging task and you should allow plenty of time to get things organised. Most RE days are planned at least a term in advance and many longer than that. In planning you will need to check:

- Where will the day be held? In the school or at another venue? Are there any cost implications in using somewhere outside the school?
- What rooms are available: Can the school hall and other classrooms be used through the day? Will you be disturbed by other students if the hall is also used as a 'walkthrough'?
- What staff resources do you have? The more people available, the more activities you will be able to run simultaneously. Will school staff help in running the day or simply keep discipline among students.
- What budget do you have? Will the school cover any costs, including photocopying or art materials?
- What equipment will you need? Will the hall need amplification for speakers? Can the school provide any necessary AV equipment including projectors and screen?
- How will you staff the day? Will the school provide teachers to oversee students through the day or is your team responsible for this also? Will school staff be briefed in advance and is their role during the day clear?
- Who is responsible for health and safety during the day? Will the school carry out a risk assessment or is this your responsibility?
- How will you evaluate the day? Do students have a chance to feedback whether they found the day enjoyable and helpful?

📌 Resources

There are some resources available for anyone planning to run an RE Day:

📌 Organisations providing RE Days:

These organisations may offer to run a complete RE Day for a school. They often have prepared themes and topics and use experienced presenters. However they also normally charge for their services. Expect to pay between £400 and £700 for one day.

RE Today (secondary and sixth form)	www.retoday.org.uk
Damaris (mainly sixth form)	www.damaris.org
Barnabus (primary)	www.barnabasinschools.org.uk
Saltmine (primary and secondary)	www.saltmine.org
dare2engage (secondary and 16+)	www.dare2engage.org

📌 Published resources:

Spiritual Engagement: Inspiring 16-19's in RE Day Conferences (published by RE Today for £23.00)
This is an essential resource for anyone planning an RE Day, whether for 16-19's or younger. It includes a planning guide, ideas for themes and three ready-to-use Day Conferences with DVD material.

Man Dancin' (available to download for free from schoolswork.co.uk)
An RE Day based on 'Man Dancin' by Norman Stone, this guide includes detailed material on how to run a day around this film.

📌 Websites:

www.schoolswork.co.uk
www.teachers.tv/video/4963
www.dare2engage.org

advice, resources and links to other useful sites
video showing a sixth form RE Day on body theology
resource site for Christians working in 16-19 education

✦ **A sample resource: breathe**

breathe has been developed by a team from dare2engage and, although it's principally targeted at 16+ education, it also works well in a secondary setting.

The resource consists of a large multi-coloured mat, around 30 feet wide, with 12 different sections. In each section is a reflection on a Christian perspective of the self, others, the world and God. Each section has an activity guided by instructions that students listen to on an mp3 player.

breathe works by allowing students to explore any sections of their choice. They can visit all, some or even just one of the sections in the allotted time. The experience works well as part of an RE day, allowing students the chance to explore the Christian faith in a very different and unusual context. more details can be found on the dare2engage website at www.dare2engage.org.

▶ **Final tips**

✦ **Go and watch an organisation run an RE Day:** schoolswork.co.uk can link you to other organisations running RE Days who might be willing for you to come and observe a day in progress. If you're organising a day for the first time, this could be an essential help.

✦ **Be adventurous and fun:** The RE Day should be something special for the students, so make sure things are fun, well organised and give plenty of opportunity for them to contribute. Choose a topic that you might have wanted to hear when you were a young person!

✦ **Remember the day should be a chance for self reflection:** students should learn about a topic and find out new information, but above all they should have the space to respond to the topic personally and explore their own ideas about faith. Make sure the programme includes plenty of opportunity for them to do this!

✦ **Double check practical arrangements:** Schools are notorious for confusion in communications. Just because you've booked the school hall for the day with the main office, doesn't mean you won't find a drama class in full swing when you arrive! Make sure the school is clear about the rooms and resources you'll need to use during the day.

✦ **Be adaptable:** Sometimes it's hard to predict what will work and what won't when you're running an RE Day. Be prepared to let successful activities run over if students are really engaged, and think about cutting those that don't seem to be working. Share your experiences of your day with other schools workers through schoolswork.co.uk.

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