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Teaching secondary RE at faith schools in England and Wales: listening to the teachers

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Abstract

This study begins by distinguishing between three kinds of ‘faith schools’ (known as schools with a religious character) within England and Wales: faith schools that operate within the state-maintained sector and had their origin in voluntary church-related initiatives prior to the Education Act 1870; ‘traditional’ independent faith schools, many of which had their roots in or before the nineteenth century; and ‘new’ independent faith schools, particularly Christian and Muslim schools, following the Rochester initiative in 1969. Second, this study draws attention to and summarises a quantitative research tradition established in 1982 concerned with identifying the attitudes and values of teachers working specifically within Anglican faith schools within the state-maintained sector, and with modelling the influence of personal and religious factors in shaping their attitudes. Third, this study reanalyses a new database profiling the views of subject leaders in religious education across a broad range of secondary schools with a religious character in England. These new analyses demonstrate the different priorities given to different aims of religious education by teachers in this sector, and illustrates the relative influence of personal factors (age, sex, and church attendance), professional factors (years teaching, qualifications, and continuing professional development) and contextual factors (type of school) in shaping these priorities. The main findings are that personal and professional factors are largely irrelevant compared with the type of school. The aims of religious education promoted within the new independent faith schools are largely indistinguishable from those within Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector. Compared with state-maintained Church of England schools, state-maintained Roman Catholic schools gave less priority in religious education to promoting personal and social values, to promoting religious and spiritual nurture, and to promoting community cohesion.

Introduction

Faith schools in England and Wales

The notion of ‘faith schools’ in England and Wales currently embraces three very different kinds of schools, which are technically referred to by the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 as schools that have a ‘religious character’. These three kinds of schools are: state-maintained schools, ‘traditional’ independent schools, and the so-called ‘new’ independent schools. Each of these three kinds of schools has its own peculiar history.

The largest number of schools with a religious character are those within the state-maintained sector, and trace their origin to the fact that the original initiative for the provision of ‘public’ education in England and Wales came not from the State but from the Churches, through voluntary societies like the National Society founded by the Church of England in 1811 (Burgess, 1958), the British and Foreign School Society founded largely by Non-conformist Churches in 1814, and the Catholic Poor School Committee founded in 1847 (see Cruickshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971; Chadwick, 1997). When the Government first voted public money for schools in 1833 it did so by distributing these funds through the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society. When the Education Act 1870 established secular machinery to found schools, it did so not to supplant the initiatives of the church-related societies, but to fill the gaps within voluntary provision (Murphy, 1972).

Against this background, the major determinant in shaping the current provision of faith schools within the state-maintained sector was provided by the Education Act 1944 (Dent, 1947). This Act acknowledged the Churches’ historic investment in schools, but also recognised that the Churches were in no position to bring all these schools up to a required standard for post-war educational reconstruction. The ingenious compromise solution proposed by the Education Act 1944 was to ensure that the Churches had a statutory role in shaping religious education throughout the whole state-maintained system and to offer the

Churches a choice between two different futures for their voluntary church schools.

Voluntary schools were individually given the choice between ‘aided’ or ‘controlled’ status. This choice enabled schools which could afford to retain a high level of independence to do so (aided status), while those that either could not afford or did not desire to retain such a high level of independence could nevertheless retain something of their church-related character (controlled status).

In the case of aided status, the churches were responsible for the capital expenditure and retained the right to appoint the majority of the governors, to appoint the headteacher, and to provide denominational religious instruction and denominational worship. In the case of controlled schools, the churches were absolved of ongoing financial liability, but retained the right to appoint a minority of the governors, to provide denominational religious worship, and to offer denominational religious instruction for those children whose parents requested it. At the time of the Education Act 1944, the Non-conformist Churches largely opted out of the church school system, the Roman Catholic Church opted entirely for aided status, and the Church of England went for a mixed economy of aided and controlled status according to local preferences.

The basic framework provided by the Education Act 1944 has remained unchanged by subsequent legislation. Currently faith schools of this nature account for a third of state-maintained primary schools and a tenth of state-maintained secondary schools. The real issue concerning these schools relates to the admissions policy. In principle, the Roman Catholic Church has seen the main purpose of its schools as that of providing an alternative educational system for parents who wish a ‘Catholic’ education for their children. Following the language of the Durham Report (1970), the Church of England has maintained a twin function for its schools: on the one hand, the *general* function of serving the nation through the provision of neighbourhood schools, often in single school areas; and on the other hand,

the *domestic* function of providing a distinctive Anglican education for the children of parents who seek it. At the time of the Education Act 1944, a small number of Jewish schools claimed voluntary aided status, and in recent years a small number of schools belonging to other faith traditions have also been added to this category.

The ‘traditional’ independent schools with a religious character trace their origins to a wide range of historic initiatives, including those advanced directly by churches, by religious communities, by religious societies, and by private benefactors wishing to secure a religious connection. Alongside Anglican and Catholic traditional independent schools, there are some well-known Methodist and Quaker schools in this category.

The ‘new’ independent schools with a religious character trace their origin to a Christian foundation opened in Rochester in 1969 (Deakin, 1989). Within this context, the new independent Christian schools, often associated with the Christian Schools Trust, were variously founded by local churches or by consortia of parents. Such schools set out to offer a radical alternative to the ‘secular’ values of the broad state-maintained sector of schools. A parallel initiative was undertaken by the Islamic community in founding independent schools, some of which are linked by the Association of Muslim Schools UK. Among the registered independent schools with a religious character are Buddhist and Hindu schools.

Listening to teachers

It is reasonable to assume that one of the motivational factors underpinning the development of faith schools is a commitment to taking religion seriously, a commitment reflected in approaches to religious education. It is this assumption that shapes the research question addressed by the present study. This research question is tested by listening to the teachers responsible for the curriculum area of religious education within the three main types of faith schools currently evident in England and Wales: church schools within the state-maintained sector, traditional independent schools with a religious character, and new

independent schools with a religious character. Over the past decades several studies, working largely within a quantitative tradition, have examined the views of pupils (and former pupils) attending schools with a religious character in England and Wales, including studies concerned with Anglican schools (Francis 1986a, 1987a, 1987b; Francis & Jewell, 1992; Lankshear, 2005). Catholic schools (Brothers, 1964; Lawlor, 1965; Hornsby-Smith, 1978; Egan & Francis, 1986; Egan, 1988; Francis, 2002) and independent Christian schools (O’Keeffe, 1992; Francis, 2005; ap Siôn, Francis & Baker (2007, 2009)). The research literature (within a quantitative tradition) on listening to those who teach in such schools is, however, less well developed.

The most systematic attempt to define (and to model the influences on) the attitudes of teachers working within schools with a religious character in England and Wales was initiated by Francis in the early 1980s with reference to Anglican schools within the state-maintained sector. In the first study in a series, Francis (1986b) reported on a survey conducted in 1982 that set out to map the attitudes and values of 338 teachers (65% response rate) employed in the 20 Church of England voluntary aided and 91 voluntary controlled first, primary and middle schools in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Alongside detailed information about the views of these teachers across 25 specific topics, Francis (1986b) identified three main attitudinal clusters and constructed an attitude scale to measure each of these areas. Path analysis was employed to model the major influences on the scores recorded on each of these scales.

The first attitude scale set out to identify the issues which are best able to distinguish between those teachers who are *in favour of the church school system* and those who are not in favour of it. The second attitude scale set out to identify the characteristics of church schools which are most likely to be emphasised by those who wish to assert *the distinctiveness of the church school*. The third attitude scale set out to identify the teaching

preferences of those who would characterise themselves as *favouring traditional teaching methods*, rather than progressive teaching methods.

Two key findings emerged from the path analysis conducted on these attitude scales. The first finding was that preference for traditional teaching methods was independent of the individual teacher's age or religious commitment. Decisions about teaching styles appear to be thoroughly professional matters uninfluenced by more personal issues. The second finding was that views about church schools were clearly not independent of the individual teacher's age or religious commitment. Decisions about the distinctiveness of church schools and whether or not church schools are viewed favourably are influenced by more personal issues.

The scale of attitudes toward the church school system demonstrated that, while many teachers who find themselves working in the church school system still show considerable goodwill towards that system, their goodwill towards church schools is also clearly associated with their goodwill towards the Church in general. The statistical model suggests that the younger teachers are less likely to be churchgoers and that the teachers who are not churchgoers are less likely to be favourably disposed towards the church school system. This model could imply that the next generation of teachers in church schools is likely to be less favourably disposed towards the church school system than the present generation.

The scale of attitudes toward the distinctiveness of church schools demonstrated that, while many teachers who find themselves working in the church school system still argue in favour of the distinctiveness of church schools, this notion of distinctiveness is not only related to the individual teachers' attitudes toward the Church, but also to their age. In the case of their attitude toward the church school system, younger churchgoing teachers are just as likely to be favourably disposed to the Church's involvement in education as older churchgoing teachers. It is simply the case that fewer young teachers go to church. In the case of their attitude toward the distinctiveness of church schools, younger churchgoing teachers

are less likely to support the Christian distinctiveness of church schools than older churchgoing teachers. This model could imply that, as the next generation of church school teachers emerges, the belief that church schools should be different is likely to disappear more rapidly than general goodwill towards the Church's continued involvement in education.

Francis' (1986b) findings in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich were later tested by Wilcox and Francis (1996) in a second study conducted in the Diocese of Newcastle during 1992. The findings from this study, also, suggested that the distinctiveness of church schools would weaken as an older generation of teachers is gradually replaced by a younger generation.

In 1996, Francis and Grindle (2001) returned to the teachers in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich to replicate the 1982 study. In the meantime the stock of aided schools had reduced from 20 to 18 and the stock of controlled schools from 91 to 73 as a consequence of reorganisation involving the closure of small schools. This time responses were received from 290 teachers (56% response rate).

Four main conclusions emerge from the comparison between the 1982 and 1996 studies. First, analysis of the 1982 data indicated that younger teachers were less likely to attend church than older teachers and that the teachers who attended church less frequently were also likely to hold a less positive attitude toward the church school system. On the basis of this finding, Francis (1986b) predicted that the next generation of teachers in church schools would be less favourably disposed toward the church school system than the generation in post in 1982. Analyses of the 1996 cohort of teachers confirms this prediction. Overall, teachers working in church schools in 1996 held a less positive attitude toward the church school system than teachers working in church schools in 1982.

Second, the multiple regression model exploring the predictors of individual differences in teacher attitude toward the church school system in 1996 confirms that there remains a close relationship between teachers' personal religious commitment and their views on the church school system. Churchgoing teachers are still inclined to hold a more positive attitude toward the church school system than teachers who do not attend church. This finding underlines the clear interrelationship between personal commitment and professional judgement.

Third, analysis of the 1982 data indicated that younger teachers and teachers who attended church less frequently were also likely to hold a less positive attitude toward the distinctiveness of church schools. On the basis of this finding, Francis (1986b) predicted that the next generation of teachers in church schools was likely to be less favourably disposed toward the distinctiveness of church schools. Francis' prediction, however, was unable to foresee the potential impact of the denominational system of inspections introduced by the 1992 Education (Schools) Act on the self-conscious development of distinctiveness within church schools. Analysis of the 1996 cohort of teachers not only fails to confirm Francis' prediction but demonstrates that change had occurred in the direction opposite to that predicted. Overall, teachers working in church schools in 1996 held a more positive view of the distinctiveness of church schools than teachers working in church schools in 1982.

Fourth, Francis (1986b) and Wilcox and Francis (1996) found that teacher attitudes toward the distinctiveness of church schools were predicted by two personal characteristics. Older teachers and churchgoing teachers were more likely to emphasise the distinctiveness of church schools than younger teachers and teachers who did not attend church. This finding is not replicated in the 1996 study. Among the 1996 cohort of teachers both age and church attendance are irrelevant to teachers' views on the distinctiveness of church schools. The difference between the findings in 1982 and 1996 suggests that the process of denominational

inspection and the in-service training associated with such inspection may have been successful in raising the debate regarding the distinctiveness of church schools from the level of personal preference to the level of professional judgement.

This study has demonstrated the value of replicating a survey among teachers working within the same church schools both in 1982 and 1996 in order to monitor the way in which teacher attitudes toward various aspects of teaching in church schools have changed from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. Further replication is now desirable within the same schools in order to monitor changing attitudes toward church schools into the twenty-first century.

Research agenda

In view of the paucity of empirical research on the attitudes and values of teachers working within schools with a religious character in England and Wales (and on the factors influencing these attitudes), the present study now turns attention to the reanalysis of a recent database assembled under the initiative of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (Jackson *et al*, 2010). This database focussed on the subject leaders for religious education, and included assessment of their understanding of the aims of religious education. Reanalyses of these data would permit concentration on the responses of subject leaders working within schools with a religious character, identification of the priorities established for religious education within this (diverse) sector, and examination of the factors that shape individual differences in this field. Moreover, the database contains sufficient variables to model the relative influence on views concerning religious education exerted by personal factors (including age, sex, and church attendance), professional factors (including teaching experience, initial qualifications, and continuing professional development), and contextual factors (including different types of schools).

Initial analyses of this database, reported by Francis and Robbins (2010), concentrated on faith schools in the primary sector. These analyses demonstrated that contextual,

professional and personal factors were all implicated in shaping teacher attitudes toward religious education in faith schools within the primary sector. The key finding concerning contextual factors was that the approach to religious education within the new independent faith schools was indistinguishable from the approach within Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector. The approach to religious education within Roman Catholic schools within the state-maintained sector was, however, significantly different from the approach within Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector. The key finding concerning personal factors was that the personal religious commitment of individual teachers (as reflected in their level of church attendance) predicted differences in approaches to religious education. The key finding concerning professional factors was that participation in continuing professional development programmes predicted differences in approaches to religious education. In other words, the shape of religious education found in faith schools within the primary sector seemed to depend not only on the *type* of faith school but also on the personal and professional disposition of individual teachers.

The current analysis builds on the work reported by Francis and Robbins (2010) by turning attention to the information provided by teachers working in faith schools within the secondary sector. The new analyses are designed to explore whether the personal, professional and contextual factors found to predict approaches to religious education within the primary sector also hold true within the secondary sector.

Method

Research context

The Department for Children, Schools and Families commissioned a survey of subject leaders in religious education throughout the state-maintained and independent sectors in England at both primary and secondary levels, as part of a broader evaluation of materials available for and used within religious education. (for further details see Jackson *et al*, 2010)

Sample frame

A stratified sample was proposed to ensure sufficient representation of the minority schools. In sectors where there were fewer than 250 schools, a population study was undertaken. In sectors where there were 250 or more schools, random sampling of these sectors was undertaken from the database managed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to generate a pool of 250 schools.

Response rate

Unanticipated difficulties in receiving authorisation for the sampling strategy by the Department for Children, Schools and Families resulted in inadequate time being available to maximise the response rate. A total of 2723 questionnaires were despatched, and 627 thoroughly completed responses were received before the end of the school term, representing a 23% response rate.

Measures

In addition to sex, age, and years of teaching experience, the following measures were employed in the present analyses.

Attendance at a public place of worship (apart from weddings, funerals, or school occasions) was assessed on a five-point scale: weekly, monthly, at least six times a year, at least once a year, and never.

Qualifications in religious education were assessed by the following options: BA(QTS) in religion or RE; BA, BEd, etc. in religion or RE; PGCE in RE; other teaching qualifications in RE; MA, MEd in religion; Doctorate in religion; professional qualification in religion (e.g. ordination); and no specific qualification in RE.

Continuing professional development in RE received during the past 12 months was quantified on a six-point scale: none; 1-8 hours; 10-19 hours; 20-29 hours; 30-39 hours; and 40+ hours.

The *Aims of Religious Education Inventory (AREI)* proposed five short scales defined as: Understanding (three items), Values (three items), Community cohesion (three items), World religions (two items), and Nurture (two items). Participants were asked to assess ‘how important are the following aims of RE to your school to teach pupils’, rated on a five-point scale: very important, unimportant, no opinion, important, and very important.

Analysis

The present analyses draw on the data provided by subject leaders working within schools with a religious character within the secondary sector, a total of 149 individuals. Further details concerning the participating schools are provided in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

Meeting the teachers

The first step in analysing the data from the survey involves introducing the teachers who serve as subject leaders in religious education and who responded to the survey, in terms of their personal profile, their professional background, and their religious commitment.

In terms of *personal profile*, of the 149 participants, 65 were male, 79 were female, and 5 preferred not to disclose their sex; 11 were in their twenties, 44 were in their thirties, 35 were in their forties, 47 were in their fifties, 6 were in their sixties, and 6 preferred not to disclose their age.

In terms of *professional background*, of the 149 participants, 16 had served as a teacher for 5 years or less, 33 for 6 - 10 years, 29 for 11 - 15 years, 14 for 16 - 20 years, 53 for more than 20 years, and 4 preferred not to disclose their length of professional service; 134 held a qualification relevant for serving as a subject leader in religious education, 10 held no such qualification, and 5 preferred not to disclose their level of qualification in this area. Hours given to continuing professional development in religious education within the past 12 months varied greatly: 88 participants had undertaken no continuing professional

development in this field, 34 had undertaken up to 9 hours, 11 had undertaken between 10 and 19 hours, 9 had taken 20 or more hours, and 7 preferred not to disclose their experience of continuing professional development within the past 12 months.

In terms of their *religious commitment*, of the 149 participants, 126 responded to the question ‘What is your religion?’ by checking the category ‘Christian’, 1 ‘Jewish’, 3 ‘Muslim’, 2 ‘Other’ and 7 ‘none’; a further 10 preferred not to disclose information concerning their religious affiliation. Responding to the question how often they ‘attend a public place of worship (apart from weddings, funerals, etc., or school occasions)’, 98 reported weekly attendance, 10 monthly attendance, 12 attendance at least six times a year, and 12 attendance once a year, while 8 reported never attending and 9 preferred not to disclose their level of attendance.

Identifying the schools

The second step in analysing the data from the survey involves identifying the secondary schools with a religious character that responded to the invitation to participate in the enquiry. Table 1 places the schools within the categories used by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Given the large number of categories of schools (7) and the relatively small number of schools within some categories, the following analyses propose to collapse categories into three dummy variables, taking the two categories of Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector (voluntary controlled schools and voluntary aided schools) collapsed into the reference point. The three dummy variables are designed to capture the Roman Catholic schools (collapsing voluntary aided and independent), to capture the traditional independent schools (collapsing Church of England independent and Roman Catholic independent), and to capture the new independent faith schools (collapsing Christian and Muslim). In creating these dummy variables it is important

to note that the Roman Catholic independent schools have been incorporated within two of the dummy variables.

-insert Table 1 here -

Establishing the aims of religious education

The third step in analysing the data from the survey involves examining the Aims of Religious Education Inventory (AREI). Table 2 displays the scale properties of the five short instruments designed to distinguish between five recognised aims of religious education, defined as *Understanding* (to promote understanding of religion), as *Values* (to promote personal and social values), as *Community cohesion* (to promote community cohesion), as *World religions* (to promote learning of world religions), and as *Nurture* (to promote religious and spiritual nurture). These data demonstrate that all of these scales return a very satisfactory alpha coefficient for such short instruments (De Vellis, 2003), that the full range of scores has been used for each scale, and that in all cases the mean scores are in the upper range of the scales.

-insert table 2 here –

Table 3 examines the five scales in closer detail, reporting the individual items, the correlation between each item and the sum of the remaining items (the item rest of scale correlation), and the proportion of teachers who rated each item as ‘very important’. The percentage endorsements indicate that the two aims of religious education rated most highly by the teachers are *understanding* (to promote understanding of religion) and *world religions* (to promote learning of world religions). In terms of *understanding*, 83% rate as very important promoting reflection on ultimate questions, 72% rate as very important promoting critical thinking about religion, and 54% rate as very important promoting understanding of the influence of religion in society. In terms of *world religions*, 59% rate as very important promoting learning about the religions of the world, and 55% rate as very important

promoting learning from the religions of the world. In third place comes the aim *social values* (to promote personality and social values). In this area 51% rate as very important helping to promote good personal values, 50% rate as very important to promote moral living, and 44% rate as very important promoting good social values. In fourth place comes the aim *community cohesion* (to promote community cohesion). In this area, 43% rate as very important combating religious discrimination, 41% rate as very important promoting community cohesion, and 34% rate as very important developing good citizens. In bottom place comes the aim *spiritual nurture* (to promote religious and spiritual nurture). In this area, 22% rate as very important promoting spiritual development, and 19% rate as very important promoting a positive attitude toward religion.

Shaping the aims of religious education

The fourth step in analysing the data from the survey involves examining the personal, professional and contextual factors correlated with the priority given by individual subject leaders to each of the five aims of religious education assessed by the AREI. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients between each of the five aims of religious education and three personal factors (age, sex, and church attendance), three professional factors (years of experience as a teacher, holding a qualification in religious education, and continuing professional development), and three contextual factors (Roman Catholic schools, traditional independent sector schools, and 'new' independent faith schools, compared with Church of England schools). Intentionally these nine factors are being viewed in a bivariate context rather than in a multivariate context in order to profile their usefulness as independent indicators.

-insert table 4 here-

Drawing on the data presented in table four, each of the three factors explored in relation to religious education (personal factors, professional factors, and contextual factors)

will be discussed in turn. First, overall the personal factors are largely irrelevant in predicting individual differences in teacher attitudes toward religious education within the context of faith schools at the secondary level. In other words, the way in which religious education is conceived in these schools does not seem to be subject to the personal characteristics of the teachers. Age is an irrelevant factor: younger teachers and older teachers give the same weight to the five areas of religious education identified by the survey. Churchgoing is an irrelevant factor: churchgoing and non-churchgoing teachers give the same weight to these five areas. Sex differences are largely irrelevant as well: male teachers and female teachers give the same weight to four of these five areas (understanding, community cohesion, nurture, and values), although female teachers give more weight than male teachers to world religions.

Second, overall the professional factors are largely irrelevant to predicting differences in teacher attitudes toward religious education within the context of faith schools at the secondary level. In other words, the way in which religious education is conceived in these schools does not seem to be subject to the professional training or experience of the individual teachers. Years of teaching experience is an irrelevant factor: recently qualified teachers and teachers with long experience in the classroom give the same weight to the five areas of religious education identified by the survey. Holding a professional qualification in religious education is an irrelevant factor: teachers who hold a professional qualification in religious education give the same weight to these five areas. Continuing professional development is an irrelevant factor: teachers who devote time to their continuing professional development and teachers who take no opportunities for continuing professional development in religious education give the same weight to these five areas.

Third, overall the contextual factors are significant in predicting individual differences in teacher attitudes toward religious education within the context of faith schools at the

secondary level. Significant correlations were found between one contextual factor and four of the five areas of religious education identified by the survey. In examining the predictive power of contextual factors in this analysis, Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector were taken as the reference point, with voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools collapsed into one category. The most important finding from this section is that, compared with state-maintained Church of England schools, state-maintained Roman Catholic schools give less weight to three areas of religious education, the areas characterised as values, nurture, and community cohesion. Also, compared with state-maintained Church of England schools, traditional independent schools (taking Church of England and Roman Catholic as one category) give more weight to the area of religious education concerned with world religions. Another point of importance illustrated by these data is that the weight given to the five areas of religious education within the new independent faith schools (taking Christian and Muslim as one category) is indistinguishable from the situation within Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector.

Conclusion

The present study set out to build on an established but small research tradition concerned with describing and explaining the religious character of faith schools in England and Wales by means of qualitative studies conducted among those who teach in such schools. Much of the previous research in this tradition has concentrated on primary schools and on Church of England schools within the state-maintained sector. The present study extends previous research in three ways: by focusing on secondary schools rather than primary schools; by including Roman Catholic schools and schools associated with other faith traditions as well as Church of England schools; and by including independent schools (both traditional church-related independent schools and new faith schools) as well as schools within the state-maintained sector. The present study was able to take this broadly-based

approach by re-analysing data originally collected by Jackson *et al* (2010). These data were utilised and analysed to address two kinds of questions. The first kind of question was concerned to identify the levels of importance given to different aims for religious education within faith schools at the secondary level in England and Wales considered as a single category. The second kind of question was concerned to identify the extent to which the levels of importance given to these aims varied according to three groups of factors: the personal characteristics of the teachers (sex, age, and church attendance); the professional background of the teachers (years of teaching experience, qualification in religious education, and participation in continuing professional development); and the foundation of the school (state-maintained Church of England, state-maintained Roman Catholic, traditional independent, and new independent faith schools). Four main conclusions emerged from these new data.

The first conclusion concerns the way in which religious education is conceived within the faith school sector at secondary level in England and Wales as a whole. Overall, the sector is not concerned through religious education with promoting religious and spiritual nurture. This aim comes bottom of the five aims for religious education identified by the study. At the top of the list of five aims comes the aim of promoting understanding of religion. Overall, faith schools are concerned with enabling pupils to reflect on ultimate questions, to think critically about religion, and to understand the influence of religion in society, rather than shaping the religious and spiritual commitment of their pupils.

The second conclusion concerns the image of the new independent faith schools at secondary level. In terms of the way in which religious education is conceived, these schools are indistinguishable from Church of England state-maintained schools. There is no evidence to support the notion that the new independent faith schools at secondary level distort the

aims of religious education in order to nurture faith or to give lower value to the critical understanding of religion.

The third conclusion concerns the way in which Roman Catholic state-maintained secondary schools conceive religious education differently from state-maintained Church of England secondary schools. In their understanding of religious education, Roman Catholic schools are giving the same emphasis as given in Church of England schools to promoting understanding of religion and to promoting learning of world religions. However, Roman Catholic schools are giving less emphasis than Church of England schools to three other areas of religious education: promoting personal and social values, promoting community cohesion, and promoting religious and spiritual nurture. It is these areas that Roman Catholic schools may be addressing through other aspects of the curriculum or through the school community.

The fourth conclusion concerns the way in which personal and professional factors are largely irrelevant in shaping how teachers conceive the aims of religious education in faith schools at the secondary level. This is significantly different from the findings reported by Francis and Robbins (2010) in faith schools at the primary level. At the secondary level the aims of religious education seem to be more tightly prescribed by the schools themselves, since at this level the contextual factor of school type is significant, while personal factors (like levels of religious practice) and professional factors (like commitment to continuing professional development) are insignificant.

The reanalysis of data commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools, and Families and reported by Jackson *et al* (2010) has been able to extend knowledge about the aims of religious education within faith schools at the secondary level, taking into account a limited range of personal, professional and contextual factors. Such knowledge needs to be set within the two limitations associated with the low response rate to this survey. First, the

low response rate means that there were insufficient schools within certain categories needed to generate a more tightly nuanced evaluation of differences between the various forms of faith schools in England and Wales. Second, the low response rate may mean that the more highly committed teachers may be over-represented among the pool of respondents. Future research in this field may wish to implement strategies generally recognised as capable of enhancing response rates.

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Table 1

Primary schools with a religious character participating in the survey, according to DCSF categories

| School type | N |
|--|----|
| Church of England voluntary controlled schools | 9 |
| Church of England voluntary aided schools | 33 |
| Roman Catholic voluntary aided schools | 40 |
| Church of England independent schools | 25 |
| Roman Catholic independent schools | 12 |
| Christian independent schools | 27 |
| Muslim independent schools | 3 |

Table 2

The aims of religious education: scale properties

| | N items | range | alpha | mean | sd |
|--|------------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| To promote understanding of religion | 3 | 3-15 | .91 | 13.79 | 2.13 |
| To promote personal and social values | 3 | 3-15 | .94 | 13.00 | 2.37 |
| To promote community cohesion | 3 | 3-15 | .85 | 12.54 | 2.47 |
| To promote learning of world religions | 2 | 2-10 | .73 | 8.83 | 1.52 |
| To promote religious and spiritual nurture | 2 | 2-10 | .85 | 7.90 | 1.57 |

Table 3

The aims of religious education: item endorsement and item rest of scale correlations

| | IR <i>r</i> | VI % |
|--|----------------|---------|
| <u>To promote understanding of religion</u> | | |
| to understand the influence of religion in society | .81 | 54 |
| to think critically about religion | .85 | 72 |
| to reflect on ultimate questions | .81 | 83 |
| <u>To promote personal and social values</u> | | |
| to promote good personal values | .86 | 51 |
| to promote good social values | .87 | 44 |
| to promote moral living | .88 | 50 |
| <u>To promote community cohesion</u> | | |
| to promote community cohesion | .78 | 41 |
| to combat religious discrimination | .73 | 43 |
| to help develop good citizens | .67 | 34 |
| <u>To promote learning of world religions</u> | | |
| to learn about the religions of the world | .58 | 59 |
| to learn from the religions of the world | .58 | 55 |
| <u>To promote religious and spiritual nurture</u> | | |
| to develop a positive attitude toward religion | .75 | 19 |
| to promote spiritual development | .75 | 22 |

Note: IR = the correlation between the individual item and the sum of the remaining items.

VI = the proportion of teachers who rated the individual item as 'very important'

Table 4

Bivariate correlations

| | Values | Nurture | Co-co | Under | World |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| <u>Personal factors</u> | | | | | |
| Sex of subject leader | .00 | .07 | .10 | -.06 | .22** |
| Age of subject leader | -.01 | .02 | -.03 | .07 | -.01 |
| Personal worship attendance | .03 | .15 | .05 | .12 | -.05 |
| <u>Professional factors</u> | | | | | |
| Years of teaching experience | .00 | .05 | -.05 | .07 | .05 |
| Qualification in RE | .04 | .10 | .10 | .12 | .09 |
| Continuing Professional Development | -.11 | -.13 | -.05 | -.11 | -.12 |
| <u>Contextual factors</u> | | | | | |
| Roman Catholic school | -.36*** | -.35*** | -.26** | -.13 | -.07 |
| Independent sector | .08 | .03 | .12 | -.11 | .22** |
| Independent faith school | .12 | .12 | .09 | .11 | .03 |

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

values = to promote personal and social values

nurture = to promote religious and spiritual nurture

co-co = to promote community cohesion

under = to promote understanding of religion

world = to promote world religions