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To all Secondary Head Teachers in the Archdiocese of Birmingham

Our Ref Itrs/GCSE/JV/BH
16th June 2015

Dear Headteacher

GCSE

The renewal of specifications for GCSE provides an important opportunity for us to help our students grow in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith and the contribution that it makes to their lives and the world around them.

Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholic teaching has clearly focused on the need for inter-religious dialogue to enable all people to grow in understanding of the faith traditions of other people who form our society and world at large. This is why Catholic RE through the requirements of the RE Curriculum Directory has always included the study of another major religion.

The new specification for GCSE requires that greater time and attention is given to this study. The specification provides us with options for which religion we might study and these options need to be seriously considered.

Catholic Christianity finds its roots and foundations in the Jewish Faith. The DES would welcome and encourage diocesan schools to take seriously a contemporary study of Judaism as the second religion for GCSE. Not only will it provide an important link to the study of Catholic Christianity, but will also contribute to a greater understanding of the influence of Judaism in the world today. Such a study will also make a valuable contribution to school's provision for SMSC and links to other areas of the curriculum that are currently established in schools.

For some schools a study of Islam as the second religion may seem very interesting and an opportunity to look at the place of this faith in British society. The DES would wish to advise caution here. Islam as a faith has a tremendously diverse background with many differing interpretations of the tradition that may very well prove to be challenging within the new GCSE.

.../2 Continuation.

We expect schools to teach about other faiths within the RE Curriculum, but within the context of the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. Pupils should be taught about the integrity of other faiths and not as comparative religion; that is, at some point in their education pupils should learn about beliefs, expressions and celebrations, living and belonging, of the principal religions in Great Britain.

It is recognised that many schools include pupils of other religions and we have a responsibility to foster their religious and spiritual understanding as we have for Catholic pupils. As the CES/Bishops' Conference document states:

"When pupils of other faiths are present in a Catholic school the task must be to promote their human growth in such a way that they can integrate their particular faith with every aspect of their lives."¹

The new KS3 RE Framework provides an excellent opportunity for pupils to explore other world religions in a productive and creative manner. In Year 7, pupils will address the question: 'What are the signs of identity for Jewish people?' In Year 8 pupils will have the choice of responding to the question: 'How do Sikhs/Hindus live in relationship with each other?' And in Year 9 pupils are asked to address the question: 'How are Muslims called to live?' These units of study are set within the context of pupils in our schools being challenged to ask themselves: 'What are the signs of Catholic identity?' 'How do we live in relationship with others?' 'What as Catholics are we called to be?'

These are interesting and challenging times for our teachers and pupils and we will continue, with the help of Christ, to support them in their teaching and learning.

With my best wishes and prayers,

Yours sincerely



Fr. Jonathan Veasey
Director
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¹ Catholic Schools, Children of Other Faiths and Community Cohesion: CES & Bishops' Conference (CES, 2008), p.7