

INNOVATIVE RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS IN SCHOOLS

'RE Trail' – A journey of discovery for children and their parents

The innovation is an 'RE trail' which every pupil in the school takes part in designing and delivering. Participants go on a journey around the school visiting a series of stop-points in which a range of religious and non-religious worldviews are explored. A trail sheet asks questions which can be answered by engaging with what can be found at each stop. The questions are simple. Their purpose is not to teach a deep understanding about any worldview but to stimulate participants' curiosity to begin to engage, and to want to find out more.

Pupils spend time in each class working up their contributions. They are supported by their teachers in this but it is very much a co-production, with the pupils in the lead. They are described by teachers as 'emerging experts' and encouraged to identify what they want to know and then do the finding out. They have creative fun coming up with a combination of activities, including stalls, games, exhibitions, models, and reflective questions, for example a card game matching images to descriptions.

Each class leads on a worldview. At first glance, this appears to box worldviews in, separating them in to tightly bounded blocks of facts, represented by the classroom walls. Upon closer inspection, pupils understand that worldviews are open to interpretation. For example, a 'children of the world' display looks at how children of the same religion experience that religion differently in different parts of the world.

On a designated day, the pupils invite their parents or carers, and each other, to follow the trail in an afternoon of learning. On this occasion, 160 parents/carers attended. The school hall was packed. There was a palpable air of excitement as pupils set out

their parts of the trail, and anticipated the arrival of their guests. Once the guests were assembled, pupils were invited to collect them from the hall and begin the trail together. There was great pride and excitement on the faces of many of the children, and parents. The sheer busy-ness of the occasion lent a sense of celebration which almost, but not quite, spilled into chaos. Following the trail around felt like a pilgrimage, with much of the hustle and bustle of a real one. This added to – perhaps underpinned – a sense of curiosity and exploration, and an excitement to learn about 'others'.

The exploration of a religion within each class means that some duplications resulted, but this was helpful because pupils discover that they are learning different things about apparently identical worldviews. They seem to understand that worldviews have their own internal diversity. The physical boundaries between classrooms are countered by the diversity of understandings which is revealed about the worldviews being explored.

This is an example of how a whole community can be brought together around a curiosity about religion and worldviews – not only about the Christianity at the heart of this church school, but about a wide range of other religious and non-religious worldviews too. The school is conscious of its goal to be hospitable to the diverse communities around it. It wants to help pupils to understand each other in all their sameness and difference. It wants to involve parents/carers in this curiosity. It wants to model a journey of encounter in which pupils learn more and more about the endless and changing diversity of people. This enjoins an emphasis on balancing the school's Christian roots with an engagement with other religious and non-religious worldviews.

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What makes innovation possible?

The staff team are close knit, friendly as well as collegiate, and able to experiment with ideas creatively, knowing that some will land productively. The RE trail came out of just such an exploration. Talking about how to embed the new curriculum, somebody suggested a 'journey' around the faiths. This led to a journey around the school, and eventually this crystallised as the RE trail. The invitation to involve parents/carers as co-explorers on the journey goes hand in hand with the decision to foreground pupils as 'experts'. This reversal of power is part of what feels fresh and enlivening.

This is matched by a parent body which is very ready to be engaged. RE also seems to be a subject which parents/carers feel they can relate to with less concern about not keeping up, or looking daft than with Maths or Science. Parents spoke of their own memories of school RE, often unfavourably contrasting their own experiences with that of the RE trail.

Key Messages

- Exploring sameness and difference within and between worldviews
- Putting pupils in charge
- Engagement of parents
- Encouraging curiosity
- Team work and team culture