Diversity of Religion and Belief

A guidance and resource pack for primary schools in England and Wales

Peter Hemming
Elena Hailwood
Connor Stokes

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

School of
Social Sciences
Ysgol y Gwyddorau
Cymdeithasol

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1. Introduction

In recent years, diversity of religion and belief has been increasingly recognised within educational and social policy debates, as a strand of social difference distinct from ethnicity and culture, and worthy of attention in its own right. However, primary schools in England and Wales have not always had easy access to clear guidance on how to approach this topic. It seemed to us that there was a need to bring together relevant policy frameworks, academic research, and good practice into one single document, which would also provide signposts to helpful resources in the field. This is what *Diversity of Religion and Belief: A guidance and resource pack for primary schools in England and Wales* sets out to achieve.

The guidance and resource pack forms part of a wider engagement, impact and knowledge-exchange project that aims to build on the research of Dr Peter Hemming, which has explored the role of religion in primary schools in both urban and rural contexts (Hemming 2015, Hemming 2018). To date, the project has included a seminar and workshop event at Cardiff University in March 2017 for researchers, teaching professionals and educational organisations. The event attracted over 30 attendees, who participated in presentations and discussions about research and good practice in the field of diversity of religion and belief, and accompanied a wider email consultation with relevant experts and educational bodies. These activities were important for informing the guidance on good practice that makes up a significant part of this document.

The pack begins with a section on the various policy contexts and frameworks that inform our focus on diversity of religion and belief in primary schools. Next, it includes substantial sections providing guidance to schools, drawing on research and good practice, on how to approach this issue in everyday school life. Following this, we have included a section listing a range of resources that we hope may prove useful in exploring this topic further. Finally, the pack contains sections listing references to cited academic and policy sources, as well as acknowledgements to individuals whose ideas have contributed to the pack, including attendees of the original seminar and workshop event, and the wider email consultation.

2. Policy Context

English and Welsh society have become progressively more diverse in religious terms since the turn of the 21st century. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2015) shows that whilst the number of people identifying as Christian fell significantly in the period between the 2001 and 2011 census, there were marked increases in those choosing to describe themselves as having no religion, and smaller but nevertheless notable increases in respondents identifying as Muslim and from other minority faith backgrounds (see Figure 1). As such, many primary schools find they are catering for a greater diversity of religion and belief amongst their pupils than might previously have been the case. This development has affected schools of all types, including church schools, which have become increasingly popular amongst families of minority religious backgrounds (Coughlin 2016, Turner 2017). For example, research has shown that Muslim parents often favour church schools over community schools for the value they place on religion (Scourfield *et al.* 2013).

	2001	2011
Christian	72%	59%
No Religion	15%	25%
Muslim	3%	5%
Other Religion	3%	4%
Not Stated	8%	7%

Figure 1: Census Figures, Office for National Statistics

This section of the guidance and resource pack presents a summary of the main policy influences that collectively provide a rationale for our focus on diversity of religion and belief in primary education. The section begins with an outline of the main legal frameworks that relate to the status of religion and belief in schools. It then moves on to consider what the various English and Welsh curriculum and inspection frameworks have to say about the importance of valuing diversity of religion and belief in the primary school context.

2.1 Equalities Legislation

The *Equalities Act 2010* applies across Great Britain and aims to protect individuals from discrimination in education, work and wider society. Religion and belief is identified as one of the nine protected characteristics, alongside age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, race, sex and sexual orientation. The Equalities Act defines religion and belief in the following way:

> *(1) Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion.*
> *(2) Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief.*

(Equalities Act 2010, s.10)

Most schools are covered by the legislation in the areas of pupil admissions, the provision of education to pupils, harassment of pupils, and pupil exclusions. This means they must not discriminate against pupils on the basis of any of the protected characteristics (with the exception of age and marriage/civil partnership) and this includes religion and belief. However, the legislation as a whole does not cover anything related to the content of the curriculum.

In the case of the religion and belief protected characteristic, the legislation does not apply to discrimination in acts of collective worship or religious observance. Schools with a religious character are also more widely exempted from the legislation in terms of discrimination on the basis of religion and belief (for example through pupil admissions or the provision of education to pupils), but not in relation to the harassment and victimisation of pupils.

2.2 Curriculum Frameworks

There are a number of ways that the English and Welsh curriculum frameworks support our focus on diversity of religion and belief in primary schools. The first of

these is the crosscutting requirement to 'promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils', which features in the *Education Act 2002,* applying to both England (section 78) and Wales (section 99). The spiritual and cultural components of SMSC, as it is otherwise known, are particularly relevant in the case of religion and belief. The new National Curriculum in England, which was introduced in 2014, maintains this commitment to pupil's spiritual and cultural development (Department for Education 2014a). A new curriculum is currently in development for schools in Wales for implementation from 2020 onwards, but health, wellbeing and citizenship are central to the proposals, offering early indications that diversity of religion and belief will also be valued highly in the new framework (Welsh Government 2018).

In England, schools are also expected to promote 'Fundamental British Values' as part of their provision for SMSC. These values include "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and those without faith" (Ofsted 2017:40). The official guidance on Fundamental British Values (Department for Education 2014b) states that pupils should develop "an understanding that the freedom to choose and hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law" (p.6), as well as "an acceptance that other people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour" (p.6). The guidance suggests that this can be achieved by "meeting requirements for collective worship, establishing a strong school ethos supported by effective relationships throughout the school, and providing relevant activities beyond the classroom" (p.4).

A second area of the curriculum that has clear relevance for diversity of religion and belief is Religious Education (RE). RE in its current form has been part of the 'basic curriculum' in both England and Wales since the *Education Reform Act 1988*, although syllabus requirements are set at the local, rather than the national level. This remains the case in England following the 2014 curriculum reforms (Department for Education 2014a) and also looks likely to continue after the implementation of the new curriculum in Wales (Welsh Government 2018). The most recent guidance for RE in England argues that it: "contributes to pupils' personal development and well-

being and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society" (Department for Children, School and Families 2010:7). The equivalent guidance document in Wales states that: "Religious Education in the twenty-first century […] focuses on understanding humanity's quest for meaning, the positive aspects of multi-faith/multicultural understanding and pupils' own understandings and responses to life and religion" (Welsh Assembly Government 2008a:3). Although schools with a religious character generally have the freedom to teach RE in accordance with the particular faith tradition of their school, most do include multi-faith material as part of their RE curriculum, hence offering opportunities to develop pupils' understandings of diversity of religion and belief (e.g. see Catholic Education Service 2018, Church of England Education Office 2016).

Finally, guidance for the non-statutory subject of Personal, Social, Health and Economics Education (PSHE) also makes reference to topics and themes that are highly relevant to diversity of religion and belief. For example, the PSHE association, which is the national body for PSHE in England, argues that the subject can play an important role in helping schools to provide for SMSC and promote community cohesion (PSHE Association 2018). Similarly, the PSE guidance for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2008b:4) states that the subject should "promote self-respect, respect for others and celebrate diversity". Together, these three curriculum frameworks offer a compelling rationale for taking seriously the issue of diversity of religion and belief in the primary school context.

2.3 Inspection Frameworks

Schools across England and Wales are subject to inspection by a number of different bodies, depending on location, funding status and whether or not the school has a religious character. All maintained schools are inspected by Ofsted in England and by Estyn in Wales, based on criteria that are clearly set out in the relevant inspection frameworks. Ofsted inspectors consider a number of issues that are relevant to diversity of religion and belief (see Ofsted 2017), including the following:

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and within this, the promotion of fundamental British values.
- The role of leaders in promoting equality of opportunity and diversity for both pupils and staff, and the prevention of direct and indirect discrimination and prejudiced behaviour.
- The role of teaching and resources in reflecting and valuing the diversity of pupils' experiences and their understanding of difference, and the challenging of stereotypes and derogatory language in lessons and around the school.
- The role of pupils in the prevention of all forms of bullying, including online and prejudice-based bullying.

In the Welsh context, Estyn inspectors also consider the following aspects that are relevant to diversity of religion and belief:

Inspectors should look at how well the school helps pupils to understand issues relating to equality and diversity and develop the values of tolerance and respect. They should consider how well the school develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of harassment, discrimination, identity-based bullying and extremism. They should also consider how well the school responds to and manages any incidents relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination. They should consider how well the school's arrangements foster a positive approach to managing pupils' behaviour and an anti-bullying culture. They should consider the extent to which the school's provision challenges stereotypes in pupils' attitudes, choices and expectations, and how well it promotes human rights. (Estyn 2017:22)

Inspectors should consider the extent to which the school provides effective opportunities for pupils to develop secure values and to establish their spiritual and ethical beliefs. They should consider how well the school develops pupils' ability to reflect on religious and non-religious responses to fundamental questions and to reflect on their own beliefs or values. They should consider how well the school promotes principles that help pupils to distinguish between right and wrong. They should consider how far the school fosters shared values, such as honesty, fairness, justice and sustainability,

and helps pupils to understand the needs and rights of others, both locally and as members of a diverse global world. (Estyn 2017:23)

Many schools with a religious character (e.g. voluntary aided and voluntary controlled faith schools) are also subject to inspections from separate bodies, specifically relating to religious aspects, such as school character, leadership, collective worship, and RE (where the locally agreed syllabus is not used). The inspection frameworks for Church of England and Methodist schools (SIAMS) and Church in Wales schools (Gwella), both assess schools on "how effectively the Christian character supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all learners whether they are Christian, of other faiths, or of none" and "how well the Christian character promotes an understanding of and respect for diverse communities" (Church of England/ Methodist Church 2013, Church in Wales 2014).

Roman Catholic diocesan inspections also typically make reference to diversity of religion and belief. For example, Archdiocese of Cardiff inspections assess "the extent to which the school/college promotes pupils/students' knowledge and understanding of their own religious identity, the religious identity of others and those with none" (Archdiocese of Cardiff 2010:27). Similarly, both the Archdiocese of Birmingham and Archdiocese of Liverpool inspections evaluate "the extent to which the acts of worship reflect the Catholic character of the school and take into account the variety of faith backgrounds among pupils" (Archdiocese of Birmingham 2018:38, Archdiocese of Liverpool 2012:19).

As 98% of all maintained schools with a religious character in England and 100% in Wales have an Anglican, Methodist or Roman Catholic designation (e.g. see Long & Bolton 2017), this section has focused only on curriculum and inspection frameworks relevant to those particular dominations. However, schools with other religious designations may also view provision for diversity of religion and belief as important for inclusion in relevant curriculum and inspection policies and frameworks.

3. School Guidance

The following section collates together key research findings on diversity of religion and belief in primary schools, presenting them alongside examples of good practice drawn from consultations with head teachers, RE co-ordinators, teachers, SACRE members[1], parents and academics working in relevant fields. Drawing on this breadth of insight, a number of recommendations are made, including developing a whole school approach, promoting positive interfaith relations, providing good quality Religious Education, holding inclusive assemblies and collective worship, accommodating religious needs, recognising and marking religious festivals and celebrations, and engaging with parents and the wider community.

3.1 Developing a Whole School Approach

Although there are a number of specific aspects of school life that have a direct impact on the valuing of diversity of religion and belief, all of them will be influenced and underpinned in some way by the particular whole school approach that is adopted. Existing research indicates that the approach schools take to religion tends to vary depending on school character and pupil intake. There are differences in the extent to which diversity of religion and belief is explicitly recognised, but many schools generally appear to be promoting a climate of tolerance (e.g. Short & Lenga 2002). Ensuring that diversity of religion and belief is recognised and accommodated can help to create an environment in which all pupils feel valued. This will be reflected in school policies, ethos, teacher training and pupil engagement.

3.1.1 School Policies

A comprehensive school policy on diversity of religion and belief will ensure that:

- The approach is clearly communicated and understood by all staff, including new staff when they join the school.

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[1] Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education

- The school is able to communicate its position to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils. This can help to pre-empt issues of resistance or confusion.
- The school can communicate its position to children and weave the approach throughout the curriculum.

Ensuring that diverse religious and non-religious perspectives are explicitly acknowledged can help in monitoring and addressing pupil needs. Respondents in consultations also stressed the importance of regularly reviewing school policies so that changing needs and circumstances can be reflected.

School policies on religion will vary depending on whether or not the school has a religious character. Whilst schools without a religious character may try to reflect the diversity of the wider community within the context of a broadly Christian culture, those with a religious character will typically emphasise their specific religious tradition. However, Wilson (2015) highlights how many schools with a religious character adopt a policy of 'positive pluralism', in which the rights of minority pupils to hold differing beliefs are respected. On the basis of two years of research at an Anglican primary school in Liverpool, Wilson (2015) argues that schools with a religious character can be confident in displays of their own faith whilst respecting diverse perspectives amongst their pupils. Moreover, he argues that such schools are in a good position to educate all children to respect difference, in line with the relevant inspection frameworks that apply to them (see Section 2.3).

3.1.2 School Ethos and Communication of Values

An ethos of respect and mutual understanding provides a good foundation for encouraging positive interfaith relations and addressing prejudice on the basis of religion and belief. Schools with a religious character can draw on their faith ethos and values in this regard, whilst other schools often emphasise common values from the wider community and society. For example, the promotion of 'British values' is a requirement of all schools in England, and this includes tolerance of different religious perspectives and worldviews (see Section 2.2). In addition, all schools may

draw on the 'overlapping consensus' of values such as respect and equality, which are commonly shared across different communities (Rawls 1971). It can be beneficial for the school ethos and values to be fully embedded within the institutional environment so that pupils learn to integrate and embody school values in their everyday conduct.

Schools often adopt a number of strategies for communicating school values, as highlighted in existing research and by consultation respondents. These include:

- The use of displays in corridors and classrooms. Explicitly recognising and celebrating the diversity within the school may help pupils and parents from minority religious backgrounds to feel more at home (see Section 7).
- Embedding the school ethos into assemblies and community events through overt discussion and exploration.
- Integrating values throughout the curriculum. Exploring values in areas such as literature, art and history through use of teaching resources that reflect diversity of religion and belief can help to deepen pupils' understanding.
- Engaging in open discussions with pupils during RE and PSHE. Allowing opportunities to explore misconceptions about the school ethos and/or other children's beliefs, rather than closing down discussion, may help to build trust and encourage genuine acceptance of the school values.

Key research finding: Values and the limitations of 'tolerance'

Welply (2017) conducted research in a diverse primary school in the East of England and found that the school's 'ethos of tolerance' inadvertently reinforced segregation between pupils of different religious backgrounds. The 'shallow' representation of 'tolerance' served as a disciplinary rather than an educational framework, due to a lack of opportunities for pupils to discuss, explore and understand their differences. As a result, whilst pupils knew that inflammatory statements were punishable, they privately retained intolerant views. Pupils of White British (non-religious and Christian) backgrounds, presented their distancing of Muslim pupils as though it was congruent with the school ethos. Pupils made statements such as: 'I'm not being disrespectful but, they are just different to us'.

In addition, as pupils saw their statements as acceptable, objections by minority pupils were treated as over-sensitive. Ultimately, the 'ethos of tolerance' did not go far enough to encourage recognition of the commonalities between people of different worldviews.

3.1.3 Teacher Training and Support

Existing research indicates that teachers often lack confidence in dealing with issues relating to diversity of religion and belief (Priest *et al.* 2016). Many teachers do not feel they have adequate knowledge to cater for the increasingly diverse needs of the pupils in their classrooms. A recurrent finding both in research and consultations was that many teachers lack confidence in delivering RE. Teachers often feel they do not have adequate knowledge of different faiths and worry about offending pupils (McCreery 2005, Revell 2007). As such, specific training may be necessary regarding the delivery of RE in the context of diversity of religion and belief.

Beyond this, many teachers feel unequipped to address instances of prejudice arising in the classroom or the playground. Given the extensive evidence of religious prejudice amongst pupils (e.g. Ipgrave 2012, Madge *et al.* 2014, Moulin 2015, Moulin 2016a, Moulin 2016b, Oliver & Candappa 2003, Weller *et al.* 2015) there is a need for support and guidance on how to deal with such occurrences. Contentious issues such as those sparked by the media can present highly sensitive situations that teachers are understandably cautious to approach. Many of our consultation respondents felt that shutting down uncomfortable conversations and critical discussion in the classroom, could result in missed opportunities to dispel misconceptions about other groups and lead to conflict in the playground. Moreover, research highlights the importance of schools reinforcing values of respect and tolerance when pupils may receive conflicting messages from home (Hemming 2015, Welply 2017).

Within this pack we have provided a list of resources that may be useful for meeting training needs or the development of bespoke training materials (see Section 5). A

number of strategies may be adopted to ensure staff members have sufficient training and support to address issues relating to diversity of religion and belief:

- Contacting local faith organisations (particularly faiths representing a large proportion of pupils) for information about beliefs and practices, as well as organisations representing non-religious worldviews. Such information can be condensed into a briefing document for staff members.
- Designating a 'Religious Diversity Lead' within the school to oversee staff training and address queries.
- Networking with other schools within the local area or county to share relevant resources and training opportunities.

3.1.4 Pupil Engagement

The needs of pupils vary considerably, depending on the character of the school and its particular demographic mix. Religious, ethnic and cultural identities can intersect in the classroom, presenting issues and challenges for schools to address (e.g. see Kaczmarek-Day 2013). Yet, existing research has shown that pupils' religious needs are often unknown to schools and pupils from minority groups often lack the confidence to point out when their needs are not being met, particularly when teachers do not share the same religious background (Hemming 2015, Keddie 2011). Assumptions are often made on the basis of a child's religious/non-religious identification, without recognising the variability within religious/non-religious groups (Nesbitt 2004), and consultation respondents noted that pupil's beliefs and worldviews are not always apparent or obvious. As such, communication and the development of trusting relationships between children and staff are essential for understanding pupil needs.

Research suggests that, at times, schools both with and without a religious character could be more effective at listening to pupils' views and addressing their needs (Jackson 2003). Although schools with a religious character can often be particularly good at valuing pupils' religious identities, research has suggested that they can, in some cases, be less effective at recognising other strands of social difference such as gender and sexuality, which also shape children's needs and can intersect with

religion (Berkley & Vij 2008). Developing pupil-teacher trust and communication may go some way towards identifying and ensuring appropriate provision for all aspects of children's identities.

Consultation respondents emphasised the importance of pupil voice initiatives to ensure children's needs are properly recognised and addressed. Examples of these approaches include the following:

- Time for exploring individual religious needs in RE. This could include drawing pictures or writing stories about religious and cultural practices.
- Making use of PSHE or 'Circle Time' for pupils to (sensitively, and with prior consent) share their views and experiences of what it is like to be 'Muslim', 'Christian' or 'Non-Religious' in their particular school.
- Placing a 'My Say' box in each classroom, where pupils can anonymously write comments about positive or negative experiences in school, or suggestions on how the school could support them more. Whilst covering a number of aspects of pupil experience, the box may provide an avenue for children to express instances where their religious needs are not being met.

Key research finding: Unheard religious needs
Hemming (2015) found that a small number of Muslim and Christian pupils at one multi-faith primary school in the North of England were praying in toilet cubicles due to the lack of provision made for prayer space. This was problematic for a number of reasons, including issues relating to cleanliness and purity. Prior to the research study, the school was unaware of the issue, as the pupils had not felt comfortable to express the problem to teachers.

3.2 Positive Interfaith Relations

Schools are widely viewed as key places for promoting tolerance and social cohesion between children of different religious/non-religious backgrounds (Short 2002). Existing research by Hemming (2015) indicates that schools can use a variety of means to encourage positive interfaith encounters, including:

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- Promoting values of acceptance of and respect for difference.
- Creating a climate where racism and religious intolerance are not accepted.
- Teaching emotional management techniques.

The task facing schools is not an easy one because children do not always follow or fully understand school rules, and may develop alternative views and values at home (Hemming 2015). Family, the media and wider culture all act as significant influences on pupils' perspectives, but schools nevertheless have the opportunity to encourage tolerant and respectful attitudes, hence playing an important role in shaping young citizens and promoting social cohesion.

3.2.1 Addressing Religious Intolerance and Segregation

Existing research indicates that children from both religious and non-religious backgrounds often fear being negatively stereotyped or experience some form of bullying in school on the basis of their beliefs or worldviews (Ipgrave 2012, Madge *et al.* 2014, Moulin 2015, Moulin 2016a, Moulin 2016b, Oliver & Candappa 2003, Weller *et al.* 2015). Some studies have found that pupils from non-faith backgrounds can be less tolerant of religious perspectives (Mckenna *et al.* 2009). However, other research has shown that non-religious pupils can also be subjected to prejudice from both teachers and peers (Madge *et al.* 2014).

Beyond explicit intolerance and racism, segregation and 'othering' is commonplace in some schools. For example, Welply (2017) found that some White British (non-religious and Christian) pupils talked about Muslim pupils as though differences in their dress and customs meant that they were incompatible as friends. Other research has indicated that friendship groups in primary schools can often be relatively homogeneous in terms of religion and ethnicity (Smith 2005). Such research demonstrates the difficulties schools face in promoting positive interfaith relations and genuine understanding in the face of perceived differences.

> *Key research finding: religious intolerance in schools*
>
> A survey conducted by Weller *et al.* (2015) found that *a majority of survey respondents from almost all religious groups* experienced some unfair treatment from other pupils due to their religion at school. Examples of unfair treatment included name-calling, social exclusion and taunting or ridiculing religious beliefs.

3.2.2 Facilitating Contact and Cultivating Cohesion

Existing research has found that many young people view schools as playing an important role in the promotion of social cohesion and interfaith relations (Madge *et al.* 2014). However, research also suggests that a significant proportion of pupils believe their schools could do more to help different religious/non-religious groups get along well together (Conroy *et al.* 2013). The literature documents a broad range of interfaith initiatives for promoting social cohesion in schools (e.g. Hughes 2014, Ipgrave 2009, Koukounaras-Liagis 2011, McCowan 2016). Drawing from this research, schools may adopt a variety of strategies to promote positive interactions and understanding between pupils of differing faiths and worldviews. Such strategies may be appropriate for schools both with and without a religious character, but will necessarily be shaped by the school's location and the nature of its pupil intake.

The issue of social cohesion and interfaith relations has been particularly central to debates about faith-based schooling and its impact on wider society (e.g. Francis & Robbins 2011, Jackson 2003, Short 2002). Some studies have suggested that schools with a religious character do not always prioritise the promotion of interfaith contact and the recognition of different perspectives as central to their mission (e.g. Berkley & Vij 2008). However, research also indicates that there is significant variability across and between schools both with and without a religious character. As such, it is impossible to generalise about which schools are more effective at encouraging socially cohesive attitudes amongst pupils (Jackson 2003). For example, Breen (2009) documents the case of a Roman Catholic school in Leicester that took a 'responsive approach' to its multi-faith surroundings by developing regular

linking activities with another nearby school that provided for a predominantly Asian and non-Christian population.

Approaches and strategies for promoting social cohesion and positive interfaith relations include the following:

- Developing interactions within the school.

- Building connections within the community.

- Creating bridges between schools.

Each of these strategies will be discussed in the sections below.

3.2.3 Developing Interactions within the School

Schools with a diverse intake may have numerous opportunities to encourage positive interactions and understanding between pupils. Consultation respondents felt that a number of contexts offered particular opportunities for encouraging bonds between different groups within the school community. These included:

- Finding opportunities within RE for open discussion and philosophical debate about diverse religious perspectives and beliefs to encourage understanding amongst pupils (Jackson 2004). It was generally felt to be important that pupils were able to have such discussions under the guidance of a teacher to prevent tensions arising in the playground.
- Building links between RE and values taught in PSHE and Citizenship Education may help pupils to recognise commonalities that exist across different religious and non-religious communities, such as values of respect, kindness and generosity (Watson 2004).
- Using assemblies and collective activities to foster a sense of unity within the school. Activities that are accessible to all pupils are likely to be most successful in this regard. For example, assemblies can be more inclusive when prayers refer to common values and morals and children are informed that they are not all required to pray (Wilson 2015).

> ***Key research finding: learning to create bonds***
> Koukounaras-Liagis (2011) and Hughes (2014) found that interfaith contact initiatives are most effective when pupils *work together on a task,* such as developing a dance or play. Such activities require co-ordination between children, foster a shared sense of achievement, and can teach valuable social skills.

3.2.4 Building Connections with the Community

One approach adopted by some schools to encourage understanding of different worldviews is by engaging with religious and non-religious groups in the wider community. This approach may be helpful for all schools, but particularly those with a relatively homogenous pupil intake in terms of religious background. Strategies may include the following, and are likely to be most effective when combined with quality RE and dialogic learning in order to avoid tokenism:

- Inviting speakers from different religious and non-religious groups.
- Visits to different places of worship.
- Holding events open to members of the community from different faiths and none. Such events may involve the sharing of food and communal activities that can help to develop a sense of connection.
- Setting up a school 'faith council', bringing together representatives from the different faith and belief groups associated with the school, and including pupils, parents and members of the local community (see below).

Respondents involved in our consultations felt that such approaches can help to 'humanise' those other religious/non-religious traditions that are not strongly represented within the school. In addition, much of the existing research suggests that children often feel more inspired to learn about their own faith after engaging face-to-face with different perspectives and points of view (Mckenna *et al.* 2009). Such initiatives may also help to foster positive relationships between the school and the wider community.

In practice:

One of the SACRE members in our consultation had visited a local primary school to meet members of its developing Faith Council. This was a new initiative that brought together members of the school community but also the wider community, and had gained the support of parents and the local Mayor. The Faith Council was steered by the RE Co-ordinator and supported by the Headteacher and the school's governing body. It was comprised of pupils representing the different faith and belief groups associated with the school, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Humanists. Parents, governors and community members had also been invited to set up an adult body that would link with the activities of the pupil council.

The Faith Council had a number of purposes, all of which were made possible by its multi-faith composition. These included providing opportunities for members to share different perspectives and deepen understanding of each other's beliefs, making efforts to raise awareness of the role and importance of RE in school, promoting community cohesion and building links between different faith and belief groups, providing positive role models for members of the school and the wider community on how to treat others with respect and dignity, and discussing a range of local and national issues that impacted upon school and community life. It was hoped that other schools in the local area would follow the success of this initiative by developing their own Faith Councils.

3.2.5 Creating Bridges between Schools

Whilst schools in diverse communities are well positioned to encourage interactions between pupils of different backgrounds, this can be more difficult in schools with a relatively homogenous pupil demographic. Initiatives that build connections between schools may be one approach for encouraging interactions between those of different faiths and no faith. Research indicates that parents of children attending schools with a religious character are often concerned that their children will not be prepared for the multicultural realities of the outside world (e.g. Ap Siôn *et al.* 2007).

Inter-school initiatives are therefore likely to be received positively by parents of children in schools with a religious character. Such initiatives may involve:

- Creating links and developing shared activities with other schools of different ethnic and religious composition, such as 'pairing' with other schools and holding joint events or visits (Breen 2009, McCowan 2016).
- Email (pen-pal type), instant messaging and video conference link-ups with other schools (Ipgrave 2009).
- Creating and sharing audio recordings and video blogs about religious customs, activities and values can be an enjoyable approach for building a sense of connection between different groups.

Key research finding: engendering acceptance through digital connections
In order to promote understanding of other worldviews, one primary school in East Sussex set up an email exchange initiative with a more religiously and culturally diverse school in Leicester. Ipgrave (2009) found that the programme could help to encourage tolerance of other perspectives. The research noted that exchanges need to be properly monitored by teachers.

3.3 Good Quality Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) is widely viewed as having the potential to develop interfaith understanding, promote common values, tackle religious discrimination and build resilience against extremism (Baumann 1996, Faas *et al.* 2016, Madge *et al.* 2014, Marshall 2016). Existing research conducted in Europe indicates that pupils who have recently received RE teaching demonstrate less prejudiced attitudes than those who have not (Schihalejev 2013). Nonetheless, a number of reports have expressed concern about poor standards of RE across schools in England (Berkley & Vij 2008, Ofsted 2013). Non-denominational schools in England and Wales are expected to follow the agreed syllabus for RE in their local authority but this requirement is not always recognised by teachers and RE is often de-prioritised in the face of other curriculum pressures (Wilson 2015).

Ofsted (2013): Six in Ten Primary schools in England not meeting 'good' standards for RE

The report states that RE across schools in England is largely deficient, leaving many pupils with inadequate understanding. Criticisms include:

- ❖ A lack of high quality training in RE for teachers.
- ❖ Poor understanding of the subject amongst teachers.
- ❖ Lack of emphasis on subject knowledge.
- ❖ Poor curriculum planning.
- ❖ Weak assessment and ineffective monitoring.
- ❖ Failing to link RE with the rest of the curriculum.

In addition, it is claimed that teachers reported a decline in support from their Local Authority and Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), perhaps due to lack of resources.

There are different requirements for the provision of RE depending on the type of school in question. Non-denominational schools are expected to teach an RE curriculum that reflects the predominantly Christian nature of many of the religious traditions in Britain, whilst also teaching about the beliefs and practices of the other principal religions represented in Britain (Education Act 1996, s.375:3). A recent ruling from the High Court confirmed that this provision should also include teaching about non-religious worldviews in order to comply with existing law (R (Fox) v. Secretary of State for Education [2015]). Schools with a religious character may teach RE in line with the beliefs set out by the school's trust deed or their general religious tradition. In practice, many voluntary aided faith schools adhere to a syllabus provided by their diocese or religious body, whereas voluntary controlled faith schools and foundation schools with a religious character usually follow the locally agreed syllabus. Arrangements for academies and free schools are broadly similar to those for voluntary aided schools. However, specific requirements will be set out in the agreement between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education 2017).

In schools with a religious character, more emphasis will generally be placed on the particular religious tradition of the school in RE lessons. However, many schools with a religious character have moved away from an exclusively evangelistic approach to RE, instead teaching material with a more non-coercive, educational slant (Nesbitt 2004). Despite the increased prominence enjoyed by RE in schools with a religious character, some research indicates that more could be done to encourage understanding of diverse perspectives and deeper exploration of different faiths and worldviews (Berkley & Vij 2008). Given how existing research highlights that learning about other religious and non-religious perspectives can strengthen pupils' connection to their own faith (e.g. McCowan 2016, McKenna *et al.* 2009), this may be welcomed by both pupils and teachers in schools with a religious character.

Key research finding: Schools with a religious character in diverse contexts

Teaching RE in schools with a religious character in diverse contexts may present particular challenges, as highlighted in Wilson's (2015) research in an Anglican primary school in Liverpool with a predominantly Muslim pupil intake. He found that many teachers skipped over aspects of the curriculum where they were concerned they might be viewed as proselytising. In general, teachers attempted to balance the requirements of the curriculum with respecting pupils' faith. Nonetheless, he found that pupils generally welcomed learning about Christianity so long as it was viewed as purely educational and non-evangelistic. In addition, parents of Muslim pupils appreciated that religion was highly valued within the school.

In some circumstances, pupils adopted forms of resistant behaviour. This could include fidgeting, not listening or on some occasions, declining to visit churches. However, Wilson (2015) concludes that resistance amongst pupils was generally motivated by the fear of going against their own faith. For example, many pupils instinctively said '*stafallah'* (meaning 'Allah forgive me') after hearing things that conflicted with their beliefs. He argues that teachers should reassure pupils that they are not committing a wrong by learning about other faiths. Moreover, learning about the Bible and church visits were generally acceptable to Muslim pupils so long as they were not combined with prayer.

3.3.1 Multi-Faith Religious Education

Findings from the research literature as well as our consultations indicate a desire for more diversity in RE, in schools both with and without a religious character, particularly regarding the breadth of traditions taught (Jackson 2004, Moulin 2016b, Nesbitt 2004, Revell 2007). Existing research on pupils' perspectives indicates that pupils value RE as an opportunity to hear about different religions and worldviews from an objective viewpoint (Kuusisto & Kallioniemi 2014, Francis & Robbins 2011). Some studies suggest that pupils are especially interested in learning about others' beliefs but occasionally look to RE for guidance about their own beliefs too (Kuusisto & Kallioniemi 2014, Engebretson 2004, Madge *et al.* 2014).

The opportunity to study a broad range of religious traditions is usually reflected in locally agreed syllabuses (e.g. see Section 5.5), but some researchers have expressed concern about the tokenistic coverage of non-Christian faiths in RE (Nesbitt 2004). The inclusion of non-religious worldviews in locally agreed syllabuses has also become increasingly common (Watson 2010), bringing schools in line with the recent High Court ruling on this issue (see Section 3.3). There are on-going debates about the extent to which teachers are able to adopt a neutral stance in their explanation of different religious/non-religious worldviews (e.g. Jackson & Everington 2017). Nonetheless, it is widely felt that with adequate training and subject knowledge, teachers are able to provide good quality RE that covers a broad range of faiths and traditions (Jackson & Everington 2017).

Key research finding: pupils value diverse perspectives

Much of the existing research indicates that pupils appreciate and value learning about other religious perspectives (Arweck & Nesbitt 2011, McCown 2016, McKenna *et al.* 2009, Pyke 2013). In a qualitative survey conducted with over 1000 pupils across Europe, Knauth & Körs (2011) found that pupils mostly favour a plural approach to RE. Many pupils believed that learning about other worldviews was important to prevent future social conflicts.

Beyond the need for greater breadth, increasing pupil diversity within the classroom presents additional challenges for delivering RE. Existing research indicates that many pupils from minority faiths feel that teachers do not accurately represent their religion in the classroom (Ipgrave 1999, Moulin 2011, 2016a, 2016b). Given the diversity within religions, even pupils who share the teacher's faith may have difficulty identifying with a particular representation. As a result, issues of contention may arise even within schools with a religious character amongst pupils of the majority faith. Such situations are to some extent unavoidable but they can nonetheless cause discomfort amongst pupils who feel there is a clash between perspectives from home and those taught at school (Nesbitt 2004).

3.3.2. Commonality, Diversity and Change

In the wider research literature and amongst our consultation responses, two core themes emerge in relation to how RE teaching can be improved to recognise diversity of religion and belief (Cush & Francis 2001, Jackson & O'Grady 2007, Nesbitt 2004, Panjwani 2005, 2014, Zillacus & Kallioniemi 2016). These include:

- The importance of recognising common themes across religions and with humanist and non-religious traditions.
- Celebrating diversity *within and between* religious/non-religious worldviews.

Many of our consultation respondents felt that exploring a particular theme across different religious/non-religious worldviews (e.g. fasting, prayer or values such as honesty and respect) was helpful for encouraging pupils to recognise commonalities between traditions. Such an approach can encourage greater respect between pupils of different backgrounds (Whittaker *et al.* 2009). Wilson (2015) documents a lesson in an Anglican primary school where reading the Qur'anic perspective about Jesus' virgin birth was well received by pupils, and helped to illustrate areas of accord between Islam and Christianity. Exploring the historical intersections between religions may be interesting for pupils and link with other areas of the curriculum.

Given the plurality within religious traditions it is also important to highlight how religion is interwoven with culture. Recognising that each religion and worldview has

many forms and changes throughout history can help avoid simplifications and stereotypes (Madge *et al.* 2014, Moulin 2011, 2015). This approach may also reduce the likelihood of pupils feeling their own religion has been misrepresented. Providing opportunities to creatively explore pupils' own experiences, or examples of 'real life' and 'everyday' religion can be both engaging and effective at promoting respect and understanding (Cush & Francis 2001, Jackson 2004, Jackson & O'Grady 2007, O'Grady 2003). These approaches can also help pupils to understand the differences between doctrinal and lived religion.

Examples of how RE can be adapted to recognise diversity, commonality and change include the following:

- Selecting a theme (such as piety, joy or celebration) and exploring how it is reflected in the stories and practices of different religious and non-religious groups and traditions.
- Looking at different ways in which the practices of a particular religion are enacted across different cultures (such as contrasting forms of religious dress or foods eaten at festivals and celebrations).
- Enabling children to reflect on 'real life' experiences of religion (such as exploring their experiences of prayer, contemplation or deep thought, or experiences of worship or awe and wonder).
- Enabling pupils to express their values and sense of spirituality through art, drama and dance.

Such approaches can be helpful to foster a sense of unity between pupils of differing backgrounds whilst also celebrating diverse perspectives. These approaches can also serve to validate the spiritual experiences of non-religious pupils.

The right to withdraw
Richardson *et al.* (2013) argue that the right to withdraw children from RE is often not communicated very effectively, as many parents are not aware of the option or fear their children being 'singled out' as a result. Our consultation respondents felt

that RE was very important for fostering understanding and a sense of connection between pupils, and so withdrawal from RE should be avoided wherever possible. However, parents' wishes should still be respected if they decide to enact the right to withdraw. Respondents felt that it was important for schools to develop trusting relationships, particularly with parents from minority religious backgrounds. Where parents do express concerns, they should be fully reassured and possibly be provided with details of the content and approach of RE lessons in order to make a properly informed decision.

In practice:

When a parent at one of the primary schools participating in our consultation expressed discomfort at their child taking part in RE, they were invited to meet with the head teacher. The head was careful to reassure the parents that they had the right to withdraw their child and that the child would not be treated any differently if they did so. The head teacher shared an overview of the RE syllabus with the parents and gave them time to consider. After speaking with the head, the parents felt reassured and the child continued to attend RE.

3.4 Inclusive Assemblies and Collective Worship

Amongst our consultation respondents, assemblies were widely viewed as important activities for building a sense of unity within schools. Research indicates both pupils and teachers largely support and enjoy the celebratory and moral aspects of assemblies (Gill 2000a, 2000b). However, some minority religious and non-religious pupils may find faith-based elements difficult to engage with or even, at times, uncomfortable (Head 2009, Hemming 2018, Kay & Francis 2001, Scourfield *et al.* 2013). Moreover, research amongst teachers in schools with multi-faith pupil intakes indicates that they often view the faith-based components of assemblies to be more contentious than the corporate dimensions (Gill 2000a, 2000b). Whilst schools generally adapt assemblies in accordance with their pupil intake (Smith & Smith

2013), developing assemblies that are appropriate and engaging for all pupils can nevertheless be challenging.

3.4.1 Inclusion or Exclusion?

Whilst assemblies can provide an opportunity to foster a sense of connection amongst the school community, they can also be alienating for pupils of minority or non-religious backgrounds if they are not able to participate in activities (Hemming 2018). All schools in England and Wales are officially required to provide some sort of daily act of collective worship of a 'wholly or mainly Christian character' (Education Reform Act 1988, s.6-7), unless they have applied for an exemption through their local SACRE on the basis of their particular pupil intake. As such, assemblies in Christian schools with a religious character and also many non-denominational schools will generally be of a Christian nature. Thus, in certain circumstances, assemblies have the potential to reinforce experiences of religious difference and segregation, depending on how they are managed (Smith 2005).

Parents and pupils from minority religions and non-faith backgrounds sometimes express concerns about 'Christian indoctrination' in assemblies (Weller *et al.* 2015). Whilst schools sometimes make provisions for minority religious pupils, such as allowing them to sit quietly during Christian prayers, non-religious pupils do not always receive the same recognition (Fancourt 2017). Schools are often hesitant to communicate that prayer is non-compulsory and as a result, many non-religious pupils are unaware that they may not have to participate. This can be uncomfortable for non-religious pupils who find prayer meaningless or insincere (Hemming 2018).

3.4.2 Creating an Atmosphere of Inclusivity

Existing research and consultation responses point to a number of approaches for facilitating inclusivity in assemblies. These involve:

- *Multi-faith assemblies*: Assemblies that include stories and festivals from different religious and non-religious traditions, often highlighting particular

values or moral messages, are popular ways of approaching assemblies in diverse contexts (Baumann 1996, Erricker & Erricker 1997, Gill 2000b).

- *Citizenship, unity and shared values:* Focusing on these areas of commonality may help all pupils to feel included and able to participate (Cheetham 2000, Davies 2000, Mogra 2017, Smith & Smith 2013).

- *Open wording of prayers:* Research indicates that the ability of minority groups to participate in collective worship often comes down to the issue of 'explicit intention' (Juchtmans *et al.* 2013). Prayers that express common values and do not make reference to a specific God are therefore more inclusive and accessible for pupils from different backgrounds.

- *Inviting children to say 'Amen' if it reflects their faith:* In schools with a religious character, where there is a greater emphasis on the religious tradition of the school, this provides pupils of minority faiths or no faith the opportunity to quietly abstain.

- *Personalised prayer/contemplation:* This could involve allowing pupils to write their own prayers, poems or contemplations under the guidance of a teacher in RE or PSHE. Pupils can then be given the option of silently reciting their personal prayers/contemplations when in assembly.

- *Time for reflection:* Explaining to pupils that if they do not wish to pray, they may sit quietly and reflect on something important to them.

- *Pupil voice initiatives:* Ensuring that the school has various effective pupil voice initiatives will help to capture pupils' diverse needs and identify appropriate measures to help all children feel included in collective activities.

3.5 Accommodating Religious Needs

There are a number of aspects of school life where pupils from minority faith backgrounds may have specific needs. These include: access to prayer spaces, dietary requirements, religious clothing needs, arrangements for attending religious festivals and withdrawal from certain activities (Keddie 2014, Moulin 2016). However, schools are highly variable in the extent to which they cater for pupils' diverse religious needs. In all cases, it is important to take a sensitive approach, avoid

making assumptions and communicate arrangements clearly with parents and pupils. A key need of all pupils is to develop friendships and a feeling of belonging with others. It is therefore highly important for teachers to be sensitive to exclusion due to differences in dress, diet and customs. Again, exploring and celebrating such differences through RE, PSHE, assemblies and events can help to build a sense of inclusion.

3.5.1 Prayer and Spiritual Needs

Many schools appear to be quite accommodating in providing prayer spaces where this is possible. However, existing research suggests that some schools could be more proactive in offering prayer space and/or looking after prayer facilities, for example by providing prayer mats and washing facilities (Conroy *et al.* 2013, Guo 2015, Hemming 2015). Lack of prayer spaces in some schools can lead to pupils using inappropriate places such as toilet cubicles (Hemming 2015). In addition, Berkley & Vij (2008) note the importance of recognising that spiritual needs are not exclusive to religion and non-religious pupils may also benefit from the provision of spaces dedicated to reflection or meditation.

Despite its importance, providing for minority religious prayer needs is not always straightforward. In some circumstances, schools with a large proportion of pupils from a minority faith may not have enough space to provide facilities for all pupils to pray. Moreover, some schools with a religious character do not feel it is in keeping with their ethos to designate prayer facilities for other faiths (Wilson 2015). In such circumstances, pupils may adapt their daily routines of worship to fit around school hours. For example, Muslims are generally expected to pray five times a day, and up to two of these daily prayers may fall within the school day[2]. However, research indicates that some pupils 'catch up' with their prayers when they return home from school or do not strictly adhere to all five prayers (Wilson 2015). It should be noted that the Muslim Council of Britain recommends that all schools make provisions for pupils to pray (Muslim Council of Britain 2007). Nonetheless, research with Muslim

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[2] These are *Zuhr* (between midday and afternoon), which always falls within the school day and *Asr* between mid-afternoon and sunset, which sometimes falls within the school day.

parents indicates that some parents adopt a more pragmatic approach to daily prayer (Wilson 2015).

Consultation respondents proposed a variety of measures aimed at catering for pupils' prayer and spiritual needs, including:

- Proving a 'quiet room' or 'tranquil zone' that can be used for prayer, reflection or meditation. Some schools incorporate soft furnishings and lighting to encourage a contemplative atmosphere. These spaces may also be used for pupils whilst fasting. Avoiding explicitly religious symbols will ensure that all pupils can use these spaces.
- Creating 'faith gardens' - designated outdoor spaces in which pupils can engage with their own spirituality.
- Delivering guided secular meditations. It was reported that these were very popular amongst pupils across faith backgrounds.

Key research finding: prayer and sacred space

In a research study involving one primary school in the North of England, Muslim pupils did not always feel comfortable to use the allocated space for prayer, in the school library. In speaking to pupils, Hemming (2015) found that although the space itself was adequate, pupils did not have appropriate ways of storing their prayer mats. As a result, some Muslim pupils were concerned that their mats would be dirty when they came to use them.

3.5.2 Food and Fasting

Many schools currently cater for the food needs of different religious groups through the school lunch service (Hemming 2015) but existing research suggests that lunchtime has the potential to reinforce religious segregation due to contrasting dietary requirements (Smith 2005). Many of our consultation respondents felt it could be helpful to explore beliefs around food and diet through the curriculum and other

school events, in order to engender curiosity about the customs and cultures of other religious groups. Schools can:

- Provide opportunities to explore the various dietary needs of other religious groups in RE, PSHE, assemblies and other areas of the curriculum to help demystify and dispel misconceptions about different food practices.
- Hold activities that focus on the theme of food such as sharing dishes from different cultural and religious traditions at festivals and events.

Such approaches can provide valuable learning opportunities for children and may help build connections between the school and the wider community.

Some schools may wish to provide vegetarian, halal and kosher options through the school lunch service to cater to the needs of some Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish pupils. Schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils may decide for all meat served to be halal. However, schools will want to balance such an approach with the needs of the wider community and may be cautious of resistance amongst non-Muslim parents (Wilson 2015). Where different options are provided, it is important to adequately signpost food so that pupils are aware which dishes they can eat. One approach is to use different coloured trays that pupils can select to indicate to servers what food they would like. Schools with Muslim pupils should try to ensure that sweets given to class groups are also halal. In addition, it should be recognised that some members of certain religions (including some Hindus and Sikhs) adhere to a vegetarian diet and are not able to eat sweets containing gelatine (Nesbitt 2004).

Whilst fasting is not obligatory for Muslims until puberty, many begin fasting around age 10 or 11. The Muslim Council of Britain (2007) advises that children under the age of 10 should not be encouraged to fast whilst at school as it may interfere with their learning. If young children express interest in fasting, schools should liaise with parents to encourage them to fast outside of school hours or only for half days. For children over the age of 10, schools may choose to support them in their choice, but should not police their adherence. One approach adopted by the primary school in Wilson's (2015) research was to make sandwiches that children could request if they decided during the day that they would like to break their fast. It is noted that often

children decide to fast at certain points in the day, or break their fast intermittently, as they experiment with what works for them. In addition, schools should recognise that fasting may be an important part of a young Muslim's identity development, and should be vigilant about teasing from both Muslim and non-Muslim pupils about their choices (Wilson 2015).

3.5.3 Clothing and Dress Needs

Existing research indicates that schools have variable approaches when it comes to accommodating religious dress. Most schools generally permit certain types of religious clothing (such as the hijab and patka). However, survey research across Britain found examples of pupils and teaching assistants being prevented from wearing the hijab in school. In a couple of cases, it was also reported that mothers were prevented from attending school meetings whilst wearing the Niqab (full veil) (Weller *et al.* 2015). Another research study identified a number of disputes over pupils wearing religious symbols and dress, and clashes with uniform (Jackson & O'Grady 2007). Government guidance on school uniform is somewhat ambiguous. However, it is suggested that most religious requirements regarding dress should be accommodated within the school uniform policy. Schools must also show that their uniform policy does not discriminate against any particular group (Department for Education 2013, Welsh Government 2011). Where schools prefer to ensure uniformity amongst pupils they may opt to provide regulation headscarves or permit only a single colour and request that religious symbols are worn under clothes.

Even when religious clothing is permitted, individuals within the school may maintain less than tolerant views. Existing research suggests that some pupils and teachers hold negative perceptions and stereotypes of Muslim girls who wear the hijab (Taylor 2014). For young Muslim girls, wearing headscarves can be an important aspect of their identity development (Wilson 2015). As such, it is important that schools seek to develop a nurturing environment in which pupils are protected from discrimination. Drawing attention to similar garments worn by different faiths (such as the wearing of head dresses by Christian nuns) may help to reduce prejudice.

3.6 Religious Festivals and Celebrations

In primary schools, festivals and celebrations can be important events for developing a sense of community and for engaging parents in school life. In diverse contexts, such events provide exciting opportunities for learning about other religious traditions. However, they can also present challenges to schools, for example, if large numbers of pupils from certain religious groups are absent from school in order to attend festivals at different points in the school year.

3.6.1 Christmas, Easter and Harvest

As the primary festivals in the Christian calendar, Christmas and Easter are generally marked with activities and celebrations in schools throughout the preceding terms. In addition, many schools in England and Wales hold activities and events to mark the harvest in the autumn (Nesbitt 2004). These festivals are not only religious but also cultural and can be celebrated in a manner that is inclusive for all pupils. It has been noted in existing research that the ability of minority pupils to participate in Christian celebrations largely reflects whether they are seen as religious or cultural. For example, minority pupils may be less likely to attend a celebration held within a church rather than a school hall, as families from non-Christian faith groups may perceive this as an act of worship (Wilson 2015).

Existing research indicates that many minority pupils do actively participate in the corporate aspects of religious celebrations (Hemming 2015, Wilson 2015). Where certain pupils are not able to partake in religious festivals or celebrations (such as special assemblies or church visits), schools may wish to provide alternative arrangements for those individuals. Negotiating their participation in religious festivals and events can be difficult for pupils from minority backgrounds and may lead to confusion. One research study found that Muslim pupils were confused about the differences in Christian and Islamic perspectives concerning the birth and death of Jesus. The pupils found Christmas celebrations more uncomfortable than those at Easter because of the greater cultural emphasis placed on Christmas, despite the significant theological differences that surround Easter (Wilson 2015).

There are a number of measures that schools can take to help events feel more inclusive for pupils from minority religious backgrounds. These include the following:

- Focusing primarily on non-religious songs or avoiding overtly evangelistic religious songs.
- Emphasising the corporate and moral aspects of events that can be made relevant to all pupils.
- Where appropriate, holding some events within the school hall rather than the local church to maximise participation from minority faith pupils. If events must be held in a church, then emphasising that prayer is not compulsory for non-Christian pupils may help allay concerns that attendance at the event is necessarily an act of Christian worship.

3.6.2 Minority Religious Festivals

Many schools choose to mark or actively celebrate some minority religious festivals and events. Those festivals that are most widely recognised in schools include Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah and Vaisakhi (Keddie 2014, Nesbitt 2004). It is widely viewed as appropriate to mark minority religious festivals, either through assemblies or discussions in the classroom, in schools both with and without a religious character (e.g. Catholic Education Service 2008). Some of our consultation respondents felt that schools could go further and hold school-wide celebrations for minority religious festivals by focusing on the cultural aspects, such as lighting candles, telling stories and sharing food. Such events can promote understanding of other faiths amongst Christian and non-religious pupils and may prevent a feeling of alienation amongst minority religious pupils and communities. However, some schools have faced a backlash from Christian or White British parents over celebrations of non-Christian religious festivals (Hemming 2015). As such, negotiating the school's approach will involve balancing the perspectives of different groups (Wilson 2015).

Many parents from minority faith backgrounds choose to keep their children out of school during important religious festivals (Wilson 2015). Existing research indicates that schools generally allow pupils to take some time off to observe key religious

events. In addition, some schools choose to organise staff training and INSET days to coincide with such events to minimise disruption to pupils' learning (Weller *et al.* 2015). However, some schools with a religious character may not feel it is appropriate to mark the festivals of other faiths in such an overt way. In such cases, the school may adopt a strategy of passive acceptance, whereby pupils and parents are not penalised for absences around important religious events (Wilson 2015).

3.6.3 Celebrating Diversity

In addition to recognising festivals and celebrations, consultation respondents felt that it was important to celebrate diversity of religion and belief within school in a more general way through bespoke events. Such events often focus on the customs of different religious groups (such as celebratory food, dance and dress). Examples include the following:

- *Multi-faith Days -* involving workshops led by representatives of different faiths and non-religious beliefs, with opportunities for children to present art, dance and drama. Parents and members of the local community can also be invited to help build connections with different sections of the community.
- *Peace Mala Days* (see Section 5.6) - is a concept developed by a Welsh charity aiming to encourage understanding amongst pupils of all backgrounds. Some of our consultation respondents had held Peace Mala days in their schools where pupils make rainbow coloured bracelets to represent harmony between religious and spiritual groups. Each colour represents a different faith or creed including a white bead for the child's own. It was reported that these events were well received by pupils in schools where they were held.

In practice:
One school involved in our consultation held a multi-faith event in which speakers from different minority religious groups were invited. Pupils from all backgrounds participated, and were able to showcase creative work to parents and the wider community (including poetry, dance, and art work). Pupils and parents were also

invited to bring in food to share. Afterwards, the school received some complaints from White British parents about the focus on minority religions. The school responded by speaking with parents and explaining that Christian events were emphasised within the school and that the event provided a learning opportunity for the children. Parents were generally satisfied with this response and the event continued in the subsequent year without complaints.

3.7 Parents and the Wider Community

It was very clear from our consultations that many schools feel they have a responsibility to reach out to their local community. This desire is also reflected in existing research, where studies indicate that schools often perceive they have an important role in serving the wider community (Colson 2004). Nonetheless, engaging with parents and communities in diverse contexts can present a number of challenges. Schools must balance the needs and wants of different religious and cultural groups which may at times conflict. In addition, schools with a religious character may find it easier to engage with their own faith community than those from other faiths or worldviews (Hemming 2015). Such schools may, therefore, feel the need to develop additional strategies to successfully reach out to other sections of the community.

Existing research indicates that parents of minority groups sometimes feel that schools do not make enough provision for their faith. For example, in Hemming's (2015) study, some parents felt that schools should do more to celebrate non-Christian religious festivals or provide minority language classes. However, some of the parents from the White British (Christian/non-religious) community may become upset about what they perceive as schools going 'too far' in accommodating minorities in a Christian cultural or religious context. This can include arrangements such as the withdrawal of certain popular children's books viewed as potentially offensive to certain groups, inclusion of non-Christian festivals in the school calendar

and the perceived dilution of Christian worship (Hemming 2015, Nesbitt 2004). Schools often try to manage these kinds of tensions through appropriate use of communication with parents.

3.7.1 Engaging with Minority Communities

Cultural and language differences may act as a significant barrier to engaging with minority religious parents and communities. In such cases, schools may need to be particularly sensitive to any cultural differences that might hamper communication with members of certain communities. Teachers from minority religious backgrounds are generally under-represented, even in schools with a high proportion of pupils from minority faiths (Weller *et al.* 2015). In instances where a large proportion of the pupil population is from a minority religious group, schools may wish to take additional measures to bridge communication, such as those discussed below.

Key research finding: feeling out of place
In her research focusing on relations with the South Asian Muslim community around three schools in the UK, Keddie (2011) found that many female mothers in the community were intimidated by what they saw as a 'White environment' and did not feel confident to speak to teachers at the school.

It should also be remembered that non-religious groups constitute a minority community in some contexts, particularly those parents with children attending schools with a religious character. There is a range of reasons why non-religious families might choose to send their children to a school with a religious character, but sometimes they may have little choice in this regard, particularly in rural contexts where there is often only one primary school present in the village (Hemming & Roberts 2018). As such, it is important that the needs of this group are also taken seriously. Engaging openly with the concerns of non-religious families may help to ensure they are accommodated appropriately within the context of mutual respect for the school's religious ethos.

However difficult, successfully engaging with minority communities as best as possible is important for ensuring cohesive relations both within and outside of the school. Schools may adopt a number of approaches, such as:

- Appointing a designated member of staff for communicating with certain sections of the community (including pupils and parents). Research indicates this is most effective when the staff member shares both the religious and cultural background of the community in question (Keddie 2011).

- Holding coffee mornings and parent consultations to create informal opportunities to understand more about the needs of different groups. Parents may be more confident in explaining their children's religious needs in a more relaxed environment.

- Holding events such as multi-faith days, international memorial days and charity events may help to bring different faith and non-faith groups together from the wider community and encourage respect and understanding (Catholic Education Service 2008, Keddie 2014). Schools are in a unique position for bringing together different parts of the community and working towards the 'common good'.

- Avoiding references to any specific God during assemblies and events can help prevent feelings of alienation amongst parents who are attending.

4. Examples of Displays

The following photographs were provided courtesy of the Religious Studies Resource Centre, Nottingham (www.rsresources.org.uk) and demonstrate some of the ways in which the primary school environment can be utilised effectively to value diversity of religion and belief.

Mosque layout
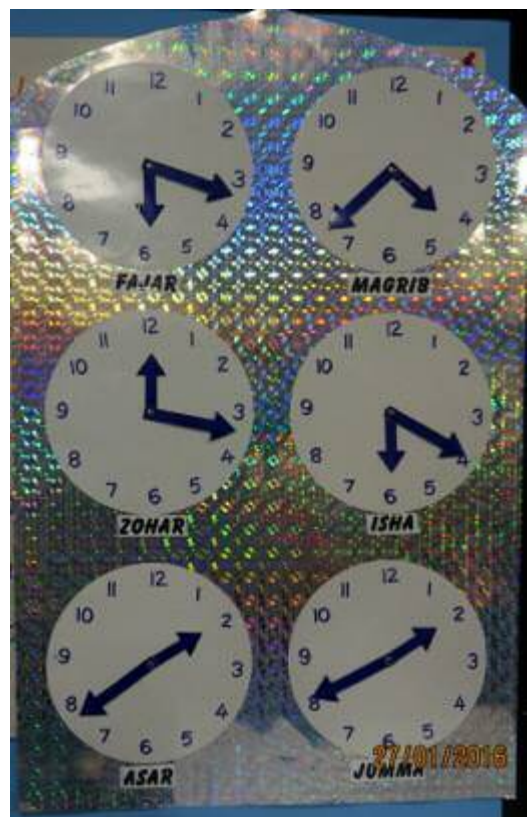

Jewish festival of Succot

Christian layout

Synagogue in a school

Sikh throne

Buddha under Bodhi tree

Clocks in the Mosque

Buddhist layout

Buddhist shrine

Jewish Torah scroll

Church in a school

Mosque in a School

Gudwara layout

Gurdwara set in a school

5. Teacher Resources

5.1 Official Guidance Documents

- DCSF (2010) *Religious Education in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance:* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190260/DCSF-00114-2010.pdf

- DfE (2014) *Promoting Fundamental British Values as Part of SMSC in Schools - Departmental Advice for Maintained Schools:* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf

- DfE (2013) *Personal, Health, Social and Economic (PSHE) Education:* *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe/personal-social-health-and-economic-pshe-education*

- DfE (2013) *School Uniform: Guidance for Governing Bodies, School Leaders, School Staff and Local Authorities:* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514978/School_Uniform_Guidance.pdf

- Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education For 3 to 19-Year-Olds In Wales: Guidance for Local Education Authorities and Agreed Syllabus Conferences*: http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130426-re-national-exemplar-framework-en.pdf

- Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *Personal and Social Education Framework for 7 to 19-Year-Olds in Wales:* http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-personal-and-social-education-framework-en.pdf

- Welsh Government (2011) *Guidance for Governing Bodies on School Uniform and Appearance Polices:* http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/110803schooluniformen.pdf

5.2 Free Curriculum Resources

- Association for Citizenship Teaching:
  https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/resources
- Bahá'í RE – Resources for Schools: http://re.bahai.org.uk
- National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE):
  https://www.natre.org.uk/resources (some require membership)
- PSHE Association: www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources
- Primary Resources: http://www.primaryresources.co.uk
- RE Today Services: http://www.retoday.org.uk (some resources are free)
- RE:Start / RE:Teachers (Christianity): http://request.org.uk/restart/
- Religious Education Council of England and Wales:
  https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resources/celebrating-re-lesson-ideas-activities/
- Religious Studies Resource Centre: www.rsresources.org.uk (join for a small fee and borrow resources in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire)
- Shap Working Party: http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/resources.html
- Understanding Humanism – Resources for Education:
  https://understandinghumanism.org.uk

5.3 Commercial Curriculum Resources

- Articles of Faith: https://www.articlesoffaith.co.uk
- Babcock IDP: https://www.babcockldp.co.uk
- Books at Press: http://www.booksatpress.co.uk
- Discovery RE: https://discoveryschemeofwork.com
- Jigsaw PSHE: https://www.jigsawpshe.com
- RE Matters: www.rematters.co.uk
- RE:ONLINE: http://www.reonline.org.uk
- RE Today Services: http://www.retoday.org.uk
- Teach It Primary: https://www.teachitprimary.co.uk
- TEACH:RE: http://www.teachre.co.uk
- TTS RE/PSHE Resources for Schools: https://www.tts-group.co.uk/primary/

5.4 Useful Books for Schools

- Bowker, J. (2005) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Brook, J. (2014) *The RE Teacher's Survival Guide: A Practical Guide to Teaching RE in Primary Schools,* Bible Reading Fellowship.

- Elton-Chalcraft, S. (ed.) (2014) *Teaching RE Creatively,* Oxon: Routledge.

- Hemming, P.J. (2015) *Religion in the Primary School; Ethos, Diversity, Citizenship,* London: Routledge.

- Lowndes, J. (2012) *The Complete Multi-faith Resource for Primary Religious Education: Ages 4-7,* Oxon: Routledge.

- Lowndes, J. (2012) *The Complete Multi-faith Resource for Primary Religious Education: Ages 7-11,* Oxon: Routledge.

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- Smith, G. (2005) *Children's Perspectives on Believing and Belonging,* National Children's Bureau / Jessica Kingsley.

- Teece, G. (2012) *The Primary Teacher's Guide to RE,* Scholastic.

- Vaisey, G. (2017) *Guidance on Managing the Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education,* WASACRE.

- Wilson, T. (2015) *Hospitality and Translation: An Exploration of How Muslim Pupils Translate their Faith in the Context of an Anglican Primary School,* Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

- Webster, M. (2009) *Creative Approaches to Teaching Primary RE,* Oxon: Routledge.

- Woodhead, L., Partridge, C. and Kawanami, H. (2016) *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations* (3rd edition), Oxon: Routledge.

5.5 Locally Agreed RE Syllabuses (reflecting a range of approaches)

- Barnsley:
  https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/sacre-religious-education/agreed-syllabus/
- Bath and North-East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and Haringey (London): http://www.awarenessmysteryvalue.org
- Birmingham:
  https://servicesforeducation.co.uk/files/Learning%20&%20Assessment/Subject%20Support/RE/Birmingham_Agreed_Syllabus_for_Religious_Education_2007.pdf
- Bournemouth and Poole:
  https://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/childreneducation/Schools/SACREdocuments/SACREdocs/Bournemouth-and-Poole-Agreed-Syllabus.pdf
- Cambridgeshire: https://ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/working-together-children-families-and-adults/SACRE%20RE%20in%20Cambridgeshire%20agreed%20syllabus.pdf?inline=true
- Cheshire West and Chester:
  https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-and-performance/council-plans-and-strategies/documents/Agreed%20Syllabus%20for%20Religious%20Education%20September%202013.pdf
- Cornwall:
  https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/9227047/Agreed-syllabus-2014.pdf
- Cumbria:http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/537/6381/6528/4290215573.pdf
- Devon, Torbay and Plymouth:
  http://www.devon.gov.uk/sacre-agreed-re-syllabus-2014.pdf
- Doncaster:
  http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/locally-agreed-syllabus-for-religious-education

- East Sussex: https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/2423/east-sussex-agreed-syllabus-june-2017.pdf
- Gloucestershire: http://www.lindenprimary.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RE-Syllabus.pdf
- Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight: http://re.hias.hants.gov.uk/pluginfile.php/2464/mod_resource/content/1/Living%20Difference%20III%20pdf.pdf
- Kirklees and Calderdale: https://learning.calderdale.gov.uk/cmbc/services/school-management/sacre/Documents/Reports%20and%20Brochures/syllabus%202014.pdf
- Leeds: https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Leeds%20RE%20syllabus.pdf
- Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford: http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/6561/manchester_agreed_syllabus_for_religious_education
- Newham (London): https://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Education%20and%20learning/ReligiousEducationSyllabus.pdf
- Northamptonshire: http://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/schools-and-education/information-for-school-staff/curriculum-and-resources/Documents/Introduction.pdf
- Nottinghamshire: http://www.bishopalexanderacademy.co.uk/images/websiteFiles/curriculum/re/agreed_syllabus.pdf
- Redbridge and Havering (London): www.whybridge-jun.havering.sch.uk/files.php?force&file=office/Hsis_1215_A007_Joint_Agreed_Syllabus_RED_HAV_2015_FINAL_672290498.pdf
- Sheffield: https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/schools-and-childcare/sheffield%27s-education-authority/SACRE%20Agreed%20Syllabus%202014-19.pdf
- Somerset: http://amvsomerset.org.uk

- Staffordshire: http://entrust.education/Pages/Download/8E67CCC1-2091-493F-9EA3-44103D22E68B
- Wales (links to all local authorities): http://www.wasacre.org.uk/publications/syllabi.html
- Wandsworth (London): http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/downloads/file/2081/wandsworth_locally_agreed_syllabus_for_religious_education

5.6 Educational Organisation Listings

- Catholic Education Service: http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk
- Church of England Education (National Society): https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools
- Church Schools Cymru: http://www.churchschoolscymru.org
- National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE): http://www.nasacre.org.uk/home
- National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE): https://www.natre.org.uk/
- Peace Mala: http://www.peacemala.org.uk
- Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity: http://www.pcfcd.co.uk
- PSHE Association: https://www.pshe-association.org.uk
- Religious Education Council of England and Wales: https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk
- Shap Working Party: http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/index.html
- Wales Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religion Education (WASACRE): http://www.wasacre.org.uk

5.7 Other Organisation Listings

- Board of Deputies of British Jews: www.bod.org.uk
- Buddhist Society: http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org
- Children's Rights Alliance for England: http://www.crae.org.uk/

- Children's Rights in Wales: http://www.childrensrightswales.org.uk
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints:
  https://www.mormonnewsroom.org.uk
- Churches Together in England: www.cte.org.uk
- Equality and Human Rights Commission – Religion or Belief:
  https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/religion-or-belief
- Hindu Council UK: http://www.hinducounciluk.org
- Hindu Forum of Britain: www.hfb.org
- Humanists UK: https://humanism.org.uk
- Institute of Jainology: http://www.jainology.org
- Inter Faith Network (IFN): www.interfaith.org.uk
- Islamic Cultural Centre: http://www.iccuk.org
- Islamic Society of Britain: https://www.isb.org.uk/
- Jain Network: http://www.jainnetwork.com
- Jehova's Witnesses: https://www.jw.org/en/
- Jewish Leadership Council: https://www.thejlc.org
- Methodist Church: http://www.methodist.org.uk
- Muslim Council of Britain (MCB): http://www.mcb.org.uk
- Network of Buddhist Organisations: www.nbo.org.uk
- Network of Sikh Organisations: http://nsouk.co.uk
- Pagan Federation: https://paganfed.org
- Quakers in Britain: http://www.quaker.org.uk
- Runnymede Trust: https://www.runnymedetrust.org
- Sikh Council UK: http://sikhcounciluk.org
- Spiritualists' National Union: https://www.snu.org.uk
- Three Faiths Forum (3FF): http://www.3ff.org.uk
- UK Bahá'í: http://www.bahai.org.uk
- United Reform Church: https://www.urc.org.uk
- United Sikhs: http://unitedsikhs.org
- Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe: https://www.ztfe.com

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