



AVANTI SCHOOLS TRUST

Policies on Philosophy, Religion and Ethics & Participation in Collective Worship

April 2019

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Avanti Trust schools aim to develop ‘*Deeply inspired people who speak about the many forms of the same one reality*’¹ Rig Veda 1.164.46

1. Introduction

This document sets out the framework for the Avanti Schools Trust’s philosophy, religion and ethics (PRE) curriculum for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and primary and secondary phases of education and includes:

- aims and purpose of the PRE curriculum
- pedagogic and curriculum principles
- approach to inclusion and alternative provision

2. The Avanti Schools Trust PRE curriculum

The Trust’s vision is for its schools to progressively foster confident, articulate, , philosophically reflective, mindful, loving, and spiritually aware students who contribute meaningfully as positive, socially responsible British citizens.

The PRE curriculum upholds the principles embedded in the new National Curriculum in England by:

- ensuring opportunities for an exploration of philosophies and religions
- promoting spiritual, moral and mental well-being, and social and cultural development within the school and wider community
- developing learners’ sense of self and identity to empower them to achieve excellence academically and personally, ready for their next phase of learning in life
- presenting the practical value of faith, towards the nurture of young people who are both personally fulfilled and a blessing to the world.

As designated Hindu schools, Avanti schools aim to develop learners who:

- love learning and are deeply inspired by knowledge of and about life
- are confident, inquisitive and articulate, and strive to learn more independently
- are curious about the different descriptions of ‘reality’, including those expressed in Western and Eastern philosophies as well as religious ideologies

¹ This quote from the Vedic texts refers to the dialogic tradition in Hindu philosophy; the desire to seek knowledge through discussion with people who hold different views, resulting in deeper thinking, critique and understanding.

- whilst rooted in their own beliefs, they are able to analytically discuss and debate these in relation to those of others
- are socially responsible and exhibit a passion to achieve the very best for themselves and society.
- are good citizens, exemplars of the strong overlapping consensus across British values and the Hindu faith.
- Are highly successful yet display an awareness that their individual happiness is inextricably linked to the quality of their meaningful and positive relations with family, friends, society, the natural world, and indeed God.
- respond to the values and beliefs of all others with respect, sensitivity and discernment.

The PRE curriculum comprises deepening one's faith in the Chaitanya Hindu tradition and/or developing a deep appreciation for this belief. It is also about learning from and about different faiths, alternative belief systems and philosophic theories and approaches to asking and answering the 'big' questions in life. In this journey we seek to engage not only the cerebral, but also the heart-felt, dimensions of being fully human.

Whilst rooted in the monotheistic Chaitanya Hindu tradition, the intention is to learn comparatively, so that there is informed and authentic dialogue about the similarities and differences across different faiths and other world-views, including new-age spiritualities, humanist, naturalist and atheist perspectives. 10% (at primary) and 10-15% (at secondary) of the curriculum will address major world faiths- with priority given to the Judeo-Christian foundations of British society. PRE lessons will be held three times a week in primary schools, and the same for years 7, 8 and 9 lasting 60 minutes each in secondary schools.

The PRE curriculum does not explicitly include the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, citizenship, nor any other National Curriculum subject (although values are explored) but stands as a discrete area of knowledge. The PRE curriculum is our RE curriculum offer in primary phase and in Years 7, 8 and 9. As the PRE curriculum includes RE, parents are entitled to withdraw their children from all or part of the sessions.

Schools will provide RE/philosophy and ethics examined courses from Years 10 to 11; and optional Philosophy and Religious Studies courses for years 12 & 13.

3. Pedagogic and curriculum principles

3.1 Structure of the curriculum

The curriculum develops learners' a) knowledge and understanding of Hinduism, major faiths and other world-views and b) critical thinking skills. Aligned to the new National Curriculum, these are categorized into four aspects: knowledge, critical thought, application and experience.

- **Knowledge:**
 - learning about religious philosophical concepts drawing from the Hindu tradition
- **Critical thought:**
 - teaching students how to construct arguments and debate (in written and oral ways), with critical analysis as essential
 - teaching students to become skillful and articulate questioners, able to question 'blind faith', common assumptions or held views.
- **Application:**
 - applying learning and skills to ethical and moral dilemmas
 - debating and questioning 'big' philosophical questions and problems.
 - Appreciating that philosophy is more than intellectual gymnastics; it is the calling to a life well lived.
- **Experience:**
 - experiencing religious life in real contexts (e.g. visiting places of worship)
 - learning about different religious rituals, festivals and ways of life (with the option to be involved in festivals, for example).
 - Developing spiritual sensibilities as awe, mystery, gratitude, and inter-connection- through music, drama, art, play, and other creative methodologies.

These categories give the foundations on which an appropriate pedagogy can be constructed to include:

- A balanced pupil and teacher voice, giving more opportunities for students to pose critical questions and work towards edifying conclusions.
- Both dialogue and discernment
- Harnessing dialogue and discernment with movements of the heart- vital to effect holistic and wholesome character development
- Knowledge acquisition through direct teaching
- Planned opportunities for students to debate and critique their own and others' thinking

- Planned opportunities for students to use their knowledge productively through presentations/projects to improve the school or society, teaching younger pupils, volunteering etc.
- Independent research skills and practice
- Learning through visits to religious places and meeting people from different faiths
- Direct teaching of debating skills and critical thinking
- Effective assessment that informs planning and differentiation so that every student is challenged and motivated to enquire further.
- Half-termly summative assessments to monitor and track progress
- High-impact marking with student responses every fortnight (at secondary level).

3.2 Theological structure

The curriculum overview and programmes of study identify the key theological principles underpinning the PRE curriculum:

1. You are not the material body but an eternal, spiritual soul
2. The ground of all being is an inclusive, all loving Being- introduced in the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition as Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead
3. Everything is part and parcel of Krishna- and consequently entitled to flourish
4. Encouragement of the four principles of civilised and humane living: Self-discipline, Purity, Truthfulness, and Mercy.
5. Devotional service to the Lord, and His creation, as the true meaning of life.
6. *Param vijāyate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam* (chanting of the holy names of God as both the means for, and the ends of, spiritual perfection in this lifetime).

Our faith perspective suggests that, like many belief systems (including non-religious), nurturing love and its subsuming values (respect, self-discipline, empathy, integrity, courage and gratitude) can positively contribute to British society.

4. Inclusion: learning opportunities for all

Teachers should set high expectations for every learner. The principles above should be developed across the PRE curriculum so that complex questioning, confident debate and discussion and focused acquisition of knowledge stretches all. Learners who are identified as gifted should be challenged by offering deep learning experiences that:

- (i) require more complex thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation)
- (ii) engage robustly with the aesthetic, artistic, and emotional domains and
- (iii) facilitate planned independent study (e.g. research projects).

A parallel offer is available for those wishing to deepen their spiritual sensibilities through music, drama, art, good company, and other wholistic dimensions. Lessons should be well planned, using the outcomes as a focus and ensuring progress within each year and across phases. Lesson planning will take full account of the ability of learners at different stages of learning English. Teaching will enable them to participate fully and contribute to discussions that advance their acquisition of English and understanding of the content of the PRE-curriculum.

All learners- irrespective of their abilities, temperament, race, special need, disability, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics- will have an equal opportunity to gain from high-quality teaching and careful planning that sets out to overcome the prejudice and discrimination that can act as barriers to learning.

Teachers should take into account their duties under equal opportunities legislation and be well informed and sensitive to the communities they serve. As teachers in faith schools, they should be particularly knowledgeable about the different communities with diverse beliefs, including those with faith and those without.

Teachers will draw on the PRE curriculum and our values to support learners who struggle to show positive attitudes to learning or have problems developing appropriate behaviors and relationships with others, including their peers. The curriculum promotes personal reflection, a sense of positive spiritual self-image and identity. These aspects of the PRE curriculum will influence teachers' behaviors and our schools' wider behavior management strategies.

In some cases, PRE will be taught by a specialist teacher, however, class teachers will be actively supporting the PRE lesson with their knowledge of the children's needs unless an exception has been arranged between the Principal, PRE lead and the Trust, due to this not being possible.

5. Assessing and monitoring progress

Assessment of learning in the PRE curriculum, across all stages from EYFS to KS5 will take place frequently and be carried out robustly. It will be used both to inform planning of subsequent teaching and learning as well as to summarise the attainment and progress of learners at agreed, predetermined intervals, and reporting the same to parents and carers.

Assessment at KS4 and KS5 will be aligned to the required or recommended frameworks to be found in the adopted national examination board specifications.

For the EYFS phase we will follow the agreed national approach to assessing learners' progress through the seven areas of learning. At KS1–3, Trust schools will,

determine their detailed approach to the assessment of attainment and the progress of pupils following the bespoke PRE curriculum and the national curriculum.

The overview for the PRE curriculum shows progression in learning and offers increasing opportunities for learners to develop, apply and demonstrate higher order thinking skills of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. These outcomes are mapped to the six half-termly themes as well as to the theological principles and key knowledge content of the PRE curriculum. The outcomes are assessed through on-going formative assessment to evaluate learning and inform teaching. They are used by teachers and senior leaders to evaluate achievement and standards for individual and cohorts.

6. Involving parents/carers and community

Avanti Schools will endeavour to create positive relationships with their parent body and wider communities to gain from their diverse beliefs, faiths, skills and knowledge to support the high-quality teaching of the PRE curriculum. Where appropriate, parents/carers and members of the wider community will participate in school curriculum learning (e.g. parents running Bhagavad Gita workshops for other parents, or a local Christian priest coming in to talk about the significance of the loving message of Jesus so that children can compare this with our own distinctive Hindu perspective on love for Krishna). Parents will be invited to workshops to build their knowledge and to understand the PRE curriculum taught and experienced by their children in Avanti schools.

Our schools will foster positive and collaborative relationships with local faith groups and places of worship so that our learners develop respect for others and an outward-looking attitude to the diverse neighbourhoods in which they live.

7. Accountability for quality and standards

The Principals will monitor the quality of teaching and learning in PRE and keep it under regular review to ensure that delivery of the curriculum fully meets the expectations as described in this policy. The Trust will support the schools to implement best practice and achieve high learning outcomes by providing constructive feedback on their practice through regular external monitoring and a three-yearly inspection of the effectiveness of PRE teaching and learning using the trust's Section 48 framework. The cycle of the inspection may be shortened in response to a risk assessment. The trust will broker additional support for the school if the practice and outcomes fall short of the expectations as outlined in the Trust's policy for PRE and collective worship and the S48 inspection framework.

Appendix 1

Withdrawal Policy from R.E and/or Collective Worship

The right of Withdrawal from Religious Education (including Philosophy, Ethics and Religion study and Collective Worship)

At Avanti schools we wish to be an inclusive community but recognise that parents, of course, have the legal right to withdraw their children from religious education on the grounds of conscience. However, the right of withdrawal does not extend to other areas of the curriculum when, as may happen on occasion, spontaneous questions on religious matters are raised by pupils or there are issues related to religion that arise in other subjects such as history or citizenship.

We would ask any parent considering this to contact the Principal to discuss any inquiries or anxieties about the policy, provision and practice of religious education at our schools.

At our schools we have three main aspects of Religious Education:

1. Philosophy Religion & Ethics curriculum
2. Collective Worship
3. Festival Days (drop down days involving festivals related to Hinduism (50%) and other religions (50%) so over the year there could be 3 Hindu and 3 other festivals from other faiths.

Managing the right of withdrawal

- The school will ensure that parents who want to withdraw their children from PRE are aware of the PRE curriculum and that its relevance for all pupils and ways in which the curriculum respects others' personal beliefs.
- Parents should be made aware of its learning objectives and what is covered in the PRE curriculum and should be given the opportunity to discuss this, if they wish.
- The school should review such a request each year, in discussion with the parents.
- The use of the right to withdraw should be at the instigation of parents (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over), and it should be made clear whether it is from the whole of the subject or specific parts of the three aspects mentioned above it. No reasons need be given. They should complete the written request using the form provided in this document
- Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from PRE without any influence from the school. However, each school should ensure that parents or carers are informed of this right and are also helped to become aware of the educational objectives and content of the PRE curriculum. In this way, parents can make an informed decision.
- Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right must be respected, and the school must discuss and agree appropriate alternative arrangements with the parents or carers to explore how the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated. There will be no negative impact or recourse to the child or family.

- If pupils are withdrawn from PRE, schools have a duty to supervise them and help them to utilise the time fruitfully, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Pupils will usually remain on school premises. However, at our schools and with our inclusive ethos we will provide opportunities to take part in self-directed and independent research projects based on themes which focus on our values, on significant roles models (like Eleanor Roosevelt) and other philosophical questions. With younger learners, pupils will be given tasks that develop their reading, writing and also focused on enriching their understanding of our values. Depending on the needs of the children who have withdrawn, teachers will ensure that appropriate tasks are given.
- Children who are withdrawn from PRE will work in another suitably safe and quiet area, like another classroom for example and will be properly supervised.
- Children who are withdrawn from Collective Worship will be supervised while undertaking activities which may involve reading of stories related to our values or be led in discussion about the values and how they can impact positively in our community as British values of inclusion, respect and democracy. Prayers are a daily part of our school life. Pupils who do not wish to take part can choose to sit quietly and respectfully observe or can withdraw. They will be encouraged to say a prayer from their own tradition and if with no faith to consider how our values contribute to making the school a positive school community
- During the celebration of Festival days children who have been withdrawn will be taught following the National Curriculum. They will be fully involved in all other aspects of the school day including Lunch and play so that they do not feel isolated.

Pupils and students who exercise their right to withdraw will continue with other set learning tasks. This time will be used productively to engage them in learning across other subjects of the school curriculum. Teaching during this time may also include tasks or projects that promote exploration of our schools' values², through independent research skills, critical thinking, age-appropriate study of non-religious philosophy and reflective writing. The provision will be suitably staffed and might also make good use of technology and e-learning. School leadership teams are best placed to make this provision based on the ages, needs and interests of their learners. The quality and impact of this provision will be kept under review so that learners use their time productively and do not feel excluded (see Appendix 3).

² Empathy, Respect, Self-discipline, Courage, Integrity, Gratitude

Notification to withdraw from PRE, Collective Worship, Prayers and/or Festivals

Pupil's name	Pupil's class	Pupil's Teacher
I would like to withdraw my child from (please tick)	Philosophy, Religion and Ethics study	
	Collective Worship	
	School prayers	
	Festival days	
Should my decision change I will notify the school in writing.		
I acknowledge that the school has explained to me the curriculum details and the nature of Collective Worship, so that I can make an informed choice.		
Signed: U.Sahni		

Next review: April 2020