



Westmorland  
& Furness  
Council



# What does RE look like in Early Years?

**Guidance for subject leaders**

The EYFS statutory framework (2024) must be used in all early years' settings and schools from January 2024. It is important that subject leaders understand what their specialist subject looks like in early years; how key knowledge and skills are taught and what progression through these may look like. There is no requirement for schools to adopt a particular teaching style or method and the school curriculum as a whole needs to be considered, so it meets the needs of your children, families and community. The ELG should not be seen as your curriculum as this very narrow, merely a checkpoint for the end of the reception year.

The statutory requirement to provide RE does not include children prior to Reception, however schools will wish to consider what valuable learning experiences their early years curriculum will include and how this will prepare pupils for later learning in RE, as described in the local syllabus - **Cumbrian Agreed Syllabus for RE 2023**

The Cumbrian agreed syllabus for RE 2023 states that 'RE as a curriculum subject is not a single discipline; it is rooted in a range of disciplinary approaches'. This holistic approach fits well with the EYFS which has seven inter-connected areas of learning and development. In this document, the EYFS **prime** area of 'Personal, social and emotional development' and the **specific** areas of 'Understanding of the world' and 'Expressive arts and design' have been selected as EYFS areas that have strong links to the teaching of RE, but you will likely find that others link as well. Religious Literacy is at the heart of the local syllabus, and in this context, it means that children will have the opportunity to hold balanced and well-informed conversations about religious and non-religious worldviews. Language development is also key and is a 'golden thread' which runs through and underpins all other areas of learning.

The statutory framework is supported by two non-statutory documents which schools can choose to use ('Development Matters' and 'Birth to 5 Matters'). The table below shows where learning in early years could link to a broad and balanced curriculum within the NC programmes of study, your school's vision and values, and to your locally agreed RE syllabus. These statements are basics upon which to build your full curriculum.

Development Matters		Birth to 5 Matters	
Birth to Three - Babies and young toddlers will be learning to:	<b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Thrive as they develop self-assurance, notice and ask questions about differences such as skin colour, types of hair, gender, special needs and disabilities, religion and so on. Develop friendships with other children.	Range 1	<b>Understanding the World</b> Recognises key people in their own lives.  <b>Expressive arts and design</b> Babies explore media and materials as part of their exploration of the world around them (See Characteristics of Effective Learning).
	<b>Expressive arts and design</b> Respond emotionally and physically to music when it changes, move and dance to music, notice patterns with strong contrast and be attracted by patterns resembling the human face. Express ideas and feelings through making marks, and sometimes give a meaning to the marks they make.  <b>Understanding the world</b> Explore natural materials, indoors and outside. Explore and respond to different natural phenomena in their setting and on trips. Make connections between the features of their family and other families.	Range 2	<b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Builds relationships with special people. Is fascinated by other children.  <b>Expressive arts and design</b> Babies explore media and materials as part of their exploration of the world around them (See Characteristics of Effective Learning).  <b>Physical Development</b> Enjoys the sensory experience of making marks in food, damp sand, water, mud, paste or paint.

<p>3 and 4 year olds will be learning to:</p>	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b>          Develop their sense of responsibility and membership of a community Understand gradually how others may be feeling.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b>          Take part in simple pretend play, using an object to represent something even though they are not similar.          Show different emotions in their drawings and paintings, like happiness, sadness, fear etc.          Respond to what they have heard, expressing their thoughts and feelings.          Remember and sing entire songs.</p> <p><b>Understanding the world</b>          Begin to make sense of their own life-story and family's history.          Show interest in different occupations.          Begin to understand the need to respect and care for the natural environment and all living things.          Know that there are different countries in the world and talk about the differences they have experienced or seen in photos.</p>	<p>Range 3</p>	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b>          Shows empathy and concern for people who are special to them.          Understanding the World Is interested in photographs of themselves and other families people and objects.          Is curious about people and shows interest in stories about people, animals or objects that they are families with or which fascinate them.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b>          Explores and experiments with a range of media (tools and materials including sound) and whole body movement, through multi-sensorial exploration.          Notices and becomes interested in the transformative effect of their action on materials and resources.          Sings/vocalises whilst listening to music or playing with instruments/sound makers.          Expresses self through physical actions and sound.</p>
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Development Matters		Birth to 5 Matters	
3 and 4 year olds will be learning to:		Range 4	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Shows a sense of autonomy through asserting their ideas and preferences and making choices and decisions.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b> Experiments with ways to enclose a space, create shapes and represent actions, sounds and objects. Enjoys and responds to playing with colour in a variety of ways, for example combining colours. Uses 3D and 2D structures to explore materials and/or to express ideas. Joins in singing songs. Creates rhythmic sounds and movements</p> <p><b>Understanding the World</b> Remembers and talks about significant events in their own experience. Recognises and describes special times and events for family or friends. Shows interest in the lives of people who are familiar to them.</p>

Development Matters		Birth to 5 Matters	
Children in reception will be learning to:	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Express their feelings and consider the feelings of others. Think about the perspectives of others.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b> Explore, use and refine a variety of artistic effects to express their ideas and feelings. Create collaboratively sharing ideas, resources and skills.</p> <p><b>Understanding the World</b> Talk about members of their immediate family and community. Compare and contrast characters from stories, including figures from the past. Understand that some places are special to members of their community. Recognise that people have different beliefs and celebrate special times in different ways. Recognise some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries . Explore the natural world around them. Describe what they see, hear and feel whilst outside. Recognise some environments that are different to the one in which they live.</p>	Range 5	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Shows increasing consideration for other people's needs, is becoming more aware of the similarities and differences between themselves and others. Enjoys joining in with family customs and routines.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b> Continues to explore colour and how colours can be changed. Develops an understanding of using lines to enclose a space, and begins to use drawing to represent actions and objects based on imagination, observation and experience. Uses tools for a purpose.</p>
		Range 6	<p><b>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</b> Recognises they belong to different communities and social groups and communicates freely about home and community. Is more aware of their relationships to particular social groups and sensitive to prejudice and discrimination. Knows about similarities and differences between themselves and others, among families, communities, cultures and traditions.</p> <p><b>Expressive arts and design</b> Expresses and communicates working theories, feelings and understandings using a range of art forms, e.g. movement, dance, drama, music and the visual arts. Creates representations of both imaginary and real-life ideas, events, people and objects.</p>

Development Matters		Birth to 5 Matters	
			<p>Creates sounds, movements, drawings to accompany stories.</p> <p>Chooses particular movements, instruments/ sounds, colours and materials for their own imaginative purposes.</p> <p>Begins to build a collection of songs and dances</p> <p><b>Understanding the World</b></p> <p>Remembers and talks about significant events in their own experience.</p> <p>Shows interest in the lives of people who are familiar to them.</p> <p>Enjoys joining in with family customs and routines. Knows about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.</p>

**Some of the Early Learning Goals are shown below – please see the EYFS (2024) for others:**

**Personal Social and Emotional Development**

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Explain the reason for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- Show sensitivity to their own and other’ needs.

**Understanding the World**

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society;
- Know some similarities and differences between difference religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences of what has been read in class.

**Expressive Arts and Design**

Children at the expected level of development will:

Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.

- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories
- Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and (when appropriate) try to move in time with music.

## Characteristics of Effective Learning

In planning and guiding what children learn, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- Playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'.
- Active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements.
- Creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Characteristics children may display which will support future learning in RE		
Playing and Exploring	Active Learning	Creating and thinking critically
<p><b>Development Matters</b> Bring their own interests and fascinations into early years settings. This helps them to develop their learning. Respond to new experiences that you bring to their attention.</p> <p><b>Birth to 5 Matters</b> Engaging in open-ended activity. Showing curiosity about objects, events and people. Showing particular interests. Representing their experiences in play. Taking on a role in their play. Acting out experiences with other people.</p>	<p><b>Development Matters</b> Keep on trying when things are difficult.</p> <p><b>Birth to 5 Matters</b> Showing a deep drive to know more about people and their world. Showing high levels of involvement, energy, fascination.</p>	<p><b>Development Matters</b> Review their progress as they try to achieve a goal. Check how well they are doing. Know more, so feel confident about coming up with their own ideas. Make more links between those ideas. Concentrate on achieving something that's important to them. They are increasingly able to control their attention and ignore distractions.</p> <p><b>Birth to 5 Matters</b> Thinking of ideas that are new and meaningful to the child. Playing with possibilities (what if? what else?). Visualising and imagining options. Making links and noticing patterns in their experience.</p>



## What does RE look like in Early Years?

The Cumbrian Agreed Syllabus (2023) states the following for Early Years:

As a preparation for the disciplinary approach, pupils begin to explore religion and worldviews in terms of special people, times, places, books and objects. Pupils explore religious stories which raise interesting questions. They are introduced to specialist words and use their senses in exploring religious beliefs, practices and forms of expression. Practitioners should **model** respect to all people, religions and worldviews in all their references and interactions, for example, handling sacred objects. Resources in the EY should reflect a range of cultures, ethnicities, religions and worldviews.

Early Years Professionals from across Cumbria and Cumbrian SACRE members have made the suggestions below.

What RE might look like in Early Years, including in Indoor and Outdoor Provision	
What you might see children doing	What you should see practitioners doing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working collaboratively and independently both in and outdoors.</li> <li>Interacting, communicating and expressing their feelings and emotions through music and other media.</li> <li>Asking questions and wanting to find things out.</li> <li>Respectfully handling and discussing real life objects and artefacts.</li> <li>Discussing artefacts, clothes and photos related to children's own worldviews.</li> <li>Creating artefacts or scenarios and discussing their significance eg Diva lamp, Easter garden, Christingle, Ramadan lanterns.</li> <li>Cooking and tasting food enjoyed by their own, and other, communities.</li> <li>Exploring how light is used in some celebrations · Listening to, and talking about, religious stories – retelling and sequencing events including through small world play.</li> <li>Taking part in role play, on stories, home and community events.</li> <li>Describing and exploring rites of passage eg new baby ceremonies, marriage, festivals, celebrations.</li> <li>Exploring their own identity, family and household, and appreciating difference.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing a welcoming space that communicates with all children, families and visitors that they are welcome and valued through sharing photos, stories, music and so on.</li> <li>Encouraging children to wonder and ask questions.</li> <li>Beginning to use the language of religion and worldviews, including use of some, many, or most as opposed to 'all' when describing how people might practice or live out their religious or non-religious worldview.</li> <li>Provide enjoyable, creative learning experiences related to religion and worldviews.</li> <li>Encouraging first hand experiences and exploration of materials and objects.</li> <li>Respectfully showing artefacts, special clothes and photos related to children's worldviews.</li> <li>Using photographs to observe home lives of some people from a religious tradition.</li> <li>Provide experiences, through all their senses, ways in which people explore and express meanings using symbols, stories and rituals.</li> <li>Provide resources for children to play at wrapping &amp; giving presents.</li> </ul>

What you might see children doing	What you should see practitioners doing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoying listening to and meeting visitors from a range of religious and non-religious worldviews.</li> <li>• Hearing and discussing stories about children’s different worldviews.</li> <li>• Beginning to think about where and how their lives are similar and different to those they encounter in an RE context.</li> <li>• Visiting special places including local places of worship.</li> <li>• Using their senses when exploring their locality and using natural objects to create artwork.</li> <li>• Listening and responding to the music of different instruments and from a range of religion and worldviews.</li> <li>• Looking and responding to art from a range of cultures, religions and worldviews.</li> <li>• Helping to plant, grow and harvest produce, and care for living things.</li> <li>• Watching videos of children’s different worldviews, festivals, right of passage or special journeys as a stimulus for ideas and discussion.</li> <li>• Sharing a range of non-fiction texts about how different children celebrate events in their families/homes, and about friendship and giving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping children to understand the importance of caring for the environment, and fostering awe and respect for nature.</li> <li>• Supporting children to solve problems and think critically.</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for children to explore their locality, including special places of interest and/or worship.</li> <li>• Showing pictures of people praying in different ways and places.</li> <li>• Providing support to children in expressing their emotions safely.</li> <li>• Helping children explore strategies to manage feelings such as anger, fear, sadness · Encouraging children to express to talk about things that are important to them and their families.</li> <li>• Helping children to make links between their experiences and those of others.</li> <li>• Helping all children to feel welcome and to develop friendships and respect for their peers.</li> <li>• Introducing religious words, symbols, rituals and stories and start to explore what they mean to people.</li> <li>• Fostering shared respect for own and others’ religions and worldviews.</li> <li>• Talking with children about past events in their lives.</li> <li>• Talking about similarities and differences between themselves and others and among families, communities and traditions.</li> <li>• Teaching children a wide range of songs, stories and rhymes, reflecting a wide range of cultures and worldviews.</li> <li>• Helping children understand how religious leaders and communities might help people.</li> </ul>







## The Curriculum – What we want children to learn

(Taken from Development Matters)

The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.

- Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.
- The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
- Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
- Babies and young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.
- Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way.

## Progression

		<b>Music/ Movement</b>	<b>Stories</b>	<b>Art</b>	<b>Care</b>	<b>Locality</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
2-year room		Will explore a set of basic handheld instruments e.g. shakers and may sing short parts of favourite songs Explore movement to music.	Listens to short stories with props and engages with individual repeated reading of age-appropriate books. Books reflect a range of families in a positive way.	Safely use and explore a variety of materials and develop ways of holding tools eg pencils and chalks. Make marks and simple representations.	Engages in simple activities to look after the local area with adult support, such as planting bulbs. Children are supported to treat each other with care and kindness	Starts to recognise where they live and places they visit regularly. Use natural resources and materials in the classroom.	Focused on own task or shared activities with lots of adult input. Play alongside other children, learning to respect and share resources.
Nursery/ Pre-school							
Reception Class		Can music-make with a growing number of different instruments and can sing favourite songs in their entirety. Start to understand that songs can be sung as part of religious festivals. Begin to sequence moves and move rhythmically.	Can retell/ role play and talk about a range of high-quality key texts including stories that reflect a range of cultures, religions and worldviews Begin to think about where and how their lives are similar and different to those they encounter.	Respond in a variety imaginative and expressive ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and taste; Make representations of self, others, events and places with increasing detail. Take part in enjoyable, creative learning experiences related to religion and worldviews.	Expresses views about how to look after our planet and local environment. Contributes to school led projects in the local area/ school grounds. Children are helped to understand that everyone is equally valued and treated fairly.	Use photographs to observe home lives of families from at least two different contexts, noticing some things that are the same and some that are different. Begin to develop awareness and respect for the different worldviews and traditions in wider society.	Collaboration with peers on shared projects in addition to individual creations. Join in with cooperative games and talk about the value of working together.

## Assessment in Early Years

The Early Learning Goals are not to be used or envisaged as a curriculum. The EYFS clearly states 'The ELGS are there to support teachers to make a holistic, best-fit judgement about a child's development and their readiness for Year One'. Observation checkpoints are included in Development Matters to support practitioners when considering whether children are on track or if additional support is needed.

'Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement and should not be required to prove this through collection of physical evidence- Statutory Framework for EYFS 2.2' (See document for more information about assessment, including the three statutory assessments in EY).

## Useful links:

Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage

**[Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage for group and school providers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/971620/Development_Matters.pdf)**

Development Matters

**[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/971620/Development\\_Matters.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/971620/Development_Matters.pdf)**

Birth to Five Matters

**<https://www.birthto5matters.org.uk/#:~:text=%20Birth%20to%205%20Matters%3A%20non-statutory%20guidance%20for%20the%20years%20coalition%20composed%20of%20the%20following...%20more%20>**

## Local Authority Websites

**[Learning Improvement Service - Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | Cumberland Council](#)**

**[Learning Improvement Service - Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | Westmorland and Furness Council](#)**

**Please note:** This document is not to be used as a tick list for assessment or planning purposes. Its aim is to support with understanding the revised Statutory Framework and accompanying non-statutory guidance documents. These documents may also be useful for mixed age teachers, new to EY teachers, senior leaders and governors – Early Years Team.