

Defining a United Reformed Church Primary School in order to secure a Denominational Inspection

URC Children's Charter adapted for URC Primary School

- 1. Children in our school are just as important as adults.***
- 2. Everyone in our school can worship God in lots of different ways no matter how old they are.***
- 3. Our school helps everyone keep on learning.***
- 4. Our school is a place where everyone feels and knows they belong.***
- 5. In our school children can do things to help God, the church and other people.***
- 6. God wants everyone to share the love of God with others. Our school listens and helps us to share what we have learnt.***
- 7. People can learn what God wants to say to them through what we say and do. Our school listens to children.***
- 8. Our school helps all children to discover their gifts and talents, nurture and use them.***
- 9. Our school community is a place where everyone is offered equal opportunities.***

Barrow United Reformed Church Primary School is the only maintained URC primary school in the country. Its Governing Board is proud of its history and URC status and want to ensure that its Section 48 Inspection reflects properly the beliefs, ethos and history of the URC tradition and what it means within primary education.

The SIAMS schedule is a strong and robust tool for denominational inspection, and to a large extent covers much of the areas which would require comment in a URC inspection. However, as SIAMS was designed specifically for Church of England and Methodist schools, there are a number of reflections of URC beliefs and practices that need to be explicitly and overtly covered in any Section 48 inspection of a URC primary school.

This paper is an Appendix to the SIAMS schedule including additional considerations that needs to take place for the inspection of United Reformed Church school. It is structured in line with the SAIMS framework to provide helpful cross-referencing.

1. Vision and Leadership

"Being reformed sets us in a stream of tradition that goes back 500 years. In 1517 Martin Luther launched a movement of challenge in the Church that we call the Protestant Reformation."

<https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/What is the URC 2019.pdf>

It is important to know that the URC roots are part of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, and are part of that broader European reformation and are not linked directly to the English reformation.

So inherent in the URC history is a desire and curiosity of ideas and thoughts from beyond our own experiences, communities and discourse, and a celebration of enquiry which encourages a seeking of knowledge, understanding and meaning from other communities, countries and cultures.

The leadership of the URC is very much based in and around the local church congregation. To a very large extent hierarchy in the URC is non-existent. To that end, it is the members of the local congregation to come to their own make decisions about their church in that place.

So the idea of shared leadership with each member's voice being important is something that should be replicated and visible within our schools. This also offers a different perspective on leadership and should extend from the pupils to include staff, parents, governors and those other stakeholders within the school. Communication and listening is very important.

The URC is part of the Reformed Church and the Universal Church but has a specific style of worship and prayer. The URC church did not use the Common Prayer Book but rather prayed as they felt they were led by God. They made their own decisions by coming together to listen to the Word of God in the Bible and to pray in order to seek the will of God. This was how church meetings started.

So within the URC tradition there is an importance of encouraging all to pray in a way they feel led, rather than following set or agreed prayers. There is a strong commitment to reading the Bible and considering its message, and do so in a communal and collective way.

Within the URC tradition there is also a deep commitment to collect money to pay for their own church buildings and pay for the livelihood of their minister.

So the commitment to be sustainable, to give freely to that which is important, and to support those people and organisations which look to serve is a key foundation of the URC tradition. There is an element of self-sacrifice to a greater good, and an understanding of something outside ourselves and our own lives.

The United Reformed Church declares that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ruler and head of the Church, has therein appointed a government distinct from civil government and in things spiritual not subordinate thereto, and that civil authorities, being always subject to the rule of God, ought to

respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind.

So there is a strong emphasis on Christian distinctiveness and the life and teachings of Jesus. It also stresses the right to religious freedom and would support work with and for the persecuted church.

2. Wisdom, knowledge and skills

The United Reformed Church, believing that it is through the freedom of the Spirit that Jesus Christ holds his people in the fellowship of the one Body, shall uphold the rights of personal conviction. It shall be for the church, in safeguarding the substance of the faith and maintaining the unity of the fellowship, to determine when these rights are asserted to the injury of its unity and peace.

https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf

So the URC tradition highlights that gaining wisdom and knowledge is an on-going and creative process, that requires both a mind of enquiry and the respect and patience to engage with opposing views and beliefs and to live in harmony with them. It recognises that we need to be prepared and equipped for a life-long journey of learning and discovery in a rapidly changing world. It also encourages people to ask questions, debate and change their thinking when new information or new evidence is presented.

The URC upholds that our knowledge of God may change as new things become revealed to us therefore we are open to reform.

So, within the URC there is a deep desire to understand that which is not yet understood, and be willing to listen and hear and strive to find out more about God's world and how it should be cared for and nurtured. This can be expressed in our attitude to learning and humility.

3. Character development: hope, aspiration and courageous advocacy

The central beliefs and structures of the URC church reflect the character of the church, and demonstrate the values, virtues and approaches it holds as important and desirable. These values, virtues and aspirations include equality of voice and opportunity; a hope of God's kingdom being revealed; to continue to learn, develop and understand; and courageous advocacy to care for the world and all its people.

So there is a strong emphasis for the school to encourage children to care for each other and for all creation. This could be through connections to local initiatives to promote justice, aid the poor and sustain creation, and also wider initiatives around global justice programmes in

partnership with Christian Aid and Global justice now. <https://urc.org.uk/our-work/commitment-for-life>

An active Environment Policy would demonstrate such a commitment, to link with the 'Green Apostle' that has been appointed in each area. This would look to fulfil one of the five marks of mission to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the earth

https://urc.org.uk/images/mission/church_and_society/Resources/201905_URC_Environmental_Policy.pdf

4. Community and living well together

Part of the nature of being a Reformed Church is that the URC does not fear change, and tries to run its churches in ways that take everyone's insight and contributions seriously. Being 'United' is an important part of the URC story. Indeed, the URC in its current format started when English Presbyterians merged with English and Welsh Congregationalists in 1972. Churches of Christ joined in 1981 and Scottish Congregationalists in 2000. The URC are committed to work as closely as possible with Christians of all traditions and styles.

So there is a deep sense of inclusivity, where all people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or age is treated with respect and their contribution heard and taken seriously. Indeed, the URC hold that children are equal partners with adults in the life of the church. This too should be reflected in the school, which must be scandalously inclusive. There is a sense of learning to hold in creative tension those whose views we do not share, and learning to disagree with respect.

5. Dignity and respect

The practices of the URC demonstrate its commitment to dignity and respect for all. This is reflected too in the language and layout of their churches. For example, the congregation gather round 'the table' and not an altar; there is no communion rail separating the people from the communion; the ministry of all believers is valued; and the church leader is a Minister, who ministers to and among the people and is not an intermediary in the sense of a Vicar or Priest.

So in addition to other features of school life, language is important in how the dignity and respect for all are communicated and instilled as values. Particular care should be taken over the language of hierarchy, and structures and layout should not present barriers for full participation and inclusion of all.

6. The impact of collective worship

“Spirituality is the expression of our relationship with God as God is revealed in Christ through the activity of the Spirit”. <https://urc.org.uk/search-article?articleid=2897>

So the impact of the collective worship in school will be seen in both in the relationships that are formed as human beings and in the work towards justice for people and all creation locally and globally.

7. The effectiveness of religious education

“Being reformed means that we delight in exploring the Bible, we do not fear change, and we try to run our churches in ways that take everyone’s insight and contribution seriously.”

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/What_is_the_URC_2019.pdf

The URC strongly promote the reading of the Bible and the discernment of God’s will both through the scriptures and through divine revelation. Crucially, there is also a deep conviction that religious education and understanding leads to the development of personal characteristics, values and behaviours, but also a significant commitment to care for the world and the diversity of people within it both locally and globally.

So Bible literacy is a strong component of religious education with a desire to know God’s Big Story and the characters, events and places that shaped that. The life and person of Jesus Christ is central to that.

Moreover, the impact of religious education is also important, and particularly the need to learn about how others live and to live well with others; how to listen, debate and understand; and how to graciously be challenged by new thinking and ideas.

Religious education should also blend into courageous advocacy, particular for the poor and persecuted, but also for environmental and sustainability movements. The URC has a simple message that as far as the world is concerned we should tend, treasure, tell, transform and teach.

