

Nishkam School Trust



Faith and RE Policy

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NST – Faith and Religious Education Policy

1. Overall context

The Nishkam Schools are designated as schools with a religious character. As specified in the Department of Education Funding Agreement, schools with a religious character must provide Religious Education (RE) in accordance with the tenants of the particular faith specified in the designation and the requirements of the Designated Religious Authority of the schools. This policy outlines the unique multi-faith ethos of the Nishkam Schools and the requirements of RE in the Schools.

The schools operate as Sikh ethos multi-faith schools to “educate pupils to become **good human beings** who are rooted in **virtues** and have integrity of **character**, and enable pupils to practise their **faith and beliefs**”.

To uphold human dignity and freedom, the schools support pupils to become stronger in the faith and beliefs they hold or into which they were born, rather than converting to another faith.

All school activities contribute to achieving the religious character and ethos of the school, with the following aspects having a key role:

- Virtues, Faith and Personal Development curriculum
- Collective Worship
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC¹) development programmes

Sikh ethos multi-faith approach

The Sikh faith requires respect for all faith beliefs, as well as people with no faith. First and foremost is the need to understand, maintain and respect ones’ own distinct identity and to accept that the entire human population is to be considered as one race and human family.

These teachings help our schools to recognise and promote the multi-faith approach.

The overall ethos, vision and aims for the Nishkam Schools have been determined by the Designated Religious Authority for the Nishkam Schools Trust, the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ).

Sources of Inspiration and Authority

Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, a registered faith-based organisation, provides the inspiration and authority for the Nishkam Schools, based on the teachings of the ten successive mortal Gurus (from 1469 to 1708) and from 1708 to the “Eternal Sikh Guru” Guru Granth Sahib Ji, together with the Sikh traditions developed and interpreted over some five centuries.

Guidance from the Sikh ethos for the multi-faith approach

The following religious practices form the foundation of this approach.

- Selfless prayer for all individual beings and common good as a daily routine.
- Daily prayers for the welfare, flourishing and prosperity of all humanity – “*Sarbat da bhalla*”, as opposed to that of Sikhs alone.
- A Sikh is to go beyond self and help others, even those perceived to be enemies and ‘wicked’ – “*Bhuray da bhalla*”.
- Moral virtues will be taught and lived out to provide examples which young people will be inspired to follow.
- The ethos of the school is to be exemplified in the life of the school community and all staff will be supported to provide exemplary role models.

NST Mission

To empower children with virtues to enable them to excel **academically** and **spiritually**, enabling them to serve humanity selflessly (Nishkam), with an abundance of love, compassion and forgiveness.

NST vision



At Nishkam Schools, our pupils explore the divine context of humanity and wonder of all creation. They not only learn about, but also learn from, the wisdom of religions and in so doing explore the infinite human potential to do good unconditionally. We support pupils to develop aspects of their own religious, spiritual or human identities. They learn about serenity through prayer and humility in service and in so doing, they deepen their own respective faith, and respect the common purpose of all religious traditions, as well as respecting the beliefs of those with no faith tradition. They explore the unique divinity of the individual, and our common humanity.

At Nishkam Schools, we believe that the fostering of human virtues forms the foundation of all goodness. Our curricula are carefully enriched to allow experiences where our pupils, teachers and parents alike learn to grow through a conscious focus on virtues. Our virtues-led education approach helps to provide guidance to enable pupils to understand their choices in order to help lead better lives. Our pupils become self-reflective and flourish; they are able to build strong, meaningful relationships and understand their responsibilities to the global family and all creation, founded in faith.

At Nishkam Schools, our pupils and staff alike aim to become the best human beings they can possibly be, in all aspects of spiritual, social and academic life. We foster a school culture which inspires optimism and hope, as well as determination and confidence, for all to achieve their best possible. This is accomplished through a rich and challenging curriculum, along with excellent teaching to nurture awe and wonder. Pupils gain a breadth and depth of knowledge and a love of learning to achieve their full potential.

The whole human being

The Nishkam approach is based on the belief that human beings consist of the body, mind and the soul; whilst all three are separate constituents they are inter-related and inter-connected and all three need specific individual attention to have a full and complete education. With such an education pupils will flourish and fulfil their potential, and kindle a connection with the creator.

In Nishkam Schools, we aim to provide this holistic approach to education. This policy describes the NST approach to ‘education’ of the soul.

2. Faith Development lessons

FD is focused on the virtues, dispositions and attitudes of faith. It is about learning what it is to be

human and the virtues that inspire the highest aspirations of humanity. Like RE, it is not focused on a single faith. It intends to deepen both *intra-faith* and *inter-faith* understanding promoting the development of a pupils' personal faith in a multi-faith context. This foundation is further developed in the 50 virtues encapsulated in the 'Nishkam Passport'.

- FD is about learning what it is to be human, and how to be a good human being through a virtues based framework
- to promote an individual's personal faith development (both learning about religious tradition as well as opportunity for faith practice), within a multi-faith context
- with a focus on virtues, dispositions and the behaviour these references illustrate or inspire
- teachers of RE and faith development should ideally be faith practitioners and be able to inspire to promote commitment/initiation in a pupil's personal faith

Faith development makes an essential contribution towards the primary purpose of education of helping pupils to reconnect with the Creator, through the practice of virtues and service. The experience of learning about and living with faith virtues is to learn about and connect with the Creator.

Positive virtues such as honesty, compassion, and service are common across different religions and traditions. Through understanding these principles, we hope to inspire pupils towards personal commitment in their own faith. In addition, pupils learn about the commonality of diverse faiths. They learn not just to tolerate but genuinely respect all faiths. In doing so, pupils deepen their individual faiths.

Virtues are modelled, exemplified, and articulated by teachers, and they shape pupils' ability to interpret and influence the world around them. Nishkam pupils thrive in different and diverse environments and are inspired, encouraged, and supported to contribute positively and selflessly to their society.

A pupil who experiences Nishkam education is academically successful and qualified, and develops a global, altruistic, and socially engaged outlook. Their decision-making and critical thinking are grounded in a strong foundation of well-defined and frequently practised virtues and principles.

3. RE lessons

RE have a focus on the knowledge of religion tradition, religious history and religious practice in a multi-faith context. More specifically the aims are:

- To develop understanding of religious faith as the search for and expression of truth
- To contribute to the development of pupils' own spiritual/philosophical convictions, exploring and enriching their own faith and beliefs
- To enable pupils to encounter the Sikh Dharam and other world religions and value systems found in all faiths
- To appreciate that religions play a significant part in the lives of ordinary people as well as shaping British culture and heritage.
- To enable pupils to learn about the other major religions, their impact on culture and politics, art and history, and on the lives of their followers
- to be able to reflect on their own experiences and to develop a personal response to the fundamental questions of life

- develop investigative and research skills and to enable them to make reasoned judgements about religious issues
- have respect for other peoples' views and to celebrate the diversity in society.

4. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Learning about and from religious traditions helps pupils to appreciate which aspects of life have been significant for most of humanity throughout the ages. Exploring the concepts of religion and belief and their roles in the spiritual, moral and cultural lives of people in a diverse society helps individuals develop moral awareness and social understanding. It also helps to show them what shapes people's behaviour and motivations, and points pupils towards positive models for their own lives.

5. Outcomes for pupils

The overarching outcome is to ensure that the Nishkam school community flourishes and thrives when each individual pupil does so. This will be seen through the following three main outcomes.

- a. **The Nishkam approach encourages individual faith flourishing, through increased knowledge and practice.**
 - We facilitate different methods for faith reflection, to help pupils develop their self-knowledge and personal practice in Faith Development classes. Through this, we encourage and guide pupils to encounter and understand their own tradition, towards enhancing their personal spiritual journey.
 - From this foundation, we encourage pupils to learn about, encounter, value, empathise with, and selflessly serve those of other faiths and beliefs.
 - We educate pupils in an understanding of the fundamental theology, scripture, and practices that are central to different religions and traditions. This happens in the taught curriculum, in assemblies and collective worship, as well as through service and charitable activities.

- b. **We aspire to ensure human flourishing through our approach to education, as a means to connect with God, through a love of the good and love of the other.**
 - We educate and equip pupils, parents, and staff with the language and practice of moral and spiritual dispositions. For example, teachers articulate praise, encouragement, and feedback using vocabulary that re-enforces underlying virtues to pupils. Regular staff CPD and training focusses on the practical application and articulation of dispositions in day-to-day school life.
 - We celebrate the individual experiences, gifts, and spirituality of each young person, acknowledging both similarities and differences.
 - We guide pupils to recognise the value of making intentional and positive life choices, informed by their own free thinking. Our staff, our school culture, and our curricula inspire pupils towards achieving their inherent potential. Pupils are thus in a strong position and with a clear mindset to serve others in the community.

- c. **The authentic practice of different beliefs is a clear, visible, and important part of**

the Nishkam environment.

- Pupils being able to authentically practise means that their faith is not re-interpreted, filtered, or watered-down by another.
- We celebrate this diversity of thought and practice as it enriches and enhances the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school and community. For example, pupils from different traditions lead their peers in prayer and reflection specific to their religious faith tradition. Pupils have opportunities to mark and celebrate festivals and holidays of importance to themselves.
- We are rooted in the Sikh tradition, which encourages individuals to practice their own various faith traditions and does not seek to proselytise or convert, whilst encouraging and supporting the flourishing of pupils of all religions and traditions. Pupils are not encouraged to change faith.

6. Faith Practice in a Multi-faith Environment

Individual faith and virtues are complex, and need to be lived out and experienced to be understood.

a. Pupils are supported and encouraged to engage with their own tradition through personal practice, to the extent they deem appropriate.

- We offer pupils structured and self-guided opportunities within and outside the school timetable to experience their own faith tradition.
- We collectively deliver assemblies, collective worship, daily prayer, and form exploration time as opportunities to reflect on and deepen individual faith practice.

b. Pupils have a breadth of opportunities to learn from and about religion.

- We ground our faith and virtues education in the understanding that each tradition is a nuanced, living, and dynamic body, rather than a static or rigid one.
- We demonstrate some of the ways in which faith is lived out in contemporary society, helping pupils understand the context of faith practice.
- We strive to recognise and communicate some of the multiple perspectives, opinions, and beliefs within each faith or tradition (intra-faith diversity).
- We provide a foundation of understanding central teachings and practices of different traditions, from which pupils have opportunities to experience, encounter, and engage with the core principles of other traditions in meaningful and authentic ways.
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- We offer opportunities and enrichments such as visits to places of worship, offering practical service to local community groups and organisations, hosting guest speakers, video-conference dialogues with pupils in other countries, and links with local schools that have different pupil populations.

c. Pupils' experience at a Nishkam school inspires and equips them to live more intentionally in a diverse, multi-faith society.

- We build a deep and authentic understanding of what it means to attend and thrive at a multi-faith school, and how to live with integrity in a diverse society. We do this in every subject, lesson, and interaction, and particularly through Religious Education (RE), Faith Development (FD), Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), collective worship, assemblies, and form exploration time.
- We believe that being multi-faith education within a Sikh ethos is built on acknowledging and celebrating the theological uniqueness of each tradition, whilst highlighting and emphasising shared virtues and dispositions.

- We enable all pupils and teachers to maintain integrity and authenticity in their own beliefs, never diluting or reinterpreting another's tradition.
- We cherish, respect, and value the unique contribution which each pupil makes to the school community, drawing from their individual faith or belief heritage.
- We fully and completely accept each pupil as the unique person that they are, regardless of their personal background or level of faith practice.
- We encourage pupils to engage wholeheartedly in every aspect of school life, including collective worship and prayer. Pupils are free to opt-out of these elements if they are uncomfortable participating.

7. Approaches to teaching faith

As teachers we promote every pupil's freedom of thought, choice, and practice, whilst restricting thoughts and expressions that are hurtful to others or grounded in misunderstanding. We provide opportunities and enrichments, and invite but never require participation. Pupils develop an understanding that they make choices within the framework determined by their experience and environment. In turn, this helps them empathise with their peers who bring their own backgrounds, lenses, and interpretations to their decision-making. Pupils understand that different religions and traditions offer unique articulations of truth, and that being in a multi-faith environment does not water-down or dilute anyone's beliefs, and indeed deepens their individual faith.

The process of learning in FD/RE can be seen as a journey, a quest for personal growth through faith commitment, prayer and service.

This involves the following steps:

Engaging. The teacher establishes a relationship of respect and trust with learners. They recognise the importance of the learner's understanding of his or her own life experience and affirm the unique capacity of each person to reflect upon events. Activities are constructed which allow the teacher to walk with the children and young people in a supportive and discerning fashion.

Reflecting. Varied, stimulating learning opportunities are presented which catch the imagination, and focus attention on a selected aspect of life. Learners are led to think in such a way that they enter their own, or another person's, life experience. They are invited to respond by identifying and declaring the thoughts and feelings which they experience.

Questioning. Through questioning, the learners recognise key issues common to all people, which lie at the root of the life experience under reflection. This demands much skill and awareness on the part of the teacher and can often be best achieved through the use of open-ended questioning.

Explaining. The teacher explains the meaning of aspects of Sacred Scripture and Tradition which help the learner make sense of the particular element of life experience under consideration.

Deepening. The way that the teaching is unpacked contains elements which help the learner engage and understand at levels that go beyond cognitive understanding alone.

Experiences such as poetry, prayer, meditation, music, drama and faith witness can open not only the mind but also the heart and soul of the learner.

Responding. The teacher creates a climate of respect for the beliefs of all learners and affirms the worth of each person being able to reflect, identify and describe their personal understanding of what they believe in the context under study. Within this ethos learners are led on to reflect upon the challenge to respond to God's call which lies at the heart of the study under consideration. They are asked to describe and explain their response and how this may affect their own life and that of others.

Responding in this way, when connected to the other five elements above, presents learners with the opportunity to deepen their existing faith commitment. Within this ethos, learners of all denominations, faiths and stances for living which may be independent of religious belief are presented with the opportunity to progress their personal search for meaning and truth.

Such dynamic experiences of learning and teaching will be achieved where teachers in their planning seek to:

- build in time for personal reflection and encourage in depth discussion of ideas, experiences and moral challenges
- help learners to recognise the significance of their experience and nurture their capacity to reflect on and evaluate it
- incorporate experiences of prayer, liturgy and reflection and other opportunities for spiritual growth, enabling children and young people to experience the life of faith
- provide opportunities for learners to experience participation in prayer and service to others and meet people who show their faith in action
- highlight the relevance of religious faith traditions to the lives of young people in modern society
- encourage children and young people to probe the basis of different beliefs within an ethos of inclusion and respect
- help children and young people to develop critical thinking skills
- maximise opportunities for collaborative and independent learning
- draw upon a variety of creative approaches which promote active learning
- engage learners in the assessment of their own learning

8. Guidance on contemporary debate

Pupils learn and experience the tools, skills, and frameworks to dialogue, interact, and engage with others selflessly, positively, and productively.

- a. The classroom should always strive to be a safe space for pupils to discuss a broad range of topics.**
 - Any statement or discussion which feeds division, hatred, or misunderstanding threatens a safe learning environment.
 - As teachers it is our responsibility to 'hold' the classroom space. This means encouraging and facilitating meaningful and honest discussion, whilst recognising that some topics require a broader and more carefully supported conversation. These topics require sufficient knowledge and experience to be dealt with effectively and appropriately.

- Support and resources within the school are available to be able to more effectively have those difficult discussions.
- Topics include contemporary issues and those which have the potential to be challenging, divisive, or controversial due to their moral, social, or political nature.
- We approach conversations about sensitive topics with care and attention, so that an issue does not become even more divisive. No topic or discussion is ever completely off-limits, however the approach to such topics should be balanced, and led by staff after prior training has taken place.
We collaborate as pupils and teachers in partnership to maintain a safe and productive learning environment.

b. **When educating around potentially controversial topics, it is essential to contextualise the issue.**

- We present pupils with intra- and interfaith perspectives to give an appreciation of the complexity of issues, and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, needs, wants, and rights of all involved parties.
- We acknowledge that, sadly, situations of conflict are sometimes expressions of religious zealotry, and at other times group or cultural conflicts are expressed in religious terms.
- We teach in an apolitical way. As teachers, we cannot be politically affiliated or encourage particular political viewpoints. A pupil's understanding of an issue should not be led by a teacher's personal views. Rather, we encourage informed discussion and critical thinking, through presenting facts and communicating the multiple and complex layers of any divisive topic.

9. British Values and Community cohesion

FD/RE subject matters gives particular opportunities to promote an ethos of respect for others, challenge stereotypes and build understanding of other cultures and beliefs. This contributes to promoting a positive and inclusive school ethos that champions democratic virtues and human rights/responsibilities.

- RE makes an important contribution to a school's duty to promote British Virtues and community cohesion. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared virtues and to challenge racism and discrimination.
- The school community – RE provides a positive context within which the diversity of cultures, beliefs and virtues can be celebrated and explored.
- The community within which the school is located – RE provides opportunities to investigate patterns of diversity of religion and belief and forge links with different groups in the local area.
- The UK community – a major focus of RE is the study of diversity of religion and belief in the UK and how this influences national life.
- The global community – RE involves the study of matters of global significance recognising the diversity of religion and belief and its impact on world issues.

10. Responsibilities for RE within the school, (Headteacher, Lead for Faith inclusion and Governors)

As well as fulfilling their legal obligations, the governing body, Headteacher and Lead for faith inclusion should also make sure that:

- all pupils make progress in achieving the learning objectives of the FD/RE curriculum
- the subjects are well led and effectively managed and that standards and achievement in FD/RE and the quality of the provision are subject to regular and effective self-evaluation
- those teaching FD/RE are suitably qualified and trained in the subject and have regular and effective opportunities for CPD
- teachers are aware of FD/RE's contribution in developing pupils' understanding of religion and belief and its impact as part of the duty to promote community cohesion
- teachers explore how new pedagogies and technology can be fully utilised to support FD/RE learning objectives and promote community cohesion
- clear information is provided for parents on the FD/RE curriculum and the right to withdraw
- teachers are aware that they do not have to teach RE unless specifically appointed to do so
- FD/RE is resourced, staffed and timetabled so that the school can fulfil its legal obligations on RE and pupils can make good progress

11. The right of withdrawal from RE

Parents have the legal right to withdraw their children 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 head teacher to discuss any concerns or anxieties about the policy, provision and practice of religious education at the school.