

Ten Leading Schools: the spiritual influence of Christian-ethos secondary education

Little research has been undertaken investigating the influence of Christian-ethos secondary schools on the spiritual development of their students. This research project aims to redress that situation by investigating the nature of the spiritual influence of ten leading Christian-ethos schools and generating case studies of those schools that others can draw upon. Christian-ethos schools are those that aspire to be distinctively Christian whilst serving a diverse student population from Christian and other religious backgrounds, and those of no religious affiliation. The term *'leading'* describes schools that have been selected to participate in the project based on the presentation made in their application as to how they approach the spiritual development of their pupils and evidence as to the success of their approach. The research will tell the stories of how these schools promote the positive spiritual development of their students.

For the purposes of this project, positive spiritual development is understood as:

“Influence on the beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, and behaviours of the young people who attend them in a manner which is commended in the Christian scriptures.”

This two-year research project (2014-16) is an initiative set up by the National Institute of Christian Education Research (NICER) at Canterbury Christ Church University, working in association with Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick.

The main research question:

- “What features of Christian-ethos secondary schools contribute to positive spiritual development for their pupils?”

The research project will recruit ten Christian-ethos state-funded secondary schools, which aspire to offer their pupils spiritual development through the experience of attending the school and have provided evidence of success in achieving that. These will constitute the ten leading schools for the project. The project Research Fellow Dr Ann Casson will work with the schools in identifying and disseminating their good practice in the area of spiritual development. Dr Ann

Casson is an experienced secondary Religious Education teacher, who has taught in a variety of Christian-ethos secondary schools in the North East of England. Her PhD thesis investigated the distinctive ethos of Catholic secondary schools and the schools' contribution to social cohesion. The findings were published in peer-reviewed articles and as a book 'Fragmented Catholicity and Social Cohesion: faith schools in a plural society'.

The research methods:

The project will employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative element of the project will be undertaken by WRERU at the University of Warwick and the qualitative element by NICER at Canterbury Christ Church University.

- For the quantitative element, schools will be invited to participate in a survey of pupils across the secondary school years of 7-11. The survey (the Francis' attitude questionnaire) designed by Professor Leslie J. Francis of the University of Warwick, has been widely used in national and international research studies. The data will be compared with the national database; it will give a picture of the school's influence on the spiritual development of its pupils.
- The qualitative dimension of the project will use a range of data collection activities to build a picture of each school's approach to promoting spiritual development. The data collection will include, document analysis, observation, interviews with staff, pupils, and parents, focus groups and lesson observation.

The outcomes:

The research findings will form the basis of the ten case studies of the ten leading schools, which will be presented in a book. The project's findings will be widely disseminated; the intention is to offer other Christian-ethos secondary schools case studies that stimulate them to reflect on, and improve on their own work of spiritual development with their students. The findings will also be employed to contribute to the international academic debate on the distinctiveness and effectiveness of Christian-ethos secondary schools.

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