

Project: Teaching about Religious Diversity in Inclusive Schools

First phase evaluation

April 2018

The project's first phase is nearing completion and each of the milestones completed. In the first part of this evaluation we will comment on the milestones, and in the second part on some changes that have been made to the original project plan in response to different circumstances and needs. In the third part we will briefly review the project's aims and scope.

1. Milestones

INITIAL STAGE

- Identify specific *Signposts* themes to be addressed through the research, through an initial series of discussions with Bob Jackson and school colleagues. *Completed, as a result of a full series of discussions. The Signposts themes to be addressed are the representation of religions in the media and safe space.*
- Finalise summary papers for school colleagues to consider before the first round of meetings. Prepare power-point presentations for use in those meetings. *Completed. The summary papers and power-point presentations were finalised, sent to school colleagues for discussion and have been further presented to and discussed with school colleagues during researcher visits to school.*
- Email / skype communication with school colleagues in order to discuss the project, the *Signposts* summaries and to plan and prepare the school-based investigations to take place during the fieldwork stage, including teaching programmes and resources. *These tasks were completed at an early stage in the project and we have now moved on to planning the specifics of teaching and research, based on our discussions of the Signposts summaries in relation to the school's RE teaching programmes and resources.*
- In consultation (online) with school colleagues, begin to develop a short series of RE lessons which reflect the *Signposts* research findings, represent innovations in the practice of the RE department and build capacity for further research-based innovations in the future. (1)
- Collect contextual information about the school and RE faculty / subject provision. *Contextual information about the school and RE faculty has been obtained. The short series of RE lessons is now under development in time for June teaching.*
- In consultation (online) with school colleagues, develop a short series of RE lessons which reflect the *Signposts* research findings, represent innovations in the practice of the RE department and build capacity for further research-based innovations in the future. (2) *Again, the short series of RE lessons is now under development in time for June teaching. The teaching group will be a high-ability year 7 (11-12 years old) group. Their teacher is a RE specialist early-career colleague.*
- In collaboration with Bob Jackson, and through consideration of feedback from project advisory group members, write evaluation of first phase of project. Review project aims and scope. *This document is the first phase evaluation – it will be circulated to advisory group members and their feedback incorporated. See below for review of project aims and scope.*

2. Changes

There are two changes to note. The first results from school event constraints, meaning that teaching dates have had to be altered slightly. A project principle is not to interfere with planned RE content, so because dates have moved, so has content: where originally, we planned to integrate the media and safe space concerns into teaching on Islam and beliefs about life after death, these concerns will now be integrated into teaching on Christianity and environmental stewardship. The second is that we originally planned to address research ethical issues during May, but to address University of Warwick HSSREC requirements in good time, did so during March and April.

3. Project aims and scope review

The key project aims are unaltered: to disseminate high quality research to RE teachers, to prepare innovative pedagogy on the basis of these, to provide a basis for further future improvements and to report and disseminate the findings. The smaller funding allocation has inevitably resulted in some streamlining, however. The series of researched lessons will be shorter, the time and scope to build up a working relationship with the SACRE are lacking and the final data set will be less detailed. The project has taken on the character of a pilot study for later scaling-up.

At the same time, some interesting, unanticipated issues are opening through visits to the school and observation of the studied class's RE lessons. A previous report to the project's advisory group in the form of notes from a visit to the school highlighted various significant contextual features including performative pressures on teachers, lack of time to reflect professionally, an attempted rebrand of RE as Religion, Philosophy and Ethics, pupils' fears over the future and high susceptibility to different kinds of media influence and the 'daily battle' to engage them in any kind of values framework.

Observation and discussion of teaching and learning now reveal further layers. Key Stage 3 appears to be modelled as a GCSE rehearsal. Philosophical and ethical content is presented to younger pupils (e.g. year 7 pupils grapple with the teleological argument). Will these changes result in confusion for pupils or better progression from Key Stage 2? The teachers understand the moves as part of the imperative towards 'ideas' and 'knowledge' in RE, but so far this is uncertainly conceptualised, and their planning is not in line with thinking in projects such as Big Ideas or Powerful Knowledge. Yet wider issues open out. So far, what appears to characterise a knowledge-driven RE curriculum is a tendency to look outside the pupil at content from religions. But such a knowledge-driven curriculum, by itself, does not provide the safe space to deliberate on the

meanings and ramifications of such study, or to analyse influences shaping the representation of religions. A lack of balance is risked where pupils miss opportunities for personal value development and are, potentially, demotivated. How our project findings relate to these developments remains to be seen, but they are evidently pressing on the teachers' work in the way that educational movements or ideas often seem to – less clear explanation and direction, more pressure to react to unseen forces.

Professor Robert Jackson

Dr Kevin O'Grady

April 17th 2018