

# AN INTEGRATED PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM VISION: HOW SCHOOLS OF A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER MIGHT RESPOND



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This project is being funded by Templeton World Charity Foundation as part of a wider scheme of research titled Big Questions in Classrooms.

Although studies have explored school pupils' attitudes concerning science and religion, there has been little research on beginning teachers' experiences in their development and formation and not much is known about how big questions are framed in classrooms or the extent of teachers' experiences of the science/religion encounter. This project addresses the gap, develops informed responses for teacher education and finds some preliminary understandings of the impact of the use of that knowledge in teacher education programmes.

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**TEMPLETON WORLD**  
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**BIG QUESTIONS**  
*in* CLASSROOMS

# A SCHOOL AMBITION FOR AN INTEGRATED PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THEIR CURRICULUM VISION: HOW SCHOOLS OF A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER MIGHT RESPOND

## Science Religion Encounters Toolkit 11

In the Science Religion Encounters (SRE) research project, we did not find much evidence that beginning teachers who had experience of a Christian character sensed a strong integrated philosophy of knowledge although the method and focus of enquiry did not seek to reveal this.

However, in presenting the findings of the project to senior school leaders from schools of a Christian the question of how science religion encounters were made sense of brought up Christian school ethos intentions of an integrated holistic or overarching philosophy of education or knowledge.

Ofsted, the English school inspectorate, require that schools express a curriculum intent and this is translated into different subjects (Ofsted September 2022). Schools may expect to be asked about their rationale for including knowledge they identify and also the sequencing of that within individual subjects. Strictly speaking, schools are not expected to articulate a bigger integrated picture of knowledge above that of subject level. (Young 2013, Billingsley 2013; Kötter and Hammann 2017; Billingsley and Nassaji 2020).

However, Government policies for schools do hope schools will draw on more than one subject in certain areas. For example, in the statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (DfE 2021). Curriculum programmes addressing these areas may complement and be complemented by multiple national curriculum subjects including science and RE.

Government policy on sustainability and climate change (DfE 2022) also encourages schools to provide ‘opportunities to develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the importance of nature, sustainability and the causes and impact of climate change and to translate this knowledge into positive action and solutions’

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems>). This policy document mentions contributions of different subjects in a inspire collective collaboration to address climate change.

Multi-subject cooperation is viewed as beneficial for attending to some of the more complex and important personal, societal and global concerns of education. There is, therefore, one kind of integration that a student must undertake in terms of managing an integrative making sense process, when confronted with complex challenges that requires insight or disciplinary tools from different subjects. There is a second kind of integration in terms of how the different ways of making sense that subjects offer can be balanced. How for example the knowledge and insight of music can be appreciated alongside mathematics or history. Alongside any thinking about the integration of these subjects is a third insight of any understanding of what it is to be human and any overarching worldview, philosophy of life or religion which seeks to incorporate all of these elements.

## SCHOOLS OF A RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

English state funded Christian religious character schools express an ambition for a joined-up picture of the education they provide to the 2 million children in English Church schools. The Catholic Church and Church of England both have education policy expressions for a bigger philosophy of education which touches on science and RE and other subjects as well.

The Catholic theological understanding of schooling and faith promoted by the English and Welsh Bishops declares RE should be a core subject integrated into “every aspect of the curriculum” (Stock 2012, 13). Catholic education policy also declares “the Catholic school stands at the meeting place of faith and culture ... a ‘place of integral formation’ where pupils can integrate faith and life” (p.18) (*To know You more clearly: The Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools, Colleges and Academies in England and Wales* (2023))

The Church of England’s Vision for Education also presents an integrated vision of education for the, ‘whole child, seeing spiritual, moral, social and cultural development integrated with physical and intellectual development at the heart of human flourishing’ (Church of England Education Office, 2016, p.6). The C.of.E advocates a horizon of ‘seeking truth and wisdom in relation to all reality – areas of knowledge and know-how, religions, cultures, the sciences, the arts and crafts, economics, law, politics, and more’ (p.17).

Both Churches have something to say about the bigger philosophy of education, and how subjects are related to that.

### **An example of might this be articulated?**

The following is an example that was shared to senior school leaders of Secondary Schools and Academies of an Anglican character and to the whole staff at a staff development day at a School in London. The aim of this suggestion was to go a little further in

*Drawing on metaphors from Genesis, at its most basic, education is the striving to enlighten the darkness, to reach out into the unknown and make sense of experience. It is a hope filled vision of the prospects for education.*

*This occurs in community. At the most basic level this community is the family in the passing down from one generation to the next and this occurs also in schools. This places on us burdens of moral responsibility to one another as the reaching out is a cooperative activity. The educational movement is one that is not only outwardly reaching, but also inwardly transformative. We learn ourselves and learn together with others.*

***The integrity of separate subjects:** That process of reaching out occurs within subjects, that have developed over time their own integrities as ways of making sense. They each seek to confront the unknown and provide some ways of discerning patterns that are meaningful across the curriculum areas. These disciplines or subjects need their own spaces to protect their own integrities. They have distinct kinds of ends they have discerned in process of making sense and to not protect their integrities might mean that one distinct integrity is lost at the expense of the another. The school community then should know, understand and appreciate the integrities of each of the subjects.*

***A greater making sense:** It is also the case that there is a greater making sense that we seek schools to help children undertake. There is some connecting if one subject area to another when we draw on more than one to address a concern of understanding. Mathematics assists science. Language facilitates the humanities. Subjects should not be entirely separate one from another. There is a dialogue between them to be had. On occasion there are matters of concern in life that require different insights from different subjects.*

***A dialogic school:** The school, therefore, must also enable dialogue when there is a need to draw on the insights of multiple integrities, such a science and religious education. Genesis might offer an insight that these different subjects, with the integrities, are part of the creation that is said to be good, and part of the process of naming that Adam undertakes, in community with Eve. There is in Genesis, therefore, a foundation for a philosophy of education for schools of a Christian character.*

# School intentions underpinned by a Christian Philosophy of Education



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## Discussion questions for school leaders involved in new teacher induction

1. What is the vision of education that runs through your school? How does it connect the kind of person pupils and teachers are believed to be, with a philosophy of knowledge in the curriculum subjects, and the ends to which education is aimed?
2. How are new teachers introduced to this vision, and in particular how their subject relates to it?
3. What examples within your school's approach to certain multi-subject issues (such as PSHE, RSE, Sustainability etc) detail curriculum connectivity? What conversations do you encourage across subjects about these areas?
4. What outcomes do you want for your pupils at the end of their studies in terms of the bigger questions of knowledge, how they make sense of things, and the role of many subjects in those questions?

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