

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH OF THE 2007
BIRMINGHAM AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FACILITATE
THE ENGAGEMENT OF PUPILS OF ALL FAITHS AND NONE TO LEARN BOTH
FROM AND ABOUT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS? AN EXPLORATION OF
TEACHERS' VIEWS

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the extent to which the pedagogical approach of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus facilitates the engagement of pupils. Local control of Religious Education has caused much discussion in recent years, but little work has been undertaken on Birmingham's distinctive approach to the subject. The syllabus teaches through 24 dispositions as opposed to religious topics such as 'festivals' or the study of discrete faiths.

My research questions were:

- 1) Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE?
- 2) Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE?
- 3) Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?

To investigate these questions I collected and analysed data by means of a questionnaire to all Birmingham RE teachers and interviews with selected respondents.

One of the significant findings of my research is that aims for RE favoured by the majority of Birmingham RE teachers align closely with the aims of the Agreed Syllabus. Teachers' responses in relation to why RE is of importance echoed the same themes of values and personal development. My research also indicates that teachers think the dispositional approach enables pupils to engage with RE by making the subject more relevant to their lives.

For Mom and Dad with love and thanks

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Abbreviations

APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
ASC	Agreed Syllabus Conference
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BCC	Birmingham City Council
BHA	British Humanist Association
CORE	Commission on Religious Education
DfCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
ERA	Education Reform Act
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LA	Local Authority
NASACRE	National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education
NSNFRE	Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
P4C	Philosophy for Children
PPA	Planning Preparation and Assessment
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Council
RS	Religious Studies
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

SAPERE	The Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SMSC	Spiritual Moral Social Cultural
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The current state of Religious Education (RE)

The current state of RE is perplexing. The subject faces many challenges, including exclusion from the English Baccalaureate, academisation contributing to the redundancy of locally agreed syllabuses, the increase of non-specialists teaching RE, and weaknesses in both the educational rationale for the subject and its academic character.

Whereas the Religious Education Council's (REC) Review (2012a) refers to the legislative requirement of local determination being considered a strength by some expert witnesses, recent subject reports from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2007) relate the uncertainty of continued local control of RE. Chater (2013b, p. 101) questions, 'If a semi-local system is working badly, should we leave it alone in the name of freedom?' Additionally the Academies Act (2010) stipulated that as part of model funding agreements, Academies are not required to teach RE through a locally agreed syllabus. Although many academies may still choose to follow a locally agreed syllabus, it is no longer a legal requirement. Another factor contributing to a crisis in RE originated with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (Department for Education [DfE], 2010). This performance indicator based on a number of 'core' subject areas taken by students disregarded the inclusion of RE (Commission on Religious Education [CORE], 2018). Each of the previously discussed changes are cause for concern on an individual level, however, when combined, have caused distinct unease in the RE community, in terms of the status of the subject, Clarke and Woodhead (2018, p. 5) refer to current legislation as 'hindering rather than helping'. Likewise, Ofsted subject inspection reports have also highlighted similar concerns regarding the subject's disparate nature and how this has manifested in confused

practice within the classroom (Ofsted 2007, 2010, 2013). Although ‘moral development’ is seen as one of a number of competing imperatives (Conroy *et al.*, 2013), it is one voice among many, in a confused national picture.

A number of other challenges further exacerbate RE’s predicament. The REC Review (2012a) highlights issues in RE as wide ranging as: the nature and purpose of the RE, misrepresentation and concern with the number of religions being taught, governmental decisions in regard to qualifications, schools disregarding RE and the assessment of RE. Affirming many of the same areas of concern, an inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (2016), the REC Review (2013) and CORE report (2018) respectively looked at the impact of the teaching of RE including: the number of non-specialist teachers, a lack of confidence in teaching, training, and governmental policies contributing to the lowering of the subject’s status.

One must also note the present context of RE, that the existence of so many pedagogies could also be seen to contribute to the problem that RE is currently facing. The research project ‘Does RE work?’ posits that RE has reinvented itself too many times in recent years to the detriment of the ‘substantive core’ or ‘essence of the subject’, (Conroy, 2011). This study cites thirteen competing imperatives within RE, ranging from moral development, to understanding heritage, and from sex and relationship education, to religious literacy (2011, p. 7). Although within the thirteen imperatives highlighted, there are elements of virtues and moral aims, the wider forum in RE has somewhat neglected the discrete promotion of pupils’ personal and character development. In a similar vein, Barnes (2012a) also asks about the appropriate aims for RE.

Contrary to the ‘Does RE work?’ research, the encompassing nature of RE is seen by REC’s Review (2012a) as a particular strength within the subject (Gates, 2015), although Chater (2014) is critical of the report’s findings. However, Plater’s (2016) analysis of the 2015 Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE) survey, representing 131 SACREs, is seen to support the REC’s (2012a) findings, advocating that such diversity should be embraced. Although the contemporary state of RE is far from healthy, nationally commissioned bodies have also recognised and reported the beneficial aspects of the subject: contribution to wider school aims, policies and personal development, multi faith nature, enthusiastic responses to schools gaining the RE Quality Mark, innovative and exciting RE; enabling learners to think deeply about questions of their own identity and what it means to be human and, a year on year rise in examination entries. Whilst the CORE report (2018) emphasises the importance, more than ever, of understanding religions, Gates (2015, p. 53) extols the opportunities made by the teaching of RE as ‘distinctive’ to the subject.

The concerns outlined in the recent reports and reviews resonate much of what has already been documented in the three subject reports published by Ofsted. Throughout the three reports: ‘Making Sense of Religion’ (2007), ‘Transforming Religious Education’ (2010), and ‘Realising the Potential’ (2013), Ofsted lists effective features of RE as: contributing to pupils’ broad personal development, pupils relating to both subject content and connecting with relevance for their lives, and the exploration of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. However, less effective features amongst others are listed as: teachers’ insufficient knowledge, weaknesses in planning and managing learning, non-specialist teaching and teachers lacking confidence. Other concerns highlighted are: the lack of clarity about the purpose of learning, confusion about the purpose and aims of RE, and

the relationship between RE, ethics, moral guidance and, community cohesion. Rarely do the reports comment on moral development in a singular manner:

Boys were said to enjoy Religious Education when: they were finding out what other pupils thought, particularly about social and moral issues. (2007, p. 15)

Whether Christian material should be investigated in its own right, as part of understanding the religion, or whether it should be used to consider moral or social themes out of the context of the religion. (2010, p. 33)

RE was sometimes confused with the school's wider contribution to pupil's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development. (2013, p. 13)

Moreover, this is mainly due to the confusion between the school's wider duty to promote SMSC and the purpose of RE. However, one report specifically refers to the development of dispositions and values as being one of the core purposes of RE: 'to help pupils develop positive values, attitudes and dispositions', (Ofsted, 2010, p. 42). Barnes (2011) and Coles (2014; 2015) defend this positive contribution as being essential for the development of pupils and society.

One of the many challenges facing RE is that teachers are not clear on the purpose and aims of the subject as the work of Conroy *et al.* (2013) highlighted. The REC Review (2012a) cites the practice of some RE departments changing their names to 'Philosophy' or 'Ethics' departments instead, in order to reflect a current standpoint of the subject as being more discursive, philosophical, and as such distancing itself from its confessional, Christian roots. Baumfield (2012) affirms that the change in name is part of a crisis of identity that has 'dogged' the development of RE. Furthermore, Chater and Erricker (2013c) posit that there could be a case for changing the name, 'education' in the subject's title: being seen as

redundant and ‘religious’ not capturing what is to be ‘studied’; but this Chater argues must also be followed with a change of purpose and pedagogy.

As Chater (2018) further alludes, it is not the spectrum of aims that is a concern per se, rather the ‘pick and mix’ approach, resulting in a confusing jumble of an ‘incoherent and scattergun curriculum’ (p. 73). Just as a teacher in not conveying the aims and purpose of a lesson may be deemed to be ineffective, if the aims of a subject are unclear, vague and confused, the outcomes will be seen as unpromising. Whilst some academics trace the contemporary crisis back to the divorce from its moral origins (Barnes, 2015), others take the opportunity to call into question its compulsory status (White, 2004).

Following RE’s predicament regarding its role, purpose and significance, it would seem that a national solution should be sought. One of the ways forward is the call for national policy and guidance. Clarke and Woodhead (2015; 2018) outline a national resettlement for RE and Collective Worship, allowing for the standardisation of practice, and much needed support for non-specialists and specialists alike. Clarke and Woodhead (2015; 2018) rightly point out that during the last seventy five years, schools and society have undergone an immense amount of change, leaving behind the laws governing the duties for RE and Collective Worship. As such, given the last Census’ statistics on the decline in the significance of religion (Office of National Statistics, 2011; National Census [NATCEN], 2017), addressing the anachronistic condition of RE and Collective Worship, is seen as long overdue.

However, whilst the Clarke and Woodhead papers recognises that there has been change in the nature and place of religion in society since the 1944 Education Act, it concedes that religion is still an important part of society. One of the most interesting recommendations

proffered invites for ‘consideration to be given to using the phrase ‘Religious and Moral Education’ rather than ‘Religious Education’ in describing this part of the statutory curriculum’, (italics and emboldened script, Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). This recommendation is based on Scottish Education’s (2010) use of the term in ‘Principles and Practice’: ‘[r]eligious and moral education is a process where children and young people engage in a search for meaning, value and purpose in life. This involves both the exploration of beliefs and values and the study of how such beliefs are expressed’, (p. 1). The document further outlines how through a ‘personal search’ values such as wisdom, justice and compassion ‘engage the development of and reflection upon their [the pupils’] own moral values’ and how through this engagement pupils can ‘make a positive difference to the world by putting their beliefs and values into action’, (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 1) whilst to ‘actively encourage children and young people to participate in service of others’, (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 2). Whilst more recently Clarke and Woodhead (2018, p. 19) advocate using the phrase ‘Religion, Beliefs and Values’ instead of RE in order to reflect societal changes. At a time of turmoil within the RE community and during a proposed all-encompassing review of the subject, a renewed focus on morality and action is being endorsed.

Nevertheless, regardless of being on the verge of a national transformation, some areas of the RE community still recognise and value local innovative practice. Plater (2016) analysing a national survey completed by SACRE members, reports the importance of diversity and the need to continue to embrace and develop work on a local level. In this manner the local determination of RE is seen as allowing for distinctive local solutions to be drawn up by communities in order to address their needs. This enables the development of

different, innovative and experimental approaches to RE. The discussion will now turn to examining one example of such local originality; the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

1.2. Birmingham

The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus is one example of an original response to the local determination of RE. As Barnes (2008) affirms: '[i]t is clear that the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus has charted a new and distinctive course for statutory religious education in England and Wales', [...] 'challeng[ing] a number of 'sacred shibboleths' of current theory and practice [...] 'provid[ing] a stimulus for further creative thinking' (p. 82). The 2007 syllabus is different from other Agreed Syllabuses; employing the pedagogical strategy of dispositions (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions) to enable the content of the faith traditions to be taught through values which the nine faiths involved in the syllabus have agreed (Birmingham City Council [BCC], 2007, p. 11). The two attainment targets are reversed from their more traditional usage; emphasising learning from faith, by learning about religious traditions (BCC, 2007 p. 4). Although other agreed syllabuses address the development of pupils, the 2007 Birmingham syllabus is forthright in its focus in the development of its dispositions in the young people of the city (BCC, 2007, p. 4) (See Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus). The 'development of pupils' can take place in a number of ways; from the increasing of knowledge of learning about religions to the development of particular skills required in certain pedagogies. In the 2007 syllabus pupils are developed through cognitive, affective and conative means in that pupils will be intellectually challenged, be affected by what they are learning about and be supported to respond to this learning. In this manner the syllabus can be seen to recognise Grimmitt's (1991) instrumental importance of devising a pedagogy providing opportunity

for ‘re-evaluation and re-interpretation of the self’ ‘which brings the ‘religious life-world’ and the ‘adolescent life-world’ into a dialectical relationship.’ (p. 77). Thus the syllabus can be seen as recognising the importance of making the religious material relevant to the life of the pupil (Felderhof, 2005f, p. 3).

The national educational agenda is more focused on values, as shown by the renewed prominence of SMSC development and the development of character (Promoting fundamental British values, DfE, 2014; the work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues; Arthur, 2003; 2014 and, Harrison, Morris, and Ryan, 2016). The development of dispositions in pupils can also be seen as appropriate with the ethos and aims of a ‘compassionate school’ (Coles, 2015) and the need to move away from an educational focus on a content driven curriculum.

The decline in the role of religion in people’s lives intensifies the need to discuss the relevance of teaching RE to the growing number of pupils from a background of ‘no faith’. The rise of this population and the implications for the teaching of RE will now be discussed.

1.3. The rise of the ‘nones’

‘The ‘nones’ are rising in Britain – in a slow, unplanned and almost unnoticed revolution.’ (Woodhead, 2016b, p. 245).

A number of sources and national surveys have reported significant changes in the belief of the population: the decline in the number of people professing Christian beliefs, combined with a decline in Church attendance and, the growth in the population referring to themselves as not having ‘traditional belief’: ‘nones’ (Woolf Institute, 2015; Guest, Olson

and Wolffe, 2012). The British Attitude Survey (NATCEN, 2017) reports more than half (53%) of the British public now describe themselves as having no religion. According to the 2011 Census for England and Wales there has been a decrease in the number of people identifying themselves as Christian between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses (from 71.7% to 59.3%) and an increase in those reporting as having no religion (from 14.8% to 25.1%, Office of National Statistics, 2011). As Clarke and Woodhead (2018, p. 4) state, 'Britain is diverse in a new way'.

According to the last Census, there have been a number of changes regarding belief 'but none more important than the religiously unaffiliated, or 'nones'. (Woodhead, 2016a, p. 10). With the nones on the increase, it is important to understand who constitutes this proportion of the population. In attempting to examine 'a portrait' of a typical none, there seems to be no characteristic type, however, the younger population of nones is increasing to a greater degree.

In terms of ascertaining more about the beliefs of the nones, they are seen to not necessarily class themselves as humanist or atheist, as they 'are resistant to secular as well as religious labels, with only 2% identifying as "secular" or "humanist"' (Woodhead, 2017, p. 254; 2012). In exploring what can be known of this expanding population, and the impact that this has on how religion is viewed in general, consideration must also be given as to whether this group raises specific challenges in the teaching of RE.

If the majority of pupils from a background of no faith are indifferent to religion, where does that leave the teaching of RE? Within the RE community this is not a new debate and is reminiscent of Rudge's (1998) article in 1998, 'I am nothing' does it matter?' Rudge raises

many significant points around the nature and purpose of RE in relation to the engagement of pupils of no faith with religious subject material. As part of a book scrutiny following an inspection, Rudge comments that pupils described themselves by their religion as ‘Muslim’, or ‘Sikh’, however, John from a background of no faith refers to himself as ‘nothing’. This illustrates how some pupils from a background of no faith are disenfranchised and somewhat alienated from RE because of the context of religion in their lives and society.

Nevertheless, as Woodhead (2016b) illustrates whilst: ‘[n]ones may reject organised religion’, [...] ‘they do not reject all it contains.’ (p. 258; 2012). Thus whilst religion per se may be perceived as unimportant, there is not a comprehensive rejection of all aspects of religion. What is of concern is how pupils particularly from a background of no faith access or encounter religion in order to engage with RE. Throughout this research I will refer to the ‘nones’ as ‘pupils from a background of no faith’. As such, I am referring to pupils who do not belong to an institutional form of religion and, may state that they do not have a religion, they may or may not have a personal ideology to which they adhere. The concern is therefore how to enable these pupils to ‘access’ religious content so that they can see the relevance of it to their own lives. This interest stems from my own teaching experience.

1.4. Personal starting points for research

I have been the RE adviser in the city of Birmingham for thirteen years. The majority of the work that I carry out is in primary schools where most of the teachers may not be RE subject specialists and through many conversations have revealed how fearful they are of the subject: not wanting to get it wrong; not wanting to offend; not having the subject knowledge or expertise and not knowing ‘what is in it for them’ let alone for the children they teach. Additionally, the concern at the heart of this research takes me back to when I

was teaching RE. I have experience of teaching RE in two very different schools in the city of Birmingham: a girls' school in the south west of the city with a very mixed pupil demographic and, a school in an area of economic deprivation with a predominantly white population. During my time at the girls' school not once did I hear a pupil ask, "Why have we got to learn about them?" "What's this got to do with us?". With the majority of the pupil population having a faith, and others seemingly immersed in this culture, there was a shared understanding and language of being open to understanding the beliefs of others. Although a range of activities and methods were employed, there was not such need to engage and 'win over' the pupils in the first place in order to take part in RE, they were already interested. I found this not to be the case when teaching at my second school. At this school engaging pupils in learning per se was more difficult, however this was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of pupils were not from a background of faith. As such pupils did not have a shared understanding of the interest of understanding the beliefs of others, if anything, pupils at this school were somewhat indifferent towards religion. The start of each lesson could be a struggle. Pupils regularly asked: "Why do I have to learn about them?" "Why can't I learn about my religion?" (When asked, which religion that was, they replied that they did not have one). Lessons revolved around engaging pupils in learning and making the RE content more relevant to their lives, answering the question, "What's in it for me?" I had not encountered this to such a great extent before.

My experiences of teaching in both of these settings caused me to reflect on RE and how it can be made relevant for all pupils. When RE is relevant to children and young people it supports them to make sense and construct the world around them in seeing (or attempting to see in some cases) how religion, beliefs and values are pertinent to them. In this manner,

RE can be viewed as a dialogue within which pupils enter into a discourse in an attempt to develop their understanding. Applying this model to the 2007 syllabus, children and young people interact with a set of universal values or shared dispositions that expose them to these attributes and qualities within the life of religious people, in order for a respective reflection to take place in the pupils' lives. In this manner my purpose for conducting this research is to evaluate the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

1.5. My role as a researcher – reflection on positionality

I am RE Adviser for BCC and SACRE. I advise schools and academies that teach the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Teachers know that I have a vested interest in how the syllabus is being taught and how successfully it is being used. This is true of many researchers in terms of interest in their area of study; it is often of personal significance due to the time, effort and finance being invested. As a researcher and a professional within the RE community as far as I could I mitigated any compromising factors during all aspects of my research; design, practice and analysis. Denscombe (2010, p. 178) writes of the effect that the personal identity of the researcher may have on the interviewee in terms of social status, qualifications, age, gender and ethnic group. Although all of these factors are of importance, the overriding influence of dual role is more closely aligned to Denscombe's social status category and must not be underestimated. This raised two aspects of concern in relation to my research: firstly, the impact that this had on the relationship with my participants and secondly, my role as a researcher but my vested interest in the object of my research because of my role as an adviser. I will now examine how I addressed each concern.

Firstly, there is a concern of how my dual role influenced the participants in my research. This concern is multi-layered and begins with the choice of participant. I have knowledge of schools in Birmingham and have worked with many teachers. In terms of my survey, I sent this out to the widest population of teachers able to respond, but care was given when I selected from this population who was interviewed. I did not want to only choose teachers who I have worked with or only teachers that I knew. Existing professional relationships with teachers could be seen to be a threat to the objectivity of my study, in that how would I know whether teachers were responding to me as researcher or adviser. I sent my questionnaire to all the co-ordinators and heads of department for which I had email addresses. I had prior contact with these teachers: knowing them as colleagues before becoming an adviser, working with them face to face, teachers contacting me for support or following up telephone conversations. I also sent the questionnaire link to general school email addresses when I did not have knowledge of the co-ordinator or their email address. Out of a total of 103 questionnaire responses, I knew 56 of the participants (39 primary teachers and 17 secondary teachers). Power relations are also an ethical consideration as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) demonstrate when citing Kvale (2007), 'the interview is not usually a reciprocal interaction between two equal participants' (p. 262). This is taking the concept of 'interviewer effect' even a stage further. I wanted teachers to respond with what they thought and not to defer to what I wanted to find out because of the hierarchical position of my advisory role. As RE adviser, I am in a position of authority and could report concerning practice that teachers divulge. I have a vested interest in the dispositional approach as that is my job. However as a researcher I am concerned with answering my research questions accurately. I did take into consideration the following factors outlined by

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007): the right to withdraw at any stage or not to complete sections of a questionnaire for example, guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity.

Anticipating that I would have responses from some teachers that I knew and had previously worked with, I sought to mitigate any bias in my questioning. This started with the design of my questions. I thought carefully of how I designed and framed the questions used in the survey. The questions designed needed to address both positive and negative accounts of the Agreed Syllabus but also gave options of more negative alternatives. I did not design questions that did not give participants an option to present an alternative point of view. When using Likert style questions I gave participants a full range of response from which to select. I also gave teachers 'free response' spaces where they could respond with views that they felt I had not captured through questioning. In terms of my interviewees, I had decided to interview 20 participants. Out of these 20 teachers I knew and had previously worked with 16 teachers (11 primary and 5 secondary). Even more so at interview, I needed to prevent how these existing relationships would influence the conduct of my research. Similarly with the design of my questionnaire, my semi-structured interview schedule was designed to capture both positive and negative responses about the dispositional approach. I was careful in how I asked questions in terms of not over emphasising an aspect which would be beneficial to my research. From previous experience of interviewing, I was able to address physical positioning and my responses in terms of both verbal and non-verbal cues that may have influenced interviewees' answers.

To my advantage I have good relationships and intimate knowledge of the schools in Birmingham. This would not be afforded a researcher starting afresh. Smyth and Holian

(2008) refer to the opportunities that insider research affords. This can be seen as an advantage in many ways: in knowing teachers, knowledge of school communities, and teachers trusting my judgment and reputation. In this manner I was in a position of trust, which may not be afforded a researcher unknown to their participants. This was an advantage since teachers were more likely to divulge their responses and thoughts more honestly. Even though one may think that as an adviser working with a co-coordinator they would try to impress and only respond positively, over years in this role I have been surprised with the honesty with which teachers respond. In this manner I realised that many teachers that I surveyed and interviewed would indeed respond in an honest and candid way. However I also needed to moderate for instances of when this was not the case. Indeed, Sikes and Potts (2008) refer to the willingness of participants to volunteer information to an already known researcher. I found this to be the case, although I am not denying that some participants may have responded in support of my research because of my role, I knew from past experience that the majority would respond candidly.

Bridges (2001, p. 372) argues for the importance of retaining the role of ‘outsider researcher’ but cites Razavi (1992) stating that an insider researcher will always be an outsider when researching his or her own community. In the respect of researching teachers’ views about teaching RE through dispositions, I am already an outsider since I do not teach the syllabus, but an insider in terms of being responsible for the syllabus in Birmingham. I sought to avoid the problems associated with insider/outsider research and as Bridges (2001) states: ‘to seek honest and as far as possible truth-like understanding of whatever is the focus of [their] enquiry’, (p. 383). Similar sentiments are conveyed by Smyth and Holian (2008), expressing the importance of the research promoting learning and making a

difference. However, what must also be avoided is what Bridges (2001) refers to as 'ventriloquy', using the voice of the participant to give expression to the argument one wishes to convey.

Smyth and Holian (2008) also counsel of the benefits of keeping a reflective journal and of engaging with challenging voices to both support and question decisions. The RE Post Graduate group was an extremely valuable resource in this respect in being able to discuss ideas and decisions with other fellow researchers.

The second aspect of concern is related to my vested interest in the syllabus as RE adviser. Within this role part of my remit is to convince and train teachers that the 2007 syllabus is an improved manner of delivering RE. However, as a researcher I needed to stand back and create some distance in order to approach my research in an objective manner. This was not an easy task and took a great deal of struggling with how I needed to approach my research. This was psychologically demanding at times in order to think anew and to really examine the syllabus afresh: Is a character education approach an appropriate way to deliver RE? Is the syllabus supporting teachers? What is the real impact on pupils? – is this beneficial? Such questions were revisited at key points throughout my research and enabled me to remain focused as a researcher addressing my research questions in order to distance myself from my 'day job'. Correspondingly, another aspect that needed to be addressed was how I approached my data analysis. When analysing my data I ensured I looked at all aspects, whether positive or negative. I paid particular attention to teachers expressing doubt or concern with the dispositional approach. I realise that in making my next point I am moving ahead by referring to my findings however I think that it will serve to show how I conducted

my data analysis. During this aspect of my research I discovered that some teachers were concerned with the lack of systematic knowledge that their pupils were gaining as a result of being taught through dispositions. This aspect, although not directly linked to my research questions will be examined in the following chapters on findings and discussion. However, at present it shows that this was a result of my research that although in contrast with my advisory role, I have reported and discussed as a researcher.

As a final point, BERA (2011) draws the researcher's attention to consider the impact of the research upon others involved. Denscombe (2010) corroborates stating 'no research is ever free from the influence of those who conduct it' (p. 301; Usher, 1996). The issue of bias is perhaps a more prevalent concern levelled at the insider researcher. Smyth and Holian (2008) illustrate how this concern very often prompts the insider researcher to account for their research decisions and interaction in a more robust manner. My intentions in terms of my research question must remain true, but the findings were not be manipulated to suit this agenda. I was as impartial as I could be and presented the findings of my research. I discussed what was revealed whether it contributed towards my research question or not. I wanted to be able to research with integrity and to be able to offer 'a unique perspective' as an insider researcher, the important factor being to address this at each stage of the research process (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

To this end in the next section I will discuss how I commenced my research and will present my research questions.

1.6. Research questions

Within this context I wanted to explore whether RE taught through the dispositional approach supports the engagement of pupils. I wanted to explore **the extent to which the pedagogical approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE facilitates the engagement of pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from and about religious traditions.**

I wanted to explore my overall research question by asking teachers what they thought. Teachers are the day-to-day professionals and practitioners delivering the syllabus and I wanted to know what they thought about this approach. Teachers have the daily contact with their pupils and will be able to comment on how they are responding to being taught through dispositions. Teachers will be aware of why their pupils become disengaged in lessons and the multi-faceted reasons for this disengagement. Conversely, teachers will also be aware of what types of approaches and methods to use in order to engage their pupils. This is why the thoughts of teachers are so crucial to my research in ascertaining the extent to which the dispositional approach facilitates engagement of pupils of faith and none. In order to support the research of this overall question, I devised three subsidiary questions.

Firstly, I asked **Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE?** As previously stated, the RE community is facing many concerns: lack of parity with other subjects in training and inclusion in national initiatives, the rise of non-specialist teachers, a current debate about the centralisation of the subject and a lack of clarity in regarding its aims. As such I wanted to find out what Birmingham teachers think about the aims of RE. Firstly, I wanted to know what teachers personally think are the aims of RE and secondly, what do they think are the aims implicit in

the Birmingham syllabus. I also asked teachers, independently of the former line of inquiry, why they think RE is of importance. I was then able to analyse whether there was any convergence with the aims of teachers and the aims of the dispositional approach.

Secondly, I asked **Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE?** As part of answering this question I needed to examine pupil engagement in general. This is a complex task, with many overlapping factors contributing to pupil engagement. However, in line with my own experience, I paid particular attention to what makes content relevant to pupils. As such, I also explored the methods that teachers use to support pupil engagement.

My third question was: **Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?** In the light of an increasing number of adults turning their backs on organised religion, what impact does this have on their children in RE lessons. My research aimed to find out, depending on the population in the teachers' school, whether teachers think that pupils from a background of no faith are harder to engage than pupils from a background of faith. From my experience I know that some schools in Birmingham have more mixed populations than others, so I needed to analyse the results according to teachers' experiences in line with the populations in their schools.

Consequently, as a result of these enquires I aimed to discover whether the dispositional pedagogy is able to engage pupils in a different manner, allowing pupils of faith and none to engage with religious content through a shared values approach. This ultimately has significance for RE in Birmingham, but also the wider RE community in demonstrating that

a distinctive approach shows an impact on the engagement of an increasing population of pupils.

1.7. Outline of the thesis

This chapter has explored the reasons for this research and placed it within the wider context of RE. I will now move on to address the research questions more specifically through an exploration of existing literature and my own research. The first three chapters of my thesis address existing literature.

Chapter 2 will contextualise the syllabus within two main areas, the first of which is the historical background and current models of character education. From the roots of Aristotle, through the work of Kohlberg to the current work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, this section outlines the importance and differing disciplines in which character is developed through education. The second area is RE's longstanding concern with pupils' development, beginning with the confessional roots of RE and moving onto the development of non-confessional RE. The discussion will then examine the work of Michael Grimmitt and Clive Erricker, which defends the instrumental use of religious content to promote pupils' moral, religious and spiritual development. Chapter 3 focuses on RE in Birmingham. Section one gives an account of the historical background of previous syllabuses. The discussion moves on to the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) procedure undertaken for the development of the 2007 syllabus and outlines the pedagogical decisions that were made. The middle sections of this chapter explore the perspective of Marius Felderhof as drafting secretary and the decision to exclude non-religious worldviews. The final two sections of this chapter focus on the 2007 syllabus, outlining its main features and providing an evaluative overview. The final literature review chapter, Chapter 4, explores

engagement. The first section examines internal and external factors providing an understanding of what is meant by engagement. The discussion then moves on to examine why the issue of engagement is a particular concern within RE. The final aspect of this chapter addresses how the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus aims to support engagement.

Chapter 5 describes my choice and reasons for the research design. In this chapter I will justify the use of a mixed methods approach evaluating strengths and weaknesses of each method. How the data are going to be analysed is discussed and ethical concerns are fully explored and considered. Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings of the research. Chapter 6 shows the outcomes of the questionnaires; overviews of significant findings, analysis of qualitative responses, exploration of patterns and discussion of themes. The subsequent chapter explores the interview findings; through the focus of my research questions, themes are discussed in more detail. In the penultimate chapter, a discussion will draw together the literature presented and the findings from my research through addressing each of the subsidiary research questions, leading to the discussion of the overall research question. The final chapter will present a number of conclusions from my research, whilst recommendations for further practice and research are expounded.

2. VALUES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will be outlining the history and the role of teaching values, morals and the character within a wider educational context and RE. This background is critical to understanding Felderhof's (drafting secretary of the 2007 syllabus) perspective of the purpose of RE and the origins of the dispositional approach as manifested in the 2007 syllabus. The context of character education is therefore pivotal to understanding the 2007 syllabus and the foundation to which Felderhof's understanding of RE is indebted. Although a more detailed exploration of Felderhof's views will be discussed in the following chapter, I will make references to relevant elements of the syllabus throughout this current chapter.

I will explore the historical background of the teaching of character education, from its origins in Aristotle through to the last twenty-five years documenting the renewed interest in the development of character with a focus on virtues (Arthur, 2003; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Lickona, 1991; Peterson and Seligman, 2004). This growth can be seen to have provided the opportunity for developing an RE pedagogy focused on the teaching of virtue (Felderhof, 2014). This chapter will set the scene for exploring Felderhof's position as outlined in Chapter 3.

The teaching of values can be seen as intrinsic to the educational process (van der Zee, 2012; Hawkes, 2000; Curren, 2017), the need to instil the values and principles of a given society onto the next generation (Kwan-choi, 2017). As Sanderse (2012) expounds teachers cannot leave morality at home as they view their pedagogical and moral task as an intrinsic part of their teaching. Given this, schools are far from neutral places (Nipkow, 1996; Jarman, 2017) leading to the controversial nature of this educational role (Kristjánsson, 2013). In

addition to learning facts, there is the need to develop and nurture values and attitudes in what Claxton and Carr (2004) refer to as the ‘learning curriculum’, echoing the sentiments of Dewey (1902/2008) nearly a century before, that there is no social gain from just acquiring facts. In working with newly qualified teachers (primary and secondary), many state their reasons for wanting to teach as to ‘make a difference’ to the lives of children. I would contend that this is not accomplished purely by the imparting of facts. The duty to promote values can be found in statute; the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 refers to a curriculum that ‘promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society’, (Chapter 40, Part 1, 2, 1) and has been implemented through a myriad of iterations (for example DfE, 2016; Peterson *et al.*, 2014).

Kristjánsson (2013, p.4) defines character education as ‘any form of moral education that foregrounds the role of virtuous character in the good life’. It must be acknowledged that some doubt whether the teaching of character is at all possible, ‘because character traits are inherited, not taught’ (Young, 2014). Whilst according to Hand (2017, p. 3) others see character education as a ‘tool of oppression’ sourcing the origins of their concerns and troubles on the condition of ‘their own souls’, away from the unjust circumstances of society. Notwithstanding these critiques, Bull and Allen (2018) document that over the last fifteen years there has been a growth of interest and investment in character education. Recent research has also demonstrated that not only does character matter in terms of what is taught, but teachers must also recognise the role that they play in the educating of character, particularly as role models (Cooke and Brown, 2014). Part Two of the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2012) outlines this personal and professional conduct. Barnes (2014, p. 63) refers to this duty as the ‘civic model’ for teaching moral education in schools, enabling

pupils to become socially responsible in developing their personal morality (Creasey, 2018). Others would contend that developing morals is the true purpose of education, as Warnock (1996, p. 53) states: ‘teaching is an essentially moral transaction’. Furthermore, Carr (2014) states of virtue ethics, as being far from a form of moral indoctrination, but the promotion of moral character dispositions as ‘a key task of schooling’, (p. 50). Thus there is a perspective that education in its widest sense is seen to develop character and morals, a much wider remit than RE alone.

Before continuing further, it must be acknowledged that character education is part of the wider concern of moral and values education. The development of character forms a particular aspect of this responsibility ‘that encourages young people to develop character qualities or virtues’ (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016, p. 18). Within the field of character education, virtues, qualities and dispositions are referred to more frequently than the term ‘values’. Virtues can be categorised further into four areas: moral, performance, civic and intellectual aspects. Moral virtues are seen to take priority over the latter three aspects (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016, p. 21). Felderhof (2014, p. 7) refers to this aspect of education as, ‘the endeavour of learning to live well and deeply’. For the purposes of this thesis I will be focusing on the development of moral virtues, although character educationalists contend all four areas of virtue are needed in order for human flourishing to take place (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016, p. 164). The syllabus is forthright in stating its aims as developing pupils both spiritually and morally (BCC, p. 3). This relates to my first research question regarding the aims of RE.

More recently, following on from the *Trojan Horse* events in Birmingham (Clarke, 2014; Kershaw, 2013), accountability for all schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum was given more prominence (Idrees, 2016). This ensued with the DfE offering renewed non-statutory advice, but under the obligations of section 78 of the Education Act (2002), to promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society as part of a balanced curriculum through the teaching of fundamental British values (DfE, 2014). This obligation is wider than the remit of RE, and encompasses: the rule of law, democracy, individual liberty and, respect and tolerance. Although Curren (2017, pp. 10 and 12) denotes that some of these values are ‘performance virtues’; enabling success and good behaviour, but not ‘true virtues’ going beyond knowledge and skills to conclude understanding and capabilities. Whilst many character educators have distanced themselves from the current focus on fundamental British values as contributing towards character education for this very reason, Curren (2017) controversially embraces this current climate proposing that these values are wider than being British ‘providing a sound basis for a cooperative society of citizens and residents who may adhere to different faiths and traditions. This should be done in a way that communicates and explores the universality of these values’ (2017, p. 31). Whilst acknowledging this debate within character education, the current discussion will not pursue the role of fundamental British values, in line with Curren’s (2017) former argument.

The first section of this chapter is concerned with setting the scene for the teaching of character. This will be the starting point for attending to my first research question as to whether Birmingham teachers’ understandings of the aims of RE align with the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus’ aims of RE. In addressing the syllabus and the aims of RE it is important

to view the context of the syllabus as this is seated in virtues and values, it is crucial that I explore the background and current teaching of character education.

However, this discussion will not be wholly focused upon the influence of RE. I will start by briefly outlining the Aristotelian background to virtues and character formation. Although it must be acknowledged that these differ from the modern focus on virtue ethics (Arthur, 2003), it will be helpful to seat the current discussion within a historical framework. This exploration will also offer a brief history of the development of character education in both the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). As part of this overview the work of Kohlberg's contribution in the USA will be discussed. This will include more recent developments in the UK through an examination of the work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

Moving on from the character education as setting the scene for the dispositional approach to teaching RE, the second section of this chapter is concerned with RE. This discussion will examine the context for the emergence of an approach to RE that incorporates teaching through dispositions. In the context of the 1944 Education Act, RE's confessional roots and emphasis on the nurturing of a pupil's own faith will be examined. Following on from this, I will also explore more academically focused pedagogies addressing non-confessional forms of RE. I also will give an overview of two pedagogies that focus more particularly on the development of character. In particular, the work of Michael Grimmitt and Clive Erricker will be discussed as focusing on the instrumental use of religious content in order to promote pupils' moral, religious and spiritual development. As part of this discussion, the

concept of pedagogy will be examined in terms of outlining a definition and examination of what this means in the context of my own research with teachers.

2.2. Character Education

Firstly, it is acknowledged that there are many different theories on the acquisition of character, from behavioural to cognitive development approaches, from theological and philosophical perspectives. As Arthur concedes, to discuss character and character education, 'is to enter a minefield of conflicting definition and ideology', (2003, p. 1). Whilst some character educationalists (Sanderse, 2012) view their role as providing an alternative to other forms of moral education such as cognitive development, character education is viewed as distinct from moral education in originating from the teachings of Aristotle (Sanderse, 2012). As such character education can be viewed as one approach within many in providing moral teaching. Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) refer to character education as 'relat[ing] to any educational activity, implicit or explicit, that encourages character qualities or virtues' (p. 18). However, within this spectrum of approaches is the recognition that not all virtues are to be seen as equally good, but cognitive development is an essential component, together with an element of action. Sanderse (2012) states that although most teachers recognise that they contribute towards character development, they are unclear what this precisely means, what is meant by virtues, which virtues are to be used, and how is this transmitted to children as part of their development. Arthur (2014) offers the following definition outlining character education, '[a]s an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit teaching that helps a student develop positive values and virtues. It is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society. Schools should aim to develop confident

and compassionate students who are effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens', (p. 2). In this definition, 'virtues' rather than 'values' are referred to, since the use of 'virtues' denotes the Aristotelian origin of the development of character. Arthur's definition can be seen to take into consideration Halstead's (1996) need for a definition of values to encompass a person's convictions and commitments to each value, otherwise any given 'value' becomes something that a person possesses rather than it being a responsibility. Whereas, Carr (2014) draws attention to the need to make a distinction between the development of character and the development of personality, the former being the role of education, the latter not. More widely, Kristjánsson (2013) draws attention to negative conceptions about character and virtue education referring to them as myths: from being unclear to being religious, from being old-fashioned to being anti-democratic. Kristjánsson concedes that there are however a number of aspects that need to be addressed from historical issues regarding past practice, to methodological and practical issues in measuring impact. Such concerns are justly made with the potential issues regarding the measuring of character being open to interpretation.

In this section I will set the scene for the teaching of character and virtues. I will examine historical and academic influences in this area, resulting in an overview of recent educational developments, academic research and practical application.

2.2.1. Aristotle

An overview of character development and virtue ethics would not be complete without reference to the work of Aristotle as providing the foundation for modern day developments. Indeed, Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) refer to Aristotle as the 'father of character education', (p. 37). Central to Aristotle's ethics are three concepts: eudaimonia (happiness

or flourishing), arete (excellence or virtue) and phronesis (practical or moral wisdom). Essential to these concepts is the question of how one can lead a good life through the cultivation of certain virtues over time.

For Aristotle the ultimate goal for all humans is 'Eudaimonia', happiness or flourishing. This is seen to be the end goal for which humans aim; and as such the central focus of life. Happiness is achieved, not through a requirement of meeting certain milestones or conditions, but the pursuit of excellence in all activities undertaken. For Aristotle, a flourishing life involves the practice of virtues through contemplation. As Sanderse (2012, p. 177) acknowledges, health, wealth and other goods may contribute to happiness, they do not 'constitute it'. Thus, for Aristotle the development of character 'is to contribute to the flourishing life which enables individuals as well as societies to flourish', (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016, p. 39).

Of paramount importance in the pursuit of happiness is 'arete', excellence or virtue. Thus a person with arete is morally effective in having acquired virtues for living a good life. For Aristotle, character is a 'state of being' that is developed through the education of that character. Importantly, knowledge is not enough, people need to be educated in how to act and be trained in the pursuit of arete, for Eudaimonia to be achieved. Although as Arthur (2014) points out, firstly, there is the need to think correctly about moral decisions, these skills need to be practiced and over time habitualised. In this manner, the deficiency or excess of appetite, passion or desire are overcome for a middle ground to be sought, and arete to be achieved. This requires practice, since the middle ground between excess and

scarcity differs according to each circumstance. For Aristotle, the continued practice of virtues is what is needed so that they are cultivated sufficiently.

The third element of Aristotle's ethical structure is 'Phronesis'. This can be seen as 'practical reasoning' or 'moral discernment'. For Aristotle, it is phronesis that supports individuals to make the right choice, enabling the right judgement to be executed in any given situation. Given that different virtues require different courses of action, which in turn may conflict with each other, phronesis is of importance to support an individual's decision making. This is particularly the case, when individuals (children) not fully practiced in exercising moral reasoning are faced with a dilemma; whether to tell the truth or to lie in a situation. The repetition of being faced with such dilemmas develops this reasoning function (Curren, 2017). As such, Van der Zee (2012, p. 32) refers to the significance of practical wisdom as part of teaching and being particularly pertinent to RE teaching. Although Aristotle acknowledged that different virtues could bring about conflict as to how a person should act in certain situations, the continued practice and habit forming of these virtues would eventually ensure the best action was taken. This enables arete (virtues) to be developed through the practice of phronesis to achieve happiness. Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016, p. 41) refer to character education through Aristotle's concepts 'as the pursuit of developing practical wisdom in children and young people'. For Aristotle, the role of parents in the cultivating of virtues was seen to be as being of vital importance, since a child's skills for thinking in a moral manner are not yet fully formed, children as such were viewed as not fully morally responsible, since they need practice in making moral decisions and time in practicing their reasoning skills. However, with the majority of a child's weekly

time spent in the care of teachers, the role of the education system in this development must be taken into consideration.

It must also be duly noted the extent to which Aristotle's concepts can be seen as the origins for many recent interpretations of character education models adapted to work within contemporary societies. Although the 2007 syllabus refers to dispositions, Felderhof (2014) has explicitly written about the importance of Aristotelian and Platonic virtues and of virtues being at the heart of education, particularly religious education (p. xii). As such it is also important to give an overview of character development in both the USA and the UK. Although practical considerations will not afford an extensive outline of these developments, I will highlight the salient concepts. These sections continue the exploration of understanding the context of Birmingham's approach and its aims focusing on the development of character, through a brief examination of character education in more recent history.

2.2.2. USA

American psychologists have played a significant role in contributing towards an understanding of character.

Within this overview the work of Kohlberg must be taken into consideration. A psychologist writing in the 1950s and responding in the light of the recent Holocaust, Kohlberg's work is based on the study of boys' responses to moral questions. His theory mirrors Piaget's cognitive stages of development in which Kohlberg encompasses six developmental stages of moral judgement, at three levels: from responding to central rules, conformity to social order; and the ability to make autonomous actions independent from authority. As Harrison,

Morris and Ryan (2016) outline, Kohlberg's theory is based on the assumption that 'as a society we need to develop autonomous individuals who can make and justify moral judgements rationally from an impartial point of view', (p. 42). However, moral decisions are rarely made in isolation from other aspects of life, nor should they be.

Kohlberg outlines different modes of moral thinking in each of the stages, asserting the core of character development is the cognitive structural dimension of a human person. Kohlberg does not outline the age or rate in which the progress through these stages should take place. However, as Arthur (2014) illustrates further, Martin Luther King, a historical figure well renowned for his moral stance, would only have reached level six according to Kohlberg's theory. Sanderse (2012) acknowledges Kohlberg was looking for an approach to moral education 'that did not treat morality as a matter of personal preferences or conventional norms, but as a matter of absolute and universal standards', (p. 41).

Kohlberg's work does not remain undisputed. His theory has been criticised on a number of levels including being widely critiqued for being solely based on an all male sample and as such, may not give a representative view. Sanderse (2012) forwards the view that Kohlberg was indeed disinterested in moral action, which he presumed would automatically result from the knowledge. However, we can all recall situations when someone has the knowledge and knows how to act, but did not follow through with their actions. Knowledge does not always translate into a moral action.

Kohlberg has also been criticised in not paying enough attention to the role of habit in the formation of character, for Kohlberg, knowledge is of paramount importance. Arthur (2014) pursues another line of criticism highlighting Kohlberg's developmental perspective as

reducing virtue ethics solely to the reasoning that motivates it. In doing so, however, Kohlberg fails to take into account flawed reasoning or self-serving moral actions. Although other psychologists have built upon this initial model, Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) remark, ‘little valid and robust empirical evidence has emerged to support it’, (p. 42).

Another contribution to character education is made by positive psychology. Positive psychology is concerned with the empirical study of what it means to live well. Within this field, the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004) is significant for their classification of positive psychological traits (p. 3). Peterson and Seligman (2004) begin with the questions: ‘How does character develop? Can it be learned? Can it be taught and who might be the most effective teacher?’ (p. 5) in order to contribute towards an understanding of ‘the why and how of good character’ (p.10) contributing towards the cultivation of increased happiness. Peterson and Seligman identify six key classes of virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence) and associated strengths (among which are: integrity, curiosity, leadership, gratitude and mercy) which when developed can contribute to the development of increased happiness. The strengths in Peterson and Seligman’s (2004, p. 89) classification are assessed against 10 criteria. Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggest that this classification and manner of measuring is the ‘social science equivalent of virtue ethics’ in using scientific methods to measure the qualities commensurate with a good life. Although as cited previously, the work of Kristjánsson (2013), has since raised concerns in regards to the measurement of character, in terms of how in character can change be measured.

Lickona (1991), another eminent scholar in the area of character education, emphasises the importance of the need for knowledge, feeling and action in the development of character. Unlike others before him, Lickona (1991) outlines the role of the teacher as pivotal (p. 71) whilst highlighting the importance of both respect and responsibility, referring to them as: ‘the “fourth and fifth R’s” that schools not only may, but must teach if they are to develop ethically literate persons who can have their place as responsible citizens of society’ (p. 43). Viewing the respect and responsibility as connected, Lickona (1991) states, ‘if we value them, [other people] we feel a measure of responsibility for their welfare’ (p. 44). In order to develop good character, Lickona stresses the interrelated nature of moral knowledge and moral feeling, leading students to be more likely to act morally in forming good habits. Although Lickona (1991) is practical in outlook and offers guidance and exemplars in how to educate in these aspects the criticisms levelled by Bull and Allen (2018) in respect of character educators in receipt of funding from the Templeton Foundation, should also be duly noted in reference to Lickona’s work.

More widely, character development in the USA throughout the 1980s was seen as a social movement aimed at improving behaviour in schools. However, as Arthur (2003) accounts there was no unity of understanding due to the rapid growth of the movement. Ryan and Bohlin (1991) write similarly, confirming the rise in interest of moral and values education responding to the ‘frightening statistics’ of homicides, suicide and teenage pregnancies (p. xiii). This growth also coincided with a change among young Americans expressing a concern for character representing ‘a search for personal qualities that are more stable and enduring than merely projecting a positive attitude or learning to be more open with one’s feelings’, (p. xiii). Ryan and Bohlin (1999) observe that by 1998 there had been six White

House congressional conferences on character education, and, that character has been a prominent theme in the President's State of the Union addresses. Echoing this interest, two major research and development centres were established in Boston and Missouri to serve the renewed interest in practical morality. This has resulted in the development of educational approaches, such as the 'Knowledge is Power Programme' (KIPPs), aiming to develop character alongside attainment in order to enable students to succeed. However, Curren (2017, p. 17) comments on how such programmes claim that 'grit' provides an actionable focus for character education without a proven track record. Other work is also becoming more action focused as Arthur (2003) illustrates, Ryan and Lickona have identified three aspects of character development: knowing, affective and action. The third aspect, action, depends on the 'will' of the person. Similarly, Ryan and Bohlin (1999) refer to good character as being 'knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good', (p. 5). Thus increasingly with the work of modern day character educators the emphasis is on action; knowledge and feeling alone cannot develop a holistic approach. This echoes the sentiments of Aristotle in the practise of virtues in order to truly flourish.

2.2.3. UK

More recent developments in the UK owe much to the influence of work in the USA. However, in terms of the historic teaching of values and character, Halstead (1996) outlines the development of teaching character in Europe through a methodology more closely associated with the teaching of religion. Arthur (2003) concurs with this perspective charting British development in the Victorian era as being biblically based, through to the formation of the Moral Instruction League, opposed to religious lessons in school. These advancements consequently resulted in certain Local Education Authorities developing their

own instruction of character programmes. In 1944, with the introduction of the Education Act, there was a definite focus on moral development placed in Statute. Throughout this time there were also agencies outside of the education system working to develop children's character: the work of the Boys' and Girls' Brigade and the Scout and Girl Guide movements. Following on from this in 1969 the Plowden report made the connection between practising faith and the love of God, with the practise of virtues. Thus in recent history, the practise of faith and virtues have been intrinsically connected.

Over the last thirty years, with the introduction of the 1988 ERA, the subject of citizenship, the Every Child Matters agenda (Department for Children, Schools and Families, [DfCSF], 2003) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme (DfE, 2005) there has been a renewed focus and conduits for the development of character within the curriculum. Individual school leaders have developed their own programmes (Farrer, 2000) and governments have placed character education at the centre of supporting children to achieve their full potential (DfE, www.iwill.org.uk/pledge/departments-education/, 2014). As part of an overview of work within the UK, it would be remiss not to include that work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues as a more recent important innovative centre for research, based in Birmingham.

The Jubilee Centre focuses on character, virtues and values in 'the interest of human flourishing' (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk). The goals of the Centre are further outlined as: '[w]e believe that character is constituted by the virtues, such as courage, justice, honesty, compassion, self-discipline, gratitude, generosity and humility. These virtues: 1. are critical to individual excellence; 2. contribute to societal flourishing; 3. can be exercised within all

human contexts; 4. are educable', (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk). The work of the Centre is therefore to be seen within a character education approach to the teaching of virtues.

In order to promote this development, the Centre is involved in a wide-ranging portfolio of strategies (Lee, 2016). As well as the development of projects, the Jubilee Centre has also produced an extensive collection of resources for teachers and other stakeholders in schools and educational settings. Among these resources 'The Knightly Virtues' includes planning for teachers and resources for pupils. The materials are based around a series of 'stories' including Beowulf, Merchant of Venice, Joan of Arc and Rosa Parks. Although the Centre for Character and Virtues does not focus on the delivery of religious character, deriving its origins from virtue ethics philosophy, the resources do refer to religious people. However, the faith element of their character is not the reason for their inclusion (Harrison, 2016, p. 30). Whereas the focus of Rosa Parks in a RE lesson would be the origins of her courage in living with integrity in accordance with her Christian beliefs, the focus of Rosa Parks in 'Knightly Virtues' is, '[t]o understand what the virtues of justice and courage mean in the story of Rosa Parks', so that pupils can by outcome 'identify and describe the virtues of justice and courage'. It must be questioned whether it is appropriate to refer to a person's actions detached from their motives and reasons for acting in accordance with their beliefs. Nevertheless, like the dispositional approach, there is a transformative process implied: '[w]e aim to enable British people to explore their character and virtues and, if and where required, transform them.' (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk). Although the 2007 syllabus refers to 'dispositions', Felderhof's (2014) 'Teaching Virtue' explicitly refers to the teaching of 'virtues' and seats their origins in Platonic and Socratic discourse. Furthermore this leads Felderhof to link the terminology, '[v]irtues, values, dispositions and ethics lie implicitly at

the heart of education’ (p. xii) a statement many virtue ethicists would not critique, however Felderhof continues, ‘religious education brings their importance into focus and religious life demands their practice, to shun shallowness and hypocrisy, cultivate an abundance of love, unflinching trust, selfless sacrifice and an incessant spirit of optimism’. (p. xii). Thus in terms of origin and terminology virtue ethics could be seem to connect the work of Felderhof (as drafting secretary of the 2007 syllabus) and the work of the Jubilee Centre.

The extensive work of the Jubilee Centre is not without criticism. Through conducting network ethnography, Bull and Allen (2018) were able to chart the financial and ideological influence of the philanthropic John Templeton Foundation on character education in the UK. Their research contributes to present critiques of character education, which delineate a conservative Christian agenda and the manipulation of individuals by focusing on their behaviour as the solution to societal concerns, whilst raising a new critique in regard to democracy; how policy on character education is formed, by whom and to what end. Bull and Allen (2018) identify the positive Psychology Centre in the USA and the Jubilee Centre in Birmingham as being two of the main recipients of funding from the Templeton Foundation, in respect of the Jubilee Centre, over 98% of its grant income. Bull and Allen (2018, p.10) argue that this funding has enabled the Jubilee Centre to legitimise character education and to gain considerable influence on government policy making through its global connections and research partnerships. One such relationship is with Thomas Lickona who was discussed in the previous section. As a result of their research, Bull and Allen (2018) conclude that ‘character education is positioned as the answer over and above ameliorating inequality and poverty’ (pp. 22-23) and as such ‘has come into being as thinkable and ‘common sense’ policy agenda’ (p. 24). Furthermore, that this area of

character education, research, policy and provision is informed by a small group of individuals, as such ‘is a cause for concern’ (p. 24). The majority of Bull and Allen’s (2018) critique in regard of the role, purpose and funding of the Jubilee Centre, can be directed to character education in general. The controversial nature of this work must not be underestimated. As Bull and Allen (2018) have demonstrated, careful consideration must always be given to the intentions and purpose of development within this area.

More generally, Halstead (1996) also raises a valid concern reminding those involved in character education of the debate as to whether schools should instil values in pupils or whether pupils should be supported to explore their own values. Regardless of these criticisms, the Jubilee Centre and the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus approach have been drawn together in discussion in regard to promoting the development of character. A recent dialogue as part of the APPG was convened to discuss: ‘[c]ombating extremism, and promoting community cohesion and character development: the contribution of Religious Education to schools’ (Bruce, 2016). This event is one of many examples where multidisciplinary fields are given a platform to discuss their impact in relation to character development.

In summary, this section has given a general overview of the development of character education. It started with an outline of virtue ethics through examining the work of Aristotle. The discussion then progressed chronologically to outline the historical and current contributions through the work and research in the USA and UK. In particular, the work of Kohlberg, Peterson and Seligman, and Lickona highlighted American contributions. Whilst in the UK the work of the Jubilee Centre in Birmingham was summarised. Each of these

contributions emphasised their different approaches to the teaching of character and what it means to live well.

In the next section I will focus on how RE has contributed towards the personal development of pupils. This discussion will examine the historical confessional roots of this aspect whilst also exploring approaches that concentrate on personal and SMSC development and the contribution that this makes to pupils' characters.

2.3. Character and RE

2.3.1. Introduction

In order to establish a context for a dispositional approach, I will now examine approaches in RE that focus more directly on the development of pupils. Although this differs from character education and virtue ethics per se, these approaches use religious content as the vehicle through which pupils learn about faiths whilst also focusing on personal character development. This discussion will not give an historical overview of pedagogies in RE, however, this exploration will take into account the importance of RE's origins and confessional roots which were nurturing in the Christian values and faith. Indeed Barnes argues that it was this exact uprooting of RE's moral foundation which has led to the subject's current confusion in its purpose (Barnes, 2015).

In particular, this section will outline the respective work of Michael Grimmitt and Clive Erricker in focusing on the contribution that RE makes to pupils' development. In connection with my first research question, and in addition to character education, this section will also set the context for the development of the dispositional approach of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

Independently of the later discussion, I also want to explore the meaning of ‘pedagogy’ and how this differs from ‘aim’ and ‘method’. This is pertinent to my research in asking teachers about the aims that they think are important for RE and the methods they use. Indeed Grimmitt (1987, p. 178) identifies educational aims and objectives, choice of methods and choice of content as being key judgements teachers make prior to seeking to engage pupils.

2.3.2. Confessional Roots

Within the next discussion I will explore RE when it was confessional at heart. By ‘confessional’ I refer to RE which was instructive of a pupil’s own religion, with nurture of this ‘true’ faith as its main intention. The term ‘confessional’ has been contested within RE circles pertaining to it being a source of indoctrination and as being inappropriate in a pluralist society. As Watson (2012) states ‘teaching any faith as true to a non-voluntary, immature and therefore vulnerable audience from diverse backgrounds can attract censure as attempted proselytising’ (p. 14; Barnes, 2012b; Chater 2013a). However, I will argue that at this stage there were clear aims in terms of how RE contributed towards the development of pupils’ character and morality.

In setting the scene, it is of interest to note the derivation of the terminology ‘Religious Instruction’ and ‘Religious Education’. The term ‘RE’, in 1944 referred to religious instruction work in class and Collective Worship (Hull, 1989, p. 2, and Copley, 2008, p. 30), this was delivered in partnership between religious groups (Christian) and the State (Dinham and Jackson, 2012). In terms of the subject’s name at this time, the term ‘instruction’ can be seen to denote a more specific set of aims and can be seen as being more direct than the term ‘education’. As Felderhof (2005a) alludes, ‘the use of the term [Religious Instruction] is

pertinent since it suggests a showing of how to do something', and as a result of instruction, 'one may learn how the religious life is lived and what it entails', (p. 1). The notion of religiosity being connected with the teaching of religious instruction is further conveyed by Felderhof (2005a) when writing that '[t]here is a suggestion in the term 'instruction' that the instructor is him/herself an active practitioner', [...], '[i]nstruction presupposes practice and doing' (p. 3). At this time religious instruction on the whole, was delivered to Christian children by a practicing Christian teacher. It was seen as nurturing the pupils' own religious standpoint, character and a form of moral education. As with the work of the Victorian character educators, the origins are biblically based.

Hand (2004) reiterates this perspective stating the legislative justification for the introduction of the teaching of religious instruction as developed from the 1938 Spens report and the 1943 White Paper, both of which call for a more 'pronounced role for RE on the basis of its power to instil moral virtue' with an emphasis on reviving spiritual and personal values (Hand, 2004, p. 153). As Hand (2004) continues '[f]rom the beginning, then, compulsory RE was explicitly justified in terms of its contribution to pupils' moral development', this was to be developed through inducting pupils into Christian belief and practice and consequently resulting in the adherence of Christian moral principles (p. 153; Parsons, 1993). As such RE was intrinsically linked with the formation of morals and the teaching of moral education. There was an explicit aim of nurturing children in faith so that they would be able to extol Christian moral principles. Clarke and Woodhead (2015; Woodhead and Clarke, 2016) also refer to how this was closely affiliated with religious practice at the time, the purpose of which to instruct from a faith standpoint, to develop pupils' character in their faith. As such, at this time there were clear and concise moral aims

for the teaching of 'RE'. Although Hand (2004, p. 154) argues that at the time of the introduction of this Act Britain was a Christian country only in the 'residual sense'. Notwithstanding the decline in Christian practice since the introduction of the Act and, this time far from being a 'golden age' of Christian practice, instruction remained the prevailing aim of RE and continued at its core until the late 1960s. In 1988 the instructional language was replaced, and the subject became RE. With the confessional aspect removed, and more emphasis placed on the academic nature of the subject, the developmental aspect was somewhat lost.

Although this aim did prevail, a change was seen with the publication of Loukes' 'Teenage Religion' in 1961. Through Loukes' (1961) work there was a focus on the 'life world' of the pupil, although still affirming the development of Christian morals through the nurture of Christian faith. As Loukes (1961) endorses when referring to the school leaver: 'Christianity makes sense to him, and helps him to make sense of his own human condition', (p. 9), the study of RE was made relevant to pupils' lives. As such there can be seen to be a change in focus from the culmination of RE being the nurture of Christian faith and practices, to the pupil being able to make sense of their own condition within the context of their faith. However, this was still within the context of developing pupils' characters in supporting their understanding in relation to their own faith. In other European countries similar changes have also occurred, as Kenngott (2017) in Germany and Skeie (2017) in Norway independently outline.

Although White (2004) argues that the subject did not progress sufficiently and, as such the justification to retain RE as a separate subject is deficient. The repercussions from this era

are still present in today's RE. This can be seen in the work of Holt (2015) outlining amongst many, two aims for teaching RE today: firstly, RE is engaged in teaching children about morals, and secondly, RE is concerned with supporting children to be true to their own religion and culture. Thus it is accepted that although RE involves the teaching of morality, this is no longer centred on the acquisition of Christian moral codes, as the pupil is less likely to be Christian (Franken and Loobuyuck, 2017). As such the responsibility of the RE teacher today is to encourage the development of the pupil's own sense of morality and the teaching of what Holt refers to as 'accepted school morality'. Interestingly, Holt (2015, p. 8) also cautions, if teachers feel it is not their place to teach morality then they are in the wrong profession. Hand (2018) also explores the case of educating pupils about morality, rather than in it, as a compelling case for non-confessional RE. Thus the teaching of morality is still seen to be a fundamental part of a teacher's intention when teaching RE, but not the sole focus of it.

2.3.3. Emergence of non-confessional RE

Through the influence of Smart (Thompson, 2004), the ensuing intervening years between 1944 and 1988, saw RE becoming more academically focused. Barnes (2014) comments that at the time RE became separated from its confessional past it 'disassociated itself from the role of moral education' (p. 54). Consequently as Barnes (2014) maintains with a new non-confessional identity emanated an ambiguity in regard to RE's relationship with moral education. As Barnes (2014) continues RE was relieved from the burden of moral education, 'however whilst excluding the consideration of moral issues and the moral content of religion lead to the disinterest of pupils' (p. 62). Barnes (2014) still contends that this is a contradiction lying at the heart of British RE, where the subject 'purports to contribute to the

moral aims of RE while overlooking the moral content of teachings and different religions’ (p. 62). This period saw the development of a vast range of differing pedagogies and approaches to the teaching Religious Education, each with their own emphasis on what should be the intention and aim of the subject. Although the pedagogies at this time are distanced from a confessional approach, and many are not solely focused on the development of morals or character, the need for pedagogies to take into account the second attainment target ‘learning from religion’, ensures that some element of pupil development is a desired outcome. It is not the purpose of the next section to outline a list of pedagogies developed at this time. However I will examine an understanding of the main objectives of RE as presented in some pedagogies. Where I am able an examination between primary and secondary approaches in the teaching of these pedagogies will also be discussed.

In one of the most recent pedagogical developments, Teece (2010) refines the concept of ‘religion as *skilful means*’ and defines; religious education as ‘*upayic*’. As part of this model, Teece (2010) develops the notion of John Hick’s use of the Buddhist idea of *skilful means*; ‘the religions, understood as vehicles of human transformation, can operate within the teaching and learning process as *skilful means* by which the students develop a wider and deeper understanding of what it means to be human’, (Teece, 2010, p. 198). This approach centres on the human development of students but this takes place not as a result of contact with religious content rather through the ‘vehicle’ of religion. Although Teece’s (2010) pedagogy does not specify any particular variation in approach for primary or secondary teachers, Teece’s (2001) ‘A Primary teacher’s guide to RE and Collective Worship’ concedes that primary teachers may need more support with subject knowledge.

Wright's (2000; 2010) focus on religious literacy and critical development through Religious Education centres on ultimate truth and truthful living; the result of which may indeed be the development of pupils' character, but the approach is not centred on this outcome. Likewise, the work of Hay and Nye (2006), and, latterly Phillips (www.theatreoflearning.org/about), focus on a more experiential approach to Religious Education. This model encourages pupils to be aware of their experience as being seated in universal human awareness and relational conscious, and as such enables pupils to be open to the experience of others. This may lead pupils to be empathetic and to develop their morality in response to those of others; but it is not the sole intention of this approach. Similarly, Cooling writing from a perspective that examines the concepts lying at the heart of Christianity, states; 'religious content in R.E. should be taught in such a way that it makes a contribution to the pupils' own personal development irrespective of whether or not the pupils accept the particular faith in question', (Cooling, 2000, p. 162). However, Cooling is primarily concerned with the distortion of Christian truth claims and seeks to readdress this concern in teaching through a model that examines biblical texts and their significance for Christians. Nevertheless, through this approach there is an emphasis on the importance of learning from this material and the to the pupils' own development. The major objective of this project was to make materials accessible to the 'non-specialist classroom teacher, be themselves Christian or not' (Cooling, 2000, p. 113). As such one could conclude that this would be directed to primary school teachers through the termly magazine outlining resources for the approach, however secondary school teachers were also supported in the approach by the provision of textbooks.

Another significant pedagogical contribution was made in response to dissatisfaction as to how RE was being presented to younger children. Under the joint directorship of Hull and Grimmer the team framed the purpose of RE as to ‘make a contribution to the human and educational development of the child’, (Hull, 2000, p. 114). As such the project became known as ‘Religion in the Service of the Child’. As part of the project team, Grove reflects, ‘the question was never about what to teach but always about what might meet children’s developmental needs’ (2012, p. 18). The instrumental use of the religious material for pupil development was paramount to this approach. This pedagogy involved selecting a religious item (numen), for example: a picture, artefact or story (Grimmer, Grove, Hull, and Spencer, 1991, p. 8). The team developed a four-stage process for each lesson moving from engagement and exploration, to contextualisation and reflection. Teachers were asked to consider what was the gift to the child conveyed through the item. As Hull explains further, ‘[a] gift was conceived of as an *expectation*, a possible benefit which might derive from encounter with this material,’ (2000, p. 117). Hull (2000) continues that such gifts could be gained by both secular and religious pupils. For example in the case of identity and belonging; Muslim children might state they belonged to Allah, whereas secular children might say that they belonged to their families or to their country (Hull, 2000, p. 119). The personal development of pupils is explicit within this approach. Grove can be seen as supporting this comment when stating; ‘it is about enhancing an awareness of self and identity, of others and their place in the world; increasing the capacity for people to make meaning in their lives in the broadest sense’. [...] ‘All this is the stuff of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’, (2012, p. 18).

Also within this period, an ethnographic or interpretative approach, as exemplified in the work of Jackson (1997) was developed promoting pupils using material from faith traditions as a stimulus to reflect on their own experiences. In this manner pupils' concerns and development stem from the engagement with religious material. Although this approach connects the life worlds of pupils with those of believers, it does not specifically examine this connection with the aim of developing pupils' moral awareness. However what are helpful are Jackson's concepts of reflexivity and edification which enable pupils to reflect on religious lives studied. This has implications in terms of pedagogy in allowing for reflection and an interactive relationship between the pupils' knowledge and experiences and that of the believer (Jackson, 2000, p. 135). However Holt (2015, p. 31) refers to the specialist skills of a professional in order to enable this process. Jackson (2000) outlines how this approach varies between Key Stages; from Key Stage One where the material relates to a single child from a number of religions enabling pupils to relate to concepts to these of the religious characters, through to Key Stage Three enabling pupils to engage with the comments and reflections of the religious young people presented through 'building bridges' (pp. 138-141).

Another approach was developed by the Westhill RE Centre. 'This model has the genesis in the work done in the Regional RE Centre (Midlands) by Garth Read and Michael Grimmitt in 1975' (Read *et al*, 1992, p. vi), but was further developed by Read, Rudge, Howarth and Teece, becoming known as the Westhill Project 5-16 (Read *et al*, 1992). The main purpose of the project was to produce effective classroom resources 'linked directly to a conceptual grasp of the subject and a methodology for translating it into a programme of planning to teaching the subject' (Rudge, 2000, p. 89). The Westhill Project saw the aim of RE 'to help

children mature in relation to their own patterns of belief and behaviour through exploring religious beliefs and practices and related to human experiences' (Read *et al*, 1992, p. 2). Explicit within this aim is a clear focus on pupils' personal development. As such Rudge comments on the project as 'emphasis[ing] the subject's potential impact upon the pupils' own lives, rather than seeing them as simply recipients of a body of knowledge', (Rudge, 2000, p. 93). The project emphasised content being drawn from three areas: traditional belief systems, shared human experience and individual patterns of belief. In this manner pupils' own 'individual patterns and belief' were made relevant and seen as part of the wider 'shared human experience' giving pupils the opportunity to raise questions about the human condition. These concerns were in turn related to the exemplars provided by the content from 'traditional belief systems'. This approach therefore uses religious material to personally develop pupils. This project was exemplified through a series of materials from lower primary to upper secondary. Story is used particularly in lower Key Stages to enable younger pupils 'to explore beliefs and values by observing the way people behave' (Read *et al*, 1992, p. 4). Pupils begin with exploring their own experience in relation to key topics of shared human experience (life themes). Whilst at secondary level, pupils explore beliefs that underlie religious practice and begin to develop a framework for the understanding of particular religions whilst beginning to appraise the information they have been studying (systems approach, [Rudge, 2000, p. 89]).

The discussion will now turn to address the work of Michael Grimmitt (1987; 1991) and Clive Erricker (Clive Erricker *et al*, 1997; 2011). I contend that these are two approaches devised to centre on pupils' personal development. The examination of these approaches is important for understanding Felderhof's (2014) focus on the development of character in the

2007 syllabus and in answering my first research question, in terms of whether the syllabus' aims align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE. Although Felderhof's stance is developed more in Chapter 3, Grimmitt and Erricker's approaches provide a context for other pedagogies that have centred on pupil's personal development.

2.3.4. Revival of interest in human development and values

This discussion will give an overview of approaches that I contend are the closest pedagogies to focus on the development of character, the human development model expounded by Michael Grimmitt and the narrative pedagogy developed by Clive Erricker *et al.* (1997).

Grimmitt (1991, p. 78) acknowledges the instrumental use of religions in his approach 'as a means of bringing about changes in the consciousness of pupils', recognising that the beliefs and values from religion could 'shape human beings and human development' (2008, p. 6). Through this approach, Grimmitt's intention is to make the life of the religious believer relevant to pupils, through shared human values and experiences (as exemplified in the Westhill Project, Read *et al.* 1992, Rudge, 2000). Grimmitt (1987) refers to this model as: 'an exploratory study of the contribution RE can make to pupils' learning, especially to their personal, social and moral development', (p. 9). At the heart of this exploration is a renewed focus on an overlooked question which Grimmitt (1987) suggests teachers do not even consider, 'why should I teach it?' Grimmitt (1987) asserts that questions such as: '1. What knowledge is worthwhile and how is it selected, transmitted and acquired? 2. What values are important and how are they selected, transmitted and acquired? 3. What understanding of childhood and how children learn should inform educational aims and practices?' (p. 16) should shape and drive the development of curriculum. In asking these questions, Grimmitt

(1991, p. 77) is putting foremost the concern as to how the religious material will be conveyed to pupils, which values and how they will be used to support the development of pupils in reflecting, evaluating and interpreting for themselves. Through this encounter pupils, whether religious or not, are supported to construct meaning for themselves. This is what I contend that the dispositions do within the 2007 syllabus; the dispositions as values shared by both the religious believer and the pupil enable a shared arena and a place of commonality so that the pupil is able to learn about and from.

Before addressing the concerns of RE, Grimmitt (1987) places RE and human development within a wider context of what it means to be human: the role of values within education and religion, the importance of relating this to the experiences and the context of adolescents: '[m]y interest in doing this arises from my view that any educational rationale for RE that purports to show that the study of religions can contribute to pupils' personal development should be informed by an understanding of those processes by which human beings come to hold beliefs and values and should address itself to those everyday realities which constitute the pupils' 'life-world', (p. 109). This could be seen as being akin to Aristotle's concept of Phronesis; moral discernment, a process whereby individuals wrestle with situations and prior experience in order to see what is applicable to their own lives in order to develop.

Grimmitt (1987, p. 161) contends that this capacity for self-awareness and being 'critically conscious of the beliefs and values that have shaped us' is what is so essential for the development of moral, religious and spiritual awareness. This is enabled by relating to and being critically aware of religious beliefs and values and the impact that they have on one's life. This will consequently become internalised within one's experience through the

combination of firstly, how we understand what it means to be human and secondly, through religion, we begin to understand what beliefs mean to others. In this manner pupils become increasingly aware through this critical dialogue of how this could have an impact on and be relevant to their lives; RE is seen to be contributing to what it means to be human. In this way, Grimmitt's (1987) model enables pupils to reflect on the religious material and in doing so enables pupils to critically appraise their own beliefs and so develop as a consequence (p. 141 and p. 215). Although with this process there is an additional layer to that of character education, in that the instrumental aspect of the religious materials is being digested, there are elements of moral discernment taking place through pupils' evaluation of the content they are encountering. Grimmitt (1987) also acknowledges that this can still take place if the young person is not a member of a religious tradition, since they will still have thoughts and values, a way of looking at the world (p. 193). As such through the shared human experience of the religious traditions and pupils' life worlds enable the pupil to make links with the religious, reflect and re-evaluate and in doing so develop morally, religiously and spiritually (1987, p. 141 and 165). Whilst engaging in this process young people are becoming aware of 'meaning-making' (1987, p. 165) further allowing for the exploration and discussion of issues of belief and value that impact on their lives. In terms of this development Grimmitt (1987) writes: '[t]he process of becoming 'self-aware' involves our becoming conscious of those beliefs and values which have shaped us as a person, and more particularly, have formed our identity' (p. 157).

Furthering this discussion Grimmitt (1987) comments 'implicit in each religion's understanding of the religious or spiritual quest is its understanding of the meaning and end of personal development, and of the different stages of self-awareness which contribute to it'

(p. 160) and in using religion's understanding of this quest enable pupils to develop personally. Although this imparting of values and the development of character is not as forthright as many character education programmes that have been referred to earlier in this chapter, in that the identification of values or character virtues are not clearly specified, the essence of personal development is evident in Grimmitt's discourse. Whereas Felderhof's vision of RE as exemplified in the 2007 syllabus, is more directed than that of Grimmitt's human development model, Grimmitt in personal correspondence with Teece (2008) recognises the furtherance of his original approach when stating 'the first recent syllabus to go back along the road I set out prior to 1998 and to use the religions to address personal, moral and spiritual development! I'm pleased about that!' (p. 11). Another religious educationalist to write in a similar manner is Clive Erricker.

Writing from what has since been termed a 'narrative pedagogy', Erricker *et al.* (1997) outline a concern that the curriculum has become over reliant on content. If this is the case, Erricker *et al.* (1997, p. 162) argue, there is the danger that it becomes teaching about 'religion', rather than 'engaging the heart of religion'. This concept of engaging with the heart of religion is very similar to Felderhof's (2014) concept of RE attending to the 'essence of religious life' (p. 13), which is at the centre of the dispositional approach. This concept will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3. Through engaging with the 'heart of religion', Erricker explores how common experiences with the life worlds of the believer and the pupil can be explored resulting in pupil development. Erricker *et al.* (2011) acknowledge that RE has always been interested with making religious material relevant to pupils' interest and has often done so by 'seeking to find some non-religious interest that will appeal to pupils that in some way can be related to what religious people do' (pp. 102-

103). The latter point echoes the premise of my thesis and two of my research questions in exploring engagement and whether the 2007 approach engages pupils of no faith. For Erricker *et al.* (2011), RE enables pupils to make sense of the world and their place in it. RE therefore needs to be relational (p. 57). In this manner pupils learn not only mere facts and content, but rather engage with the fundamentals of faith at a much deeper level in terms of what it is to be human and in supporting pupils' identity formation (p. 75). Erricker *et al.*'s (2011) model employs a conceptual enquiry approach in order for this to take place through building on prior experience and creating challenge (p. 105). At Key Stage One this approach enables pupils to grasp the 'key concept in focus' (p. 107) and explores concepts that are common to the experience of others (for example belonging). In upper Key Stage Two the complexity is increased with a higher level concept (for example the Muslim concept of Ummah, [p. 109]). In 2010 Erricker expressed this progression pictorially as a helter skelter, with the three concept types being addressed in increasing complexity as the Key Stages increased. This spiral device is another point of congruence between Erricker's pedagogy and that of the 2007 syllabus with the dispositions being revisited during each phase of a pupil's education. In Erricker's (2010) model at Key Stage Three, enquiry begins by using skills such as application and communication but it is expected through progression that contextualising and evaluating will be used to greater complexity (p. 87). Accordingly, Erricker *et al.* (2011), like Grimmer, argue for the instrumental use of religious content in order for this interaction to take place. Furthering this view Erricker *et al.* (2011) warn:

[...] at our peril, we ignore ways in which religions have approached the idea of values education. Not because we leave children without an understanding of religion, which in itself would be a lack considering the influence of religion in our world, but because our children would lack an ability to reflect on values and their world-view, religious or not. (p. 19).

It is evident from this view that Erricker sees the importance of using religious understanding for the purpose of supporting the development of pupils. Erricker (2010) further endorses this viewpoint when writing, ‘the original rationale for religious education as a form of faith nurture is still with us but simply broadened to a form of nurture in values based on religious belief’ (p. 176). Thus although the values are broadened in order to incorporate a pupil of any faith and none, the educational aspect of developing pupils is still paramount.

Erricker (1997) also maintains that the curriculum must contribute to ‘affirming a sense of being’ thus supporting a ‘more interactional perspective’ and seeing pupils as developmental partners in their learning. Through this approach Erricker *et al.* (2011) contend that effective learning takes place when pupils are engaged and reflect on their experiences. Further endorsing this view, C. Erricker and J. Erricker’s (1997; 2000) ‘Children and Worldviews Project’ concludes that RE has been too content led and has given insufficient time for children and young people’s experiences. Thus they advocate an enquiry-based approach drawing on children’s experiences to support their understanding; engaging in an understanding of their own narrative and those of others in order to make sense of the world and to develop ‘pupils’ capacities and skills’ (*et al.* 2011, pp. 57-58). This approach is evidenced in Erricker’s (2004) work in the ‘Living Difference’ syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton Councils in which the opening statement states:

to support students in developing their own coherent patterns of values and principles to support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

(Erricker, 2010, p. 81)

Thus for Erricker, the experience of the pupil when encountering the faith material is key to enabling their development. However, this pedagogy is not solely focused on ‘character education’ per se, but the wider development of pupils’ morals and values. What is common with character education is the practical application of what is learned.

Within the work of Grimmitt and Erricker there is a wider commitment to the development of pupils as human beings, rather than an agreed set of morals, character traits or dispositions. Nevertheless, these two approaches demonstrate a strand within RE which does not deviate from the intentions of the 1944 and 1988 Acts in enabling the development of pupils. As Grimmitt (2000) states:

The ability of RE to continue to address and meet the changing needs of children and young people and to make a significant contribution to their development as persons depends on both teachers and researchers being open to exploring new options and possibilities for the subject, however challenging they may be.

(p. 49)

At the heart of this discussion is whether as a consequence of RE becoming less confessional and more academic, the moral aspect of the subject has been lost. Barnes (2014) can be seen to be recommending a new way forward when endorsing the 2007 syllabus as an approach moving forward emphasising ‘the dispositions herald[ing] a move away from the narrow focus upon intellectual development in British RE to a wider focus on developing the whole person – intellectual, emotions and attitudes’ (p. 67).

2.3.5. What is pedagogy?

In isolation from the discussion on character but within the context of my research, it is also of importance to examine what is meant by the term pedagogy. The context of this exploration is of importance in answering my second research question ascertaining whether the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE. Within the wider understanding of this question I explored whether a particular pedagogy could have an impact on pupils' engagement in the classroom. As such it is firstly of importance to understanding what is meant by the term 'pedagogy' and how this differs from method or aim in RE.

The REC Review (2012b) reports expert witnesses' concern that too much emphasis has been placed on 'curriculum' at the expense of 'pedagogy'. Baumfield (2012) concurs when writing, after a period of relative neglect, pedagogy is becoming the focus of attention. At the heart of this discussion relative to my research, is the question does the teacher's aim for the subject shape their decision in terms of the methods they use; does the content to be taught provide a starting point; does the pedagogical stance of an approach guide teachers in terms of the methods they adopt? In addition and importantly for my research, what type of engagement occurs as a consequence? As Grimmitt (2000) states: '[a]t the heart of a pedagogy of RE, however, lies an intention to promote a particular kind (or several different kinds) of interaction between the pupils and the religious content which they are studying', (p. 17). Chater (2013a) can be seen to echo Grimmitt's point about the holistic nature of pedagogy, when writing that a well constructed pedagogy brings together a right amount of skills and content, it is important to note the delivery of which as Homan (2012, p. 192)

contends is partly constrained by the ‘trained habit of the teacher’. The findings of my research in regard to this discussion are explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Continuing the discussion on the meaning of the term pedagogy, Chater (2013a) states: ‘[p]edagogy is taken to mean much more than method: it is a complex set of cultural forces acting on the teacher’ (p. 48). As Chater reveals, even though the pedagogical structure may be offered through the scheme or approach in a syllabus, there is so much more that is subjective and open to the interpretation of the individual teacher and their standpoint. Similarly, Grimmitt (2010b) refers to ‘pedagogy’ as bringing theory and practice into a coherent whole, explaining that although methods can exist independently of pedagogy, different pedagogies can draw on the ‘common pool of methods’ whilst retaining their unique character. Chater and Erricker (2013a) take this further, offering pedagogy as deriving from one’s existential stance: ‘the way in which we conceive of our role in relation to the overall development of young people whom we are responsible for educating’ (p. 108). Aldridge (2012) suggests that as ‘experts in the field’ teachers are in the best position to judge what works, but also emphasises importantly, ‘[w]hat works cannot be separated from the question of ‘to what end’?’ (p. 197). This is a much more multifaceted understanding of ‘pedagogy’, in that the methods chosen to deliver the subject are connected to the end aim of the subject, pedagogy is related to the intention for teaching, the aim of activity or reason why a certain method is chosen instead of another.

It is within this context that one pedagogy advocating the development of pupils through actively cultivating dispositions has emerged. The discussion will now turn to the focus on the pedagogical approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus and an examination of

its distinctive strategy and principles. The next chapter will explore an overview and evaluation of RE in Birmingham since 1975 through to the 2007 syllabus.

3. THE BIRMINGHAM PICTURE

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the Birmingham contribution to RE. It will set the current Agreed Syllabus (2007) in the historical context of other RE syllabuses agreed by the City Council. I will also explore the current syllabus in the light of national changes within RE. Each Local Authority (LA) has the duty to convene an ASC every five years in order to agree what will be taught in RE in that locality (Schools Standards and Framework Act, 1998, also reiterated in DfCSF publication: RE in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance, 2010). Although recent national changes can be seen to have had an indirect impact in weakening RE's infrastructure (Chater, 2016), the local duty is still required (Broadbent, 2010), although Lawton (2018, p. 28) refers to local determination as 'a wonderful thing', Clarke (2018) states that it should be celebrated whilst Parker and Freathy (2011, p. 249) refer to the process as a 'peculiarity'. However, whilst many academies still choose to follow the locally agreed syllabus, the role of LAs in setting up ASCs is under threat (Chater, 2018, p. 28; Bennett, 2016). Hunt (2017) writes that in reviewing their agreed syllabuses, LAs are still delivering one of their core functions, noting between 2011-2016, 151 agreed syllabuses were formally reviewed. (152 LAs have the responsibility to provide an agreed syllabus; The Woolf Institute, 2015).

It can be said that Birmingham has courted controversy with its previous syllabuses for RE. Notably the 1975 syllabus was viewed as ground breaking and the first to embrace the teaching of other faiths and non-religious world-views (Hull, 1984, p. 29). The most recent agreed syllabus for RE has been stated as being 'equally influential in effecting another 'breakthrough in statutory religious education', and is seen as 'challenging a number of

‘sacred shibboleths’ of current theory and practice’, (Barnes, 2008, p. 75 and p. 82) but has encountered criticism due to its emphasis on personal development.

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the 1975 and the 1995 syllabuses. Although an ASC must be convened every five years, the previous syllabus can be recommended again, this was the case for both the 1975 and 1995 syllabuses, negating the need for the adoption of a new syllabus in the intervening years.

The 1975 syllabus was seen a ground breaking in many ways, but also encountered much criticism and consternation during its conception. The achievements and struggles that the syllabus conference encountered will be outlined. As such, as part of this discussion I will also explore the less controversial 1995 syllabus, as being the syllabus from which the 2007 syllabus deviated.

Secondly, I will outline the role of an ASC with reference to the conference that was convened in 2005. This section will explore how the members were nominated and the compilation for the four committees. I will further outline the role of the drafting secretary; Marius Felderhof and the scrutiny group, in instigating the writing of the syllabus material. The role of the City Council will also be addressed in terms of the approval of the syllabus itself, and for providing for the support for the introduction and delivery of the syllabus: through initial training, lesson plans and films. I must also acknowledge my role in the development of the 2007 syllabus. As RE Adviser to Birmingham SACRE and ASC I was part of the discussions about the development of a dispositional approach. I worked on several of the working parties, planned and provided the training for schools and led the development of the non-statutory resources.

Thirdly, I will examine the concerns of the ASC in 2005 and how the conference sought to address these issues. The context of the syllabus was seen in the light of three concerns: social, educational and religious. I will outline each of these and discuss how they were addressed by the approach focusing on the teaching of the dispositions with the aim of developing both pupils and society (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions). Secondly, this section will outline Felderhof's perspective on religion and RE as operationalised in the 2007 syllabus. This section will also examine the key features of the 2007 syllabus. This will encompass the spiral nature of the curriculum and the teaching of the dispositions through sets of questions ensuring progression, and not through the stipulation of specific content. I will explain how faith groups were involved in both defining and agreeing the dispositions. I will also examine the cognitive, affective and conative abilities that the syllabus aims to affirm and the decision not to include non-religious worldviews.

In the fourth section, I will outline research undertaken to evaluate the syllabus. Whilst wider academic commentary on the syllabus has been scarce, I will draw on two studies that have been initiated by Birmingham SACRE. In the first study, Jennings replicated the extensive work that she had undertaken as part of a review with Cornwall SACRE. Although this work was not as far reaching as the Cornwall study, it gives a glimpse of how pupils and teachers are responding in the light of the 2007 syllabus. The second study is concerned with an evaluation of the syllabus itself. After the ASC in 2012, Birmingham SACRE commissioned Phillip Barnes to conduct an evaluation of the dispositional approach. I will be able to draw from this evaluation and other articles written by Barnes in order to give an academic overview and response.

3.2. The historical context of RE in Birmingham

In this section I will outline the context for the current syllabus by examining the historical background of RE in Birmingham. According to Hull (1984, p. 82), the 1950 and 1962 syllabuses ‘have no particular merit’, as such this section will focus on the development of two Birmingham agreed syllabuses; 1975 and 1995, the former being seen as ‘divergent’ from other agreed syllabuses at the time. Throughout the history of Birmingham, key individuals (for example Cadbury) have played a role in influencing the politics and the culture of the city, this background must also be acknowledged as the setting for the development of its RE. Within the light of such a multi-faceted history, it is interesting to note that Parker and Freathy state that Birmingham ‘should be the site of contestation and innovation in RE’, (2011, p. 249). I will firstly examine the 1975 syllabus.

3.2.1. 1975

From the late 1960s there was a movement from the confessional form of Religious Instruction to a multi-faith focus within RE (Cooling, 1986; Barnes, 2015). With the establishing of the term ‘Religious Studies’ (RS) the subject was seen as distancing itself from moral education to the teaching of religion (Hand, 2004; Barnes, 2015). The first main exponent of this approach; Smart; (1968) advocated a phenomenological model, focusing on the *content* of what should be taught (p. 7). Although directly concerned with the teaching of Religious Studies in Higher Education, Smart (1968) concedes that this model would have an impact on how religion would be taught in colleges and schools (p. 9) making the subject more academic in focus and as such diminished the confessional and moral aspects (Lawton, 2018). As such, Barnes (2015) remarks, Smart is often referred to as sounding the ‘death knell’ of confessional RE.

Smart's (1968) phenomenological model, so called because it focused on the study of religious phenomena, advocated the teaching of religion through six dimensions (Thompson, 2004). Smart (1968) contended that the teaching of Religious Studies could not be simply dogmatic, that 'it must introduce, even from out of its own substance, the sympathetic appreciation of positions and faiths other than its own' (p. 9). According to Smart (1978) through this process, there was a 'stronger possibility of 'distancing' oneself from one's own position, which facilitates the sympathetic yet objective explanation of religion' (p. 9). Smart (1978) contended that through the practice of religious phenomenology there is a requirement of 'bracketing of all that is being presented' [...] 'of feelings and attitudes in the phenomenologist himself' (p. 76; 1973, p. 20). As such according to Smart (1973, p. 21) '[p]henomenology in this sense is the attempt at value-free descriptions in religion'.

Smart's work is influential for a number of reasons. Barnes (2012b) writes of the publication of *Working Paper 36* as representing 'a watershed in British RE and brought about a transition from confessional to non-confessional RE' (2012, p. 70). Smart's work with the Shap working party and its promotion of the study of world religions is noted to be of global significance (Thompson, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Holt 2015). Whilst Thompson (2004, p. 45) refers to how at one point 'the words 'phenomenological approach' were being intoned in syllabuses up and down the country' and further remarks of how Smart influenced and delivered lectures to the Birmingham ASC of 1975. Current debates as to whether departments in schools should be referred to as 'RE' or 'RS' originate in questions raised by Smart (Gearon, 2013, p. 163) whilst Gearon (2013) also notes that current dilemmas faced in teaching RE, such as the number, coverage and the representation of religions, are all issues identified by Smart decades beforehand. A wide range of approaches to the study of

religions can be attributed to the work of Smart including: historical and linguistic approaches, social and psychological sciences and socio-anthological models. In reference to the latter methodology, one significant religious educationalist that is referred to is Jackson and the interpretative approach (Gearon, 2013; Erricker, 2010). Whilst Jackson (2004) refers to the work of Loukes, Priestley, Hay and Robinson as others drawing from the phenomenological model, he states that Smart's work 'came as a breath of fresh air to me' in the midst of students being critical of religious education (1997, p. 2). Jackson (1997) states of his own work as being 'both a development and a sympathetic critique of Smart's work in Religious Education' (1997, p. 2. See Section 2.3.3 Emergence of non-confessional RE for an overview of Jackson's approach).

Notwithstanding having 'a profound and worldwide effect on the teaching of religion' (Gearon, 2013, p. 112) Smart and the phenomenological approach is not without its critics. Felderhof (2005a, p. 5) refers to this manner of teaching RS as 'religiously inadequate' since it does not convey religious life and misses out the 'understanding of the religious believer'. Holt (2015, p. 27) concurs with this view, stating this approach as being 'dispassionate, academic'. Barnes (2012b) observes that pupils' exposure to religions through this model did little to challenge religious intolerance and discrimination. Grimmitt (2000, p. 28) can be seen to explain why this was the case, referring to how within the phenomenological view, learners are required to 'bracket' their own beliefs, values and assumptions when engaging with 'knowledge' so that the study can be objective. Grimmitt (1987) criticises this approach in that it both invalidates the educational process of being engaged and being affected by what is being studied and that beliefs and values of the 'studied' are bracketed off somewhere else, stating: '[f]or pupils to gain personally from study, education must enable

them to relate what they learn to their own experience and to become aware of the ways in which their own perceptions of what they are studying influence their understanding’, (p. 45; Felderhof, 2014, p. 13). Thus although Smart’s pedagogy has encountered valid criticism and, in the light of my research, far from affirms the development of the pupil in terms of personal experience or connection with the faiths being studied, its legacy still remains significant in introducing the teaching of religions other than Christianity.

It is within this context that in 1970, Birmingham SACRE agreed to review its biblically based syllabus, which had been in use for the previous twenty-five years. Under John Hick’s chairing, it was felt that a new syllabus needed to represent and reflect the changing population of the city that was now more religiously diverse (Gillard, 1991; Hull, 1975). Barnes (2008) confirms this aim when commenting that this syllabus was the first to abandon, ‘Christian nurture and to embrace a multi-faith, phenomenological model of religious education’, (p. 75).

In 1971, the Religious and Cultural Panel of Birmingham Community Relations Committee presented a discussion paper to the ASC, setting the tone for the syllabus in recommending: ‘it should be part of an education for life in this country that the children come to know something of the traditional religion of the land, namely Christianity ... children should not be ignorant ... of the main features of the major religions; and that of Birmingham’, (Hull, 1984, p. 83, citing the paper, ‘Religious Education in a Multi-Religious Society’). Likewise, the working party groups of this conference included representatives of non-Christian communities. The subsequent agreed syllabus would include five world religions: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Judaism, advocating at secondary level a

detailed study of at least one of these religious traditions, and further study of one or more of these traditions to a lesser extent. Controversially, non-religious viewpoints were also represented following the lobbying from the British Humanist Association (BHA), a member was also co-opted onto an ASC working group.

The one-page syllabus was agreed by the Conference and submitted to the Council for approval. It was recommended that the syllabus should be expanded into a more detailed handbook. The Finance and General Purpose Committee of the City Council accepted this syllabus, subject to the deletion of references to communism. However, the Education Committee and the City Council continued to refuse to adopt these changes (Copley, 2008). With hostile responses to the teaching of non-religious stances for living, and with local press publishing headlines in June 1974 stating, 'Communism in syllabus is outside the law', (Hull, 1984, p. 85), legal advice was sought. Consequently, the syllabus being viewed as not meeting the requirements of the 1944 Education Act: as being too brief and containing the teaching of non-religious stances for living. Following involvement of the Secretary of State, the Conference was advised to submit documents that could be classed in law as a syllabus for the teaching of religious instruction. In the light of this judgement, the City Council had to reconvene the Conference so that the syllabus could be amended.

Finally, after a further year of discussion, the ASC reached agreement with the publication of a twenty-four page statutory syllabus, supported by a more detailed six hundred page non-statutory handbook; 'Living Together', which had undergone revision and moderation of the non-religious material. The syllabus foreword sets out the achievements of the Conference (BCC, 1975) by stating; '[w]e are sure that all who use this new Syllabus will

agree that what has been produced is imaginative, forward-looking and sensitive to the personal needs of the boys and girls in our schools', (p. 3). As the introduction to the syllabus (BCC, 1975) states: '[t]he syllabus should thus be used to enlarge and deepen the pupils' understanding of religion by studying world religions, and by exploring those elements in human experience which raise questions about life's ultimate meaning and values', (p. 4). With these few words, the ASC in Birmingham had set the precedent for the teaching of world religions. As such the syllabus can be seen as ground breaking in becoming the first to include the teaching of faiths other than Christianity in a more academic, non-confessional approach.

The remit of this section does not afford for a detailed analysis of the syllabus, however, I will refer to some of the distinguishing features: the intention to nurture Christianity or any other faith was abandoned and the contribution RE makes to community life in a plural society was explored. Other aspects included: religion was placed within the context of secular ideologies and, members of different religions agreed with how their religion was presented. As part of distancing the subject from confessional RE, there was a dissociation made between a teacher's faith and what was being taught, whilst world religions were to be taught from a pupil's first year in school.

Traditionally, RE had been taught in a confessional sense by a Christian teacher to a population of Christian children. The 1975 syllabus reflects the change in population in regards to the growth of other religions and the non-religious in acknowledging that this was no longer the case and that practice need to reflect this. Hull (1984, p. 29 and p. 114) refers to the syllabus as 'the major breakthrough' in statutory RE, focusing on the development of

‘a critical, but tolerant understanding of the religions in their modern secular context, leaving the fostering of faith in particular religions to the churches, mosques etc’. However, the reception of the syllabus still remained mixed, with the inclusion of Humanism and Communism in the non-statutory guidance, the syllabus was open to opposition in both local and national press, discussions in Parliament and at the centre of the Mary Whitehouse campaign to save RE. The syllabus encountered criticism from both religious and non-religious perspectives, Christians stating that it was ‘de-Christianising’ and humanists asserting that it was too biased in favour of religion. It is unfortunate that this controversy obscured the innovative and multi-faith nature of this syllabus.

It is also of interest to note the impact that the 1975 syllabus had on the practical teaching of RE. Although the syllabus was hailed in revolutionary terms, analysis of classroom practice revealed that it was not ‘all-pervasive’ and revolutionary in direction away from Christian confessionalism as was professed. Commenting on the 1980 HMI report, based on twenty schools in Birmingham, Parker and Freathy (2011) state, ‘[i]ndeed, the impact of the BAS 1975 could be interpreted at best as uneven and patchy, and at worst as non-existent’, concluding, ‘[c]laims for the revolutionary impact of BAS 1975 may thus have been exaggerated. Progression, regression, subversion, avoidance and compromise would be characteristic features of a more nuanced history of RE’, (p. 254). As such Parker and Freathy (2011) offer the phrase ‘evolution’ rather than ‘revolution’ when referring to the 1975 syllabus (p. 248).

Notwithstanding these differing perspectives, the syllabus can be seen as leaving a legacy: impacting upon other ASCs and the development of future syllabuses, not to mention the

Model Syllabuses (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority [SCAA], 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) and the work of subsequent Birmingham scholars, in particular the work of Michael Grimmitt. Thus although the syllabus received mixed views at its reception, I would still contend its primacy in the teaching of RE. The 1975 syllabus was duly reviewed in line with the statutory five-year cycle and continued to be taught until the introduction of the 1995 syllabus.

3.2.2. 1995

In contrast to the controversy surrounding the 1975 syllabus, Parker and Freathy (2011) comment that, ‘the BAS 1995 is missing from the historiography of RE’, (p. 257) as it was viewed as typical of syllabuses of the time. As such, there is little academic commentary on the 1995 Syllabus, absent in response to its ordinary nature. However, the 1995 syllabus (BCC, 1995) does acknowledge its history: ‘Birmingham has a strong tradition developed through its earlier Agreed Syllabus; there is a sense of gratitude for what has been written and taught in the past’, (p. 3).

It is clear that the 1995 syllabus is a consequence of the discussions and debates in the RE community at that time. Amongst these discussions were: teaching other religions alongside Christianity as relativising truth claims, the accuracy of religions as presented by teachers, whether RE results in the tolerance of religious pluralism in society, the context of the development of syllabuses post the 1988 ERA. In the light of such discussions it seems that the 1995 Conference agreed a less contentious and controversial syllabus than its predecessor.

The syllabus is ‘standard’ in appearance; separating the statutory information from the non-statutory guidance for teachers. The non-statutory guidance issued in 1996 contains suggested schemes of work for Key Stages One, Two, Three, Four and Post 16 (Ofsted, 1997), appendices in regard to SMSC development and guidance on faith traditions (including a list of “dos” and “don’ts” for each of the six major world religions, which can be seen to be responding to the needs of non-specialist teachers). Further non-statutory guidance was issued in 2002: Assessment, The Foundation Stage, Pupils with learning difficulties, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Much space is afforded to explaining the two attainment targets (BCC, 1995, pp 3-4, pp10-12 and p. 16), as relatively new additions to the teaching of RE, introduced by SCAA as outlined in the model syllabuses (1994a; 1994b; 1994c). Fancourt (2015) and, Baumfield *et al.* (2014) respectively reflect on the importance of these exemplars. As used in the 1995 syllabus (BCC, 1995), the attainment targets are pivotal in outlining Birmingham’s vision for RE, stating that every child should have the opportunity ‘to ‘learn from religion’ and to ‘learn about religion’ and furthermore, ‘these two ‘attainment targets’ are inseparable, sometimes fused into one, sometimes intertwined with one and then the other taking the lead’, (p. 3). The six major world religions are taught in this syllabus (BCC, 1995, p. 17) with Key Stage 1 through to Post-16 offering ‘material from at least three religious traditions at each Key Stage, one of which must be Christianity’, (BCC, 1995, p. 4). Unlike the previous syllabus (1975) there is no reference to the study of non-religious stances. Religions are taught through five areas of study: Making sense of our world; Living together; Following guidance; Expressing meaning, belief and value; and Marking special times, places and events, (BCC, 1995, p. 14). However, the coverage of these areas can be

seen to be inconsistent according to Ofsted's report on the impact of agreed syllabuses. This report states that Birmingham schools gave less attention to the more challenging areas (1997, 15). What is of interest to note, given my research question, and the importance of a common starting point for the teaching of RE, is the reference to the 1995 syllabus with regard to the importance of a child's experience: 'effective education will usually begin with the child and the child's current experience but it will then lead the child through those experiences to wider horizons', (BCC, 1995, p. 3). Thus starting with the experience of the child enables them to access wider experiences and the articulation of their opinions in response. In terms of the pedagogy of the syllabus, Parker and Freathy (2011) comment: '[h]ere one might argue that the phenomenological approach was now well embedded in the Agreed Syllabus, and that a pedagogical approach, missing from BAS 1975, was now included to support it', (p. 257). As such, the 1995 syllabus may be seen as more educationally explicit than its predecessor. In view that the majority of my teaching career was spent teaching this syllabus, it gave enough guidance on what could be taught and enabled flexibility in order to devise planning.

From the brief overview of the 1975 and 1995 syllabuses, it can be seen that 'Birmingham Agreed Syllabuses have been in the forefront of developing and applying new strategies and approaches to curriculum content, and teaching and learning in Religious Education', (Barnes, 2016, p. 2), even though the syllabuses have encountered mixed receptions and the former viewed as more controversial and innovative than the latter. However, what can be seen is, '[w]hat unites these syllabuses is that they all sought to respond to religious pluralisms in the context of RE, amid wider educational, religious and political debates about the subject,' (Parker and Freathy, 2011, p. 250). The discussion will now turn to

examine the context of and the process that resulted in the devising and agreeing of the 2007 syllabus.

3.3. The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007

3.3.1. The Agreed Syllabus Conference 2005 - Procedure

In this section I will explore the procedure of devising an agreed syllabus and appointing members to the conference. I will outline the four committees, the role of the drafting secretary and that of the scrutiny panel. I will not be able to do this completely in isolation of the agreed syllabus content and pedagogy, although this will be examined in more detail in the ensuing sections.

It is the duty of the ASC to devise and recommend the agreed syllabus to the LA (Schools Standards and Framework Act, 1998). The LA in turn is responsible for adopting the syllabus and ensuring schools (maintained schools without a designated denomination) are trained and able to deliver it.

Name of Committee	Number of members
Committee A: Christian denominations and other religions and denominations as, in the opinion of the LA, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area.	29
Committee B: the Church of England	5
Committee C: teacher associations	6
Committee D: the LA	7
Total number of Conference members	47

Table 3-1 2005 Agreed Syllabus Conference Membership

An ASC must be constituted of four representative committees as of a SACRE (Section 390, Education Act 1996; DSCF, 2010). Some nominees were nominated because of their knowledge of their faith and others because of their curriculum experience. Affirming this perspective, Holloway (2018) writes of the importance of faith communities as being stakeholders in RE. Mr Guy Hordern was appointed Chair of the conference and Rev. Dr. Marius Felderhof was appointed drafting secretary (BCC, 2007, pp. 59-60; Felderhof and Whitehouse, 2010). At the culmination of agreeing the syllabus, each committee has a single vote as to whether they agree to the syllabus being recommended to the City Council. This could indeed be seen as a near impossible task for 47 people of different opinions and perspectives. Therefore a scrutiny panel was formed, representative of the four committees. This group of approximately twelve people met on a more regular basis. At this point it was discovered that some of the religious traditions already had existing materials that could be drawn upon, for example the Baha'i faith (Popov, 1997). Three general principles for the syllabus were agreed: to make religious sense, to make educational sense, and that it must conform to the law (Felderhof, 2008). Furthermore, '[w]hatever pupils were going to be asked to study, there had to be clarity about how this promoted their development', (Felderhof, 2008, p. 14). After two and a half years of the Conference process, at a final meeting, all four committees voted in favour of the proposed syllabus. The City Council formally adopted the syllabus on 25th June 2007.

This section has outlined the duties and the procedures that took place in order to enable the syllabus to be devised. The next section will outline the main pedagogical decisions as part of the ASC process.

3.3.2. The Agreed Syllabus Conference 2005 - Pedagogical Decisions

This section will examine the 2007 syllabus. I will explore the pedagogical decisions that were made by the 2005 ASC. This will include a section on Marius Felderhof as drafting secretary outlining his perspective on religion and RE and how this is operationalised in the 2007 syllabus in the section on dispositions. Another section will explore one of the major decisions made by the Conference that has implications for my research in answering whether the syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE. I will also illustrate the distinctive pedagogical features of the syllabus: the dispositions, the spiral nature of the curriculum and the reversal of the attainment targets.

3.3.3. Reasons for Review and Context

It is the responsibility of the LA to convene an ASC. In 2005 there were two main reasons for Birmingham's review, as well as it reaching the statutory five-year term. Firstly, since the adoption of the previous agreed syllabus, the National Non-Statutory Framework for RE (NSNFRE) (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] and the DfE and Skills, 2004) had been published. Although not without criticism (Wright and Wright, 2012, p. 230), the NSNFRE can be seen as important in that it reinforced the national focus on a unified perspective of RE rather than a local model, offering a scale for measuring expected progress, establishing the expectation of equity between local authorities, and recommending the addressing of equality of opportunity by including secular world-views. Although as Copley (2008) acknowledges of the 2007 Birmingham syllabus, '[n]ot everyone was willing to go down the Framework path', (p. 194) as a following discussion will allude. Secondly, the City Council wanted the conference to take advantage of opportunities to use the Internet for the development and cascading of resources to the teachers in the city

(Felderhof and Whitehouse, 2010). It was hoped that this would also give teachers more flexibility, acknowledging their professionalism and enabling teachers to make their own choices about what should be taught and how it should be taught.

As drafting secretary Felderhof also made clear the context for the conference referring back to the Educational Reform Act (ERA) 1988, which states that the Curriculum, in its widest sense should promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and society (BCC, 2007, p. 3). For Felderhof there was a need to uphold this legislation more forthrightly. The syllabus emphasises the education of pupils as paramount to the development of society, ‘humans are social creatures and identities are formed through relationships with others’, (Felderhof, 2007-08). In this manner the role of the syllabus is to affirm human relationships, social institutions and organisations and, encourage participation and leadership. This was a radical departure to other syllabuses devised at the time that followed a more ‘traditional’ focus on the development of knowledge of religions, and in not being so forthright about pupil development. The reason for this departure can be seen in Felderhof’s response to the current state of RE at the time. Felderhof had long held views about the development of pupils through RE, not for the sole purpose of building a body of religious knowledge per se. Birmingham was considered radical at the time in that the conference rejected the nationally held view and rubric for RE in favour of a different approach.

The faith groups of the ASC were asked to define and agree how this development would take place. The syllabus refers to the ‘treasury of faith’: ‘[d]rawing on the beliefs, expression and practical actions of religious traditions’, (BCC, 2007, p. 5). Thus the instrumental

intentions of the syllabus are explained within the first few pages, the aim is to use the ‘resources’ of religious traditions to contribute to pupils’ development. Appendix 3: ‘Training and Support Materials’ outlines the resources developed to support the implementation and teaching of the syllabus.

The scrutiny panel discussed Felderhof’s (2008) points and concluded that the NSNFRE was ‘unhelpful’ and ‘politely decided to exercise its legal authority and move on’ (Felderhof, 2008, p. 14). At the heart of this dismissal of the Framework’s guidance is Felderhof’s interpretation of the studying of world-views and religions as being seen in opposition with the aim of the 2007 syllabus: developing pupils as responsible agents.

3.3.4. Marius Felderhof as drafting secretary

As drafting secretary, Felderhof (2008) had long held views on how RE should be taught and this differed from the NSNFRE. Indeed, Felderhof (2008) refers to the NSNFRE as ‘a step backward rather than forward’ (p. 14). Felderhof (2014) further states ‘[t]here is something peculiar about a religious education that makes ‘religion’ its focus of study’ (p. 3). Felderhof (2014) expounds that within this type of RE, the phenomena of religions becomes the most important focus. In this manner the study of religions ‘miss[es] the essence of religious life’ (Felderhof, 2014, p. 13). Consequently the connection between religions and moral and spiritual dimension becomes divorced and accordingly, the real focus for RE is lost. Continuing, Felderhof maintains that one of the features of this type of RE is ‘spectorialism’: the descriptive and distant observation of facts, arguing that this type of RE does not engage with the interests of young people. As such under the guidance of Felderhof, Birmingham was not willing to ‘go down the path’ of the NSNFRE as Copley

(2008) refers and continued following its own course. In this manner, the 2007 syllabus can be seen to be in the tradition of Birmingham's legacy (the 1975 syllabus) in devising a different approach in response to the legislative call for local determination. This decision can also be seen in the context of other pedagogies at the time being devised to develop pupil literacy and critical evaluation (Wright, 2000; 2010). Although the context and content of the 1975 and 2007 syllabuses are dissimilar, there is one major similarity; Birmingham responding to its need and forging its own path.

Furthermore, Felderhof (2014) argues that in treating religions as 'world-views' religious life becomes subverted within the descriptive, the point of it becomes obscured. In this manner RE 'does not begin or end in treating the young as responsible agents, as named doers, with the task of living for what is good and true' since 'facts' about religions do not enable this to take place (pp. 26-27; 2005c; 2005d). In this manner, Felderhof's comments that the aims of the 2007 syllabus can be seen as redressing the more phenomenologically based 1975 syllabus that was a product of a more academic and spectatorial age of teaching RE. Felderhof (2014) proposes an RE with a vision for the future that enables young people to have their feelings and beliefs developed in order to act responsibly. As the following discussion will examine, Felderhof was influenced by the work of Wolterstorff (1980; 2004) who viewed Christians as moral agents working to secure the biblical concept of Shalom.

In preparing young people for life Felderhof (2014) advocates a forward looking approach: '[w]hat a religious education pedagogy needs is an alternative approach that treats children and young people as 'do-ers' who are self-aware or as actors and agents in the world' (p. 21). Felderhof (2014) argues that RE brings the virtues of religious life to the fore through

the practice of dispositions enabling pupils to be actively involved as ‘do-ers’ in the world (p. xii). In this manner, the dispositional approach with Felderhof’s vision of pupils to be enabled by learning about and from the virtues lived in religious traditions, can be seen as a form of character education of seeking to develop virtues to enable a flourishing life. Consequently, this perspective had implications on the content and framing of the 2007 syllabus and why it was subsequently viewed as contentious outside of Birmingham. The reference to the controversial nature of the syllabus can also be seen in the light of the previous syllabus (1995) as being referred to as ‘missing from the historiography of RE’ (Parker and Freathy, 2011, p. 257). Felderhof’s perspective in regard to phenomenological nature of current RE practice is unyielding and consequently frames his subsequent thinking and the development of the 2007 syllabus. This was not open to understanding the possibilities of other pedagogies and offers a strikingly different alternative, which may be deemed to be too distinctive by other local authorities and educators who have shied away from joining the dispositional dialogue.

3.3.5. Religious and Non-Religious Worldviews

Although every locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking into account the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (Section 375, Education Act 1996, as highlighted in Long, 2015), the law does not stipulate what the principal religions of Great Britain are. Whereas the 1995 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus recommended the use of material from at least three traditions, one of which must be Christianity (BCC, 1995, p. 17), the 2005 conference paper ‘Three, Four or Six...?’ outlined the case for not following the NSNFRE (QCA, 2004), but to include a greater plurality of religious traditions whilst acknowledging, ‘[s]hallow

knowledge of many religious traditions can do more harm than a deeper knowledge of fewer' (Felderhof, 2005c, p. 2). It was also thought that in a city with a greater number of different faiths, one could not refer to 'principal religions', as if the other faiths were 'somehow in a minor league' (Felderhof, 2008, p. 15), whilst also noting Felderhof's (2005c) remark that, '[t]he goal of religious depth is not achieved simply by multiplying the number of religions studied', (p. 4). Whereas the NSNFRE advocated the teaching of six principal religions, Felderhof (2008) states of the 2007 syllabus '[t]here is no tick list of how many religions one has covered or how many there are still to do' as this is an impossible task for teachers (p. 15). Felderhof (2005c) recommended a deeper study of faiths at a secondary level, thus steering the conference towards the aim that 'RE should give students access to the depth of religious life together with the cultivation of agreed moral values and cultural creativity', (p. 6). As such the syllabus avoided stipulating the number of faiths to be studied but guided teachers' selection by a number of factors: taking into account the family background of the child, the historic and cultural roots of Birmingham, the need to deepen and broaden spiritual and moral dimensions, and the range of complementarity offered by religious traditions (BCC, 2007, p. 7). Distinctively, Birmingham draws on nine faith traditions, as Barnes (2008, p. 79) comments, this affords flexibility in its approach to the selection of content. In doing so the 2007 syllabus distinguishes itself from other agreed syllabuses in departing from the guidance and format of the NSNFRE, however, it may fall foul of its own critique in offering too shallow a range of too many religious traditions.

Controversially, another point of departure from the NSNFRE is seen in the 2007 syllabus not including non-religious world-views. The NSNFRE states that part of a broad and

balanced RE curriculum ‘it is recommended that there are opportunities for all pupils to study:

- Other religious traditions such as the Baha’i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism
- secular philosophies such as humanism.’ (2004, p. 12).

In this section I will examine why the 2007 syllabus adhered strongly to the non-statutory nature of the NSNFRE as guidance for ASCs and decided not to include reference to secular philosophies. I will also examine responses to this decision. This is in contrast to the 1975 syllabus conference that agreed the learning about Marxism and Secular Humanism. However, following local and national press coverage and discussions in Parliament, the City Council took legal advice on the proposal from the ASC. This resulted with the inclusion of Marxism and Secular humanism being significantly downplayed to ‘non-religious stances for living’ (Parker and Freathy, 2011, p. 252). According to Felderhof’s recollection of events, secular philosophies ‘could be included as *critiques* of religion but not ‘in their own right’’ (Felderhof, 2012, p. 153).

Felderhof as drafting secretary steered the exclusion of non-religious worldviews from the 2007 syllabus. Although Felderhof (2013) acknowledges that it is ‘neither possible nor desirable’ to shelter pupils from ‘secularity, agnosticism, atheism and humanism’ (pp. 6-7) as far as the wider curriculum stands, what is of concern is whether secular philosophies are considered a genuine alternative to faith or whether they are considered according to Felderhof (2012) ‘a range of intellectual activities using a methodology ‘*etsi deus non daretur?*’ [as if God did not exist] (p. 152). If they are considered a methodology, then Felderhof (2012) argues that secular humanism already dominates the school curriculum and

since RE ‘is precisely the subject which considers humanity as existing ‘before God’’, since ‘belief in God with its methodology was taken to be definitive of anything that could be called *religious* education’ (p. 152). Felderhof (2012) continues that since secular philosophies such as Marxism and Secular Humanism ‘do not think or enquire religiously’ (p. 153) they should not be part of a syllabus for RE. Accordingly, following in the spirit of the 1975 syllabus and guidance, such world-views can be used as a critique of RE. Ultimately Felderhof (2012) contends ‘[b]y all means criticise religious life but do not misrepresent it as if it were a theory’ (p. 155). This viewpoint forwarded by Felderhof and endorsed by the 2005 ASC has encountered criticism.

A notable objection to the 2007 syllabus was made by the BHA. In the light of the Human Rights Act 1998, the NSNFRE and 2010 non-statutory guidance, the BHA strongly objected to the missing representation of a humanist on the 2007 ASC and stated that, ‘while Birmingham’s current syllabus includes nine different religions, it still does not include any study of non-religious world-views, including Humanism’, (BHA, 2014, p. 3). Whilst the BHA also took objection to the naming of the website, ‘faith makes a difference’, which was seen as a, ‘title that implicitly denigrates those who are non religious’, (BHA, 2014, p. 3). In response to these objections, and after taking extensive legal advice, a SACRE working group on humanism was initiated. This group met on several occasions but concluded that non-religious world views could be taught in the context of being a critique of religion, but did not constitute a religion itself and, as such, could not be part of an RE syllabus. Of importance for my third research question as to whether the syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE, this debate continues with the 2017-18 ASC discussing the issue once again. This time the decision will be made in the light of the

‘landmark judgment’ made in the High Court, November 2015, where a judge ruled in favour of three humanist parents who challenged the Governments’ relegation of non-religious world-views in the subject content for the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) RS (Warby, 2015; BHA, 2015).

Hampshire’s (2009) review of the 2007 syllabus in the context of examining four other agreed syllabi (Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton, Redbridge and Surrey) cautions in the light of Birmingham’s view that if a pupil should be able to study their own religion, ‘[o]ne wonders what that means for a pupil who came from a background where there was no religious tradition in relation to a syllabus which precludes the exploration of non-religious life views’, (2009, p. 20). Hampshire is correct in raising this aspect; if the syllabus states that pupils should be able to study their own ‘life view’ this should include the exploration of the non-religious viewpoints for pupils from a background of no faith. Whereas Birmingham is illuminated in Hampshire’s review in terms of specifically rejecting secular humanism and atheism, Redbridge is the only syllabus as part of this review that clearly states non-religious world-views should be studied. However the Redbridge syllabus fails to give non-religious worldviews the equity of support it has for the major religious traditions outlined. As part of this review, the other syllabuses can be seen to have cautiously attended to the NSNFRE by referring to the existence of secular world-views but do not stipulate any references to these perspectives in unit overviews or support for teachers’ planning. Hampshire (2009) explores possible reasons for this absence and suggests that the NSNFRE in stating the use of non-religious worldview as ‘where appropriate’ (p. 25) causes confusion in terms of who decides where appropriate and whether these perspectives should be taught in their own right or in contrast to a religious

tradition. Hampshire (2009) concludes this section by stating ‘these questions need serious thought if the inclusion- or non-inclusion – of secular world views in a syllabus is going to be meaningful’ (p. 14). In this light, the 2007 Birmingham syllabus is at least direct and straightforward in stating that it will not incorporate these perspectives. However, it must be debated as to whether this current position can be sustained in that it is neither reflective of society (see Chapter 1 and statistics for the increasing number of nones) nor is it legally tenable. However, it will be the ASC’s decision as to whether this aspect of the syllabus is changed as part of the 2017-18 review.

The subsequent sections outline in more detail the main features of the syllabus: dispositions, attainment targets constructed around a spiral curriculum. The main aim of the syllabus in developing pupils (BCC, 2007, p. 3) is enabled through the teaching of 24 dispositions (see Appendix 2: List of Dispositions) with the religious traditions of the ASC ‘unpacking’ their faith content against the dispositions. In this manner through the teaching of the dispositions Felderhof (2014) contends that RE gets ‘to the very heart of religious life’ (p. 3) and as such can aid the development of pupils by engaging with the heart of religion. The dispositions are revisited at each phase of a pupil’s education (see Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus). A more detailed account of how the syllabus is taught according to dispositions is covered in section 3.3.10: Teaching RE through the dispositions.

3.3.6. Dispositions

Another decision made by the ASC which departed from the NSNFRE once more was that the syllabus’ religious content would be used to cultivate the development of certain characteristics, qualities or dispositions. In this manner the approach has associations with

moral education and character education in seeking to develop pupils personally by cultivating dispositions (BCC, 2007, p. 5). Felderhof (2014) furthers that there is a need to use the virtues found in faiths in order to ‘help both those who teach and those who are taught to live well and deeply’ (p. xii). In responding to a self posed question ‘wouldn’t this form of RE reduce the subject to just moral education?’ Felderhof (2014) responds, ‘[o]ne answer is that RE must be *at least* a form of moral education’ (p. 3). Thus advancing the view that RE can be more than the moral aspect but that the moral element needs to be at the heart of the subject’s intentions. As such in advocating the importance of the moral aspect of RE, Felderhof is reinstating RE’s role in ‘moral education’ and by using the virtues, the approach can also be seen to be similar to that of character education. Indeed Parker and Freathy, (2011) comment ‘the strong linkage between children’s moral education and their RE, which had often been deliberately dissociated from the 1960s onwards,’ [...] ‘marked BAS 2007 out as distinctive and divergent from existing trends’ (p. 258). Therefore Felderhof’s approach, can be viewed as a form of character education itself. The 2007 syllabus based on virtues and connected with the Aristotelian legacy of teaching virtue is focused on the heart of religions and their virtues, which he proposes can be used as a vehicle for developing pupils as they learn from and about faiths.

In terms of generating the dispositions, faith groups were asked to think of their beliefs in a different manner, in regard to the qualities expounded within their faith that they would want to see cultivated in the lives of the young people of their city; it was acknowledged that the emphasis of each disposition may be very different within each faith tradition. For example, being fair and just, being open, honest and truthful and remembering roots (BCC, 2007, p. 11). Another lengthy discussion at scrutiny level considered the number of

dispositions to incorporate. Originally twenty-five dispositions were presented, twenty four of these were accepted and became part of the syllabus (BCC, 2007, p. 11). The scrutiny panel rejected the twenty-fifth disposition, 'being playful', as being covered through a number of the other dispositions: 'being imaginative and explorative', 'expressing joy', (Felderhof and Whitehouse, 2010, p. 207). It was also considered that the number twenty four would fit more easily into termly planning and the spiral curriculum (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions). Although the dispositional approach specifically references particular virtues, it can be seen as a human development model of RE in aiming to enhance pupils' personal development as previously discussed in Chapter 2, through the work of Michael Grimmitt (1987). Furthermore, in drawing on the faiths of the city, Felderhof can be seen by Knight (1998) to be a 'Deweyan religious educator': 'someone who will draw upon experiences and practices that are 'religious' [...] and then enable pupils to reflect upon their own experiences of those things in their everyday life' (p. 77). Knight (1998) continues, referring to shared common values, a sense of community and an emphasis on relationships, all elements of 2007 syllabus, as 'the stock-in-trade of this contemporary Deweyan approach to religious education', (p. 87). Although the dispositions are much wider than the faiths alone, and can be seen to be shared human values, they are nevertheless characteristics of faiths which the ASC wanted to see developed in the children and young people of Birmingham. Returning to Statute (ERA, 1988) Felderhof sees the promotion of spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of both pupils and society (BCC, 2007, p. 3) as the aim not only for the whole of the curriculum, but for RE alone. Felderhof wanted to devise a pedagogy that developed both pupils and society, through the use of religious material.

In Chapter 2 I discussed what is meant by the term ‘pedagogy’. In relation to Felderhof’s aim for the syllabus, Chater and Erricker (2013a) refer to a pedagogy deriving from one’s existential stance ‘the way in which we conceive our role in relation to the overall development of young people whom we are responsible for educating’ (p. 108). The 2007 syllabus can be seen in the same all-encompassing manner, meaning much more than when ‘pedagogy’ is referred to a collection of teaching methods (Chater, 2013a, p. 48). As such it can be seen as developing a very particular kind ‘of interaction between pupils and the religious content which they are studying’ (Grimmitt, 2000, p. 17. See section 3.3.10 Teaching RE through the dispositions).

With the focus on the SMSC development of pupils and the influence of the work of Wolterstorff (1980; 2004) the dispositional approach was formed. Felderhof views this as primarily being driven through seeing pupils as ‘do-ers’, agents with the capacity to act and realise their future in response. With the majority of other syllabuses focusing on a more traditional acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills in developing pupils, one can see that the 2007 syllabus was ground breaking in its departure from other syllabuses and guidance at the time, advocating a different approach and direct emphasis on pupils’ personal development. In recognition of this, Parker and Freathy (2011) comment that the syllabus was ‘distinctive and divergent from existing trends’, (p. 258).

In response to viewing pupils as ‘do-ers’, ‘a number of pedagogical demands’ must be met in order for this approach to be effective. This can be seen in the three aims of the Birmingham approach. Felderhof (2014) maintains that in viewing pupils as agents, responding to beliefs that require action, the ‘cultivation of dispositions, a tendency to act in

particular ways', (p. 16) will be realised. This takes place when pupils not only develop their knowledge about different faiths (cognitive development) and are altered by the faith content (affective development) but to also results in an act of will as a consequence (conative development), (BCC, 2007, p. 5). In this manner, pupils are to be inspired and moved by what they know and have been affected by in order to promote an action, a change in response. Furthermore, Barnes (2008) comments that this type of development 'must engage the whole child, and embrace his or her capabilities and social relations', (p. 82).

Felderhof and Whitehouse (2010) can be seen as endorsing Barnes' latter point when referring to Wolterstorff, (1980), 'it is virtually impossible for a teacher to avoid seeking to shape students' tendencies' [...] 'Which tendencies to seek to inculcate, and how, are the relevant questions – not whether', (p. 207). Felderhof (BCC, 2007) can be seen as reinstating Wolterstorff's (2004) concept of 'human flourishing' through the teaching of dispositions, (p. 142; 1980, p. 35). In many ways this can be seen as very similar to Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia, seeing flourishing as an end goal to life through the cultivation of virtues. As already stated in Chapter 2, Felderhof's (2014) work 'Teaching Virtue' and the 2007 syllabus (BCC, 2007) echoes many of concepts within character education: from Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classes of virtue and associated strengths; the Jubilee Centre's interest in human flourishing and the teaching of Knightly Virtues; through to Ryan and Bohlin's (1999) understanding of character being echoed in the 2007 syllabus' aims of developing pupils cognitively, affectively and conatively (BCC, 2007, p. 5). Felderhof (2014) advocates the teaching of religion in order to achieve human flourishing, as religion already embeds and exemplifies these concepts, enabling the

cultivation of these virtues to be developed by teaching about the essence of religious life. This corresponds with the previous discussion on Felderhof's understanding of RE being concerned with the heart of religious life rather than the phenomenological aspects of religion.

Whereas Wolterstorff (1980, p. 33 and pp. 14-15) aims for the biblical ideal of 'shalom' within the context of Christian social action and the development of Christians as 'moral agents', Felderhof (2005b, p. 1) wants pupils to act in response to what they have learned from faith. Pupils will become moral agents transferring their knowledge by practically demonstrating how they have been affected by what they have learned. In this manner, Felderhof is applying Wolterstorff's concepts within a multi-faith syllabus in a city of diverse faiths, with a definite steer that education should have an impact on pupils and be transformative. The previous discussion on the respective work of Grimmitt and Erricker also outlined how RE can be used instrumentally in advancing pupil development, although their pedagogies are not as instructive as to outline which specific qualities and attributes will be developed. The complexities that this brings will be discussed in the latter section of this chapter.

In the light of the previous discussion on the confessional nature of RE (see section 2.3.2) the transformative and instructional manner of the dispositional approach needs to be addressed within the context of teaching religious values. The exchange between White (2002) and Barnes (2002) on the nature of forgiveness as appropriate for schools goes some way to understanding the complexity of these concerns. White outlines two views on forgiveness: a strict view, as requiring reinstatement and repentance from the wrong doer, to

which White (2002) questions whether this can be applied to a non-Christian context, and, a relaxed view: one of negotiation, divorced from Christian doctrine, without the aspect of repentance. The latter perspective is the one that White advocates is most suitable for education settings. Barnes defends White's strict view (with revisions) as being the most suitable for the use in education and states of White's (2002) relaxed view as serving 'to undermine moral law and moral endeavour', (p. 530). Barnes (2002) makes reference to the use of Christian language of reconciliation and estrangement as necessary to the concept of forgiveness: 'conditional on repentance' (p. 531). This is a necessary element that is missing if the 'forgiveness' disposition were to be replaced with 'conflict resolution'. This view can be seen as further supported as Barnes (2002) argues: '[a]n act of forgiveness goes beyond what morality and justice require. It is not a moral duty. Forgiving acts are acts of supererogation, acts that lie above and beyond the call of duty', (p. 537). Barnes further advocates a robust programme of moral education in schools to give meaning and validity to the understanding of forgiveness. Barnes does not comment in regard to whether the language of forgiveness in this strictest sense is instructional, however, dismisses White's weaker version of the concept as failing to take into consideration the wholeness of the term and as such this not being worthy of practice and discussion in schools. Barnes (2002) further states, in response to his previous question in regard to what can be appropriated from Christian doctrine for a non-religious audience (schools), '[i]f moral law is objective, with or without God, then it should be upheld', and as such, 'pupils in school should surely be taught to uphold it', (p. 534). However, what Barnes' argument does not encompass is an understanding of forgiveness, which is non-Christian, but still religious. Forgiveness is important in many other faiths, and does not have to be totally understood in Christian-

centric terms (for example the work on the Charter for Forgiveness, www.charterforgiveness.org.uk). Hindu, Sikh and Jain traditions as a starting point, value the concept of forgiveness, with the Jain practice of the forgiveness circle featuring in the non-statutory material for teaching the dispositional approach. As such, White's 'more relaxed' view that can be divorced from Christian doctrine is more helpful in the dispositional context, as it allows for other traditions' use and practice of the term, whereas Barnes' stricter view does not.

The Stapleford Project has sought to defend its approach in the context of confessionalism. Devised at a time when RE teaching was seen as becoming 'didactic and uninspiring' (Cooling, 2000, p. 154), this approach is aimed at counteracting negative attitudes towards Christianity and enabling pupils to handle more complex concepts. Cooling highlights the differences between a confessional and non-confessional approach as: 'the difference lies in non-confessional teaching being governed by a code of conduct that requires teachers to avoid language and behaviour which seeks to induct students into belief. So we endorse the use of techniques such as 'owning and grounding language' and 'distancing devices' which enable students to encounter the authentic faith without belief being assumed or actively sought on their part' (Cooling, 2000, p. 160). In the light of Cooling's comment, the dispositional approach may use instructional language to a greater degree than other current pedagogies, and does indeed seek a response from pupils; however, certain dispositions could be seen to 'induct pupils into belief'. However, through the dispositions this is carried out in a multi-faith context.

To illustrate the multi-faith nature of the dispositions further, the Nishkam School Trust, an international chain of Sikh schools with three schools in Birmingham, have adopted the dispositions, not only within RE, but as part of their wider ethos and philosophy (www.nishkamschooltrust.org; Sagoo, 2015). Whilst some pedagogies aim to develop pupil literacy or spirituality, the 2007 syllabus can be seen to be forthright in its adoption of an instrumental approach to RE in the developing both pupils and society (BCC, 2007, p. 4). Through the development of working towards the two attainment targets of the syllabus, using the resources found within religious traditions, the development of pupil dispositions ‘is required’ (BCC, 2007, p. 4; Felderhof, 2014, p. xi).

3.3.7. Attainment Targets

The syllabus uses two attainment targets for RE: Learning From Faith and Learning About Religious Traditions (BCC, 2007, p. 4). In this manner it reverses the two established targets within RE and has learning from faith as its starting point (Felderhof, p. 3; Chater and Erricker, 2013a). The 1995 syllabus also recognised that sometimes the attainment targets are inseparable, could be taught together or indeed in some circumstances reversed (BCC, 1995, p. 3). In the 2007 syllabus there is a conscious decision to refer to ‘faith’ rather than ‘religion’, in that ‘faith’ refers to ‘the dimension of self-involving engagement to be found in religious life’, rather than ‘religion’: ‘phenomena that may be observed’ (BCC, 2007, p. 4). As stated in the syllabus (BCC, 2007): ‘[t]he dispositions of pupils will be developed using the treasury of faith. Drawing on the beliefs, expressions and practical actions of religious traditions, pupils should grow intellectually, affectively/emotionally, and practically’, (p. 5). The term faith therefore is reflective of Felderhof’s viewpoint on the importance of religious life in the teaching of RE, as opposed to facts being taught about

religions. The intention of the approach to use faith traditions is clear; the religious traditions in the syllabus are being used instrumentally in order to promote a particular development of pupils (See Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus).

3.3.8. Spiral Curriculum

The 2007 syllabus employs a spiral strategy (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005) through which pupils will encounter the dispositions, from primary school through to secondary. The origins of this concept are attributed to Bruner (1960) stating that as a curriculum develops it should re-visit ideas, allowing the pupil to build upon prior awareness. In this manner the curriculum ‘turns back on itself at higher levels’ (Bruner, 1960, p. 13). Accordingly, ‘a curriculum ought to be built around the great issues, principles, and values that a society deems worthy of the continual concern of its members’, (Bruner, 1960, p. 52). Although the latter statement is not made in reference to the 2007 syllabus, one can understand how an approach such as the dispositions lends itself to this strategy. Grimmitt (1987) confirms how a spiral strategy aides the selection of content and learning experiences within RE: ‘[t]hus the curriculum becomes a vehicle for understanding of content [...] chosen for its capacity to illuminate these concepts and to ‘re-present’ them in ways which assist pupils’ contextualisation of them’ (p. 236). Through the use of this strategy pupils are able to revisit religious content at different levels appropriate to their needs and age and, make responses from their understanding at the time. This allows for a variety of religious content and experiences to be drawn out at any given stage within this model. This will also have an impact on whether the pupil is engaged in the subject content, in that if a pupil is taught a concept that is too easy or too difficult, a lack of engagement could result. A set of different

questions for each phase enables the disposition to be taught with progression each time (RE Syllabus Key Stage questions, BCC, 2007).

3.3.9. Development of pupils

The dispositional approach of the 2007 syllabus can be seen to combine some of the features of character development, as outlined in Chapter 2, however the syllabus is consummate in using religion as the starting point. As previously explored, connections have been drawn with Grimmitt's (1987) work of RE contributing to human development. Following on from this Richardson contends, '[r]eligious learning must engage children both intellectually and affectively' (Richardson, 2010, p. 226). These aspects are also seen in the work of American character educators Ryan and Bohlin (1999, p. 5) in considering the importance of knowing, loving and doing 'good'. Whilst Felderhof (2014) contends that in terms of justifying the teaching of virtues, it may have less to do 'with the content of what is taught than with how it is taught and with the dispositions and the intentions of the teacher' (p. 3). At the forefront of teachers' intentions should be what young people are to gain personally from their RE. As such this leads Felderhof (2014) to state that RE must be; 'at least a form of moral education' continuing that with 'moral interests and goals in mind one has a way of getting to the very heart of religious life' (p. 3) thus through learning about pupils discover what it means to live well. The work of Erricker *et al.* (1997) also echoes the importance of pedagogies engaging with the 'heart of religion' rather than solely addressing content (p. 162). The focus on virtues rather than values is also a central feature of character education, as is the development of human flourishing, explored in the work of Aristotle in the previous chapter. In drafting a 'religious' education syllabus Felderhof maintains that it is the 'treasury of faith' (BCC, 2007, p. 5) that is used as a starting point for this development

through the teaching of dispositions. Indeed, the 2007 syllabus' dispositions have many similarities with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) strengths of the virtues identified in their research.

The 2007 syllabus is different to other pedagogies. It returns to the confessional roots of the subject and is more direct in expressing how the SMSC aspects can contribute to pupil development. Nonetheless, there are many points of commonality with character education. As Felderhof (2014) states of the syllabus: 'more importantly it has led to a real engagement by pupils with the issues that all religious traditions seek to address, namely with the endeavour of learning to live well and deeply', (p. 7).

3.3.10. Teaching RE through the dispositions

After outlining the main features of the 2007 syllabus, it would be pertinent to demonstrate what the approach looks like in practice. The non-statutory lesson plans produced by SACRE, are presented differently for primary and secondary school phases. It was acknowledged at the time of writing the materials that the majority of primary teachers were non-specialist and would need more support with planning, whereas the majority of secondary school teachers as trained specialists would be able to plan with less guidance. Accordingly, week by week lesson plans were produced for primary teachers with accompanying resources whilst for secondary teachers, exemplar units were planned to show how the existing topics, themes and planning could be developed in order to meet the requirement of the 2007 syllabus.

Within the primary exemplars a single disposition is usually covered over the course of three lessons. The first lesson acknowledges that pupils come to RE with a variety of divergent

experiences. Each disposition is initially encountered by discovering what pupils know about the concept from their experiences. This becomes the foundation from where to move on to explore the other dimensions of the disposition. For example within the Year 3 exemplar 'Creating Unity and Harmony' pupils start by looking at themselves in a mirror and then sitting by another pupil and describing what they have in common. Genesis 1.16 is then looked at to explore the Christian belief that all people are made in God's image. The lesson then continues with pupils in pairs sitting back to back, with one pupil building a simple model and then instructing their partner to create the same model. The discussion then progresses to show how people look at things in different ways. The second lesson starts with pupils watching a film clip of a Muslim man going through his daily activities organised around prayer times. Pupils are asked questions to elicit their observations regarding the prayer sequence in the mosque, connecting with unity and harmony; Muslims are shown standing shoulder to shoulder, actions are synchronised. Other aspects of prayer within Islam are then explored to show opportunities for unity and harmony: washing, prayer timings. The lesson closes with a discussion on similarities with pupils' daily routines completed at similar times of the day: cleaning teeth, breaks, registration time. Within the third lesson the principles of unity and harmony as being pivotal within the Baha'i faith are explored through the activity 'inside-outside' where pupils discuss their similarities and differences. The central element of the lesson examines how Baha'is worship through the cycle of nineteen-day feasts. Film footage of a feast is shown and pupils are asked to devise a feast selecting the theme, food, words and songs. Although many familiar 'topics' are covered through this series of lessons, the focal aspect is to explore the disposition of unity and harmony through the vehicle of the faith content being presented.

For secondary teachers several exemplar units of work were produced to show how existing material could be ‘mapped’ against the dispositions. A unit of work might typically cover several dispositions by using the key questions (as outlined in the previous section ‘spiral curriculum’) to prompt discussion at a relevant level. For example, the unit ‘Who wants to be a millionaire?’ explores and reflects upon personal and religious attitudes to wealth by focusing on several dispositions: being fair and just, being accountable and living with integrity and living by rules. Questions such as ‘Does justice/fairness for me get in the way of justice/fairness for others?’ ‘What do believers mean by justice and fairness?’ ‘What should we stand for?’ guide teachers through the concepts of charity, Zakah, Kirat Karni by exploring Christian, Muslim and Sikh attitudes to wealth over a series of six lessons. The end of unit outcomes outline what pupils will be able to achieve in terms of knowledge, evaluative and reflective learning. Once again familiar religious concepts are explored through the dispositions, aiming at developing pupils’ knowledge, understanding and critical response.

3.4. Evaluation of the syllabus

This section will give an overview of the reception of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. It was seen as being different from many other agreed syllabuses at the time, with the exception of Hampshire’s ‘Living Difference’, as straying away from the pattern of the NSNFRE (Hampshire, 2009; Wedell, 2009; Kay, 2012). As previously discussed, in regard to previous Birmingham syllabuses: with the impact syllabus of 1975 viewed as ‘uneven and patchy’ (Parker and Freathy, 2011, p. 254) and little research comment on the impact of the 1995 syllabus as ‘missing from the historiography of RE’ (Parker and Freathy, 2011, p. 257), the 2007 syllabus has been also been subject to little outside academic scrutiny. In

light of the dearth of wider critical comment and evaluation I will examine work that Birmingham SACRE has commissioned in regard to the impact of the syllabus. Apart from David Hampshire's (2009) review of five recently agreed syllabi, there have not been any independent reviews of the 2007 syllabus. Whilst recognising the origins of Birmingham SACRE's reports in being considered biased, they remain important as the only existing evaluations of the 2007 syllabus thus far. Birmingham SACRE commissioned the reports in order to review the syllabus on two levels. Firstly to understand the response of pupils and teachers, a small scale research project by Penny Jennings was commissioned. This research was based on Jennings' work in Cornwall, analysing responses and attitudes to surveys. Secondly, in the light of changes in legislation and updates since its completion some ten years before and, with the review of the syllabus imminent, an evaluation of the syllabus was considered important. This work was undertaken by Phillip Barnes.

3.4.1. General reception

When BCC adopted the 2007 syllabus on 25th June 2007 the local response was recorded in the Birmingham Post as 'bold and imaginative', (Felderhof, 2008). Parker and Freathy (2011, p. 259) express the requirements of the syllabus as being 'highly ambitious'.

Within the context of the review of the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus in 2009-10, the 2007 syllabus was reviewed by their RE adviser, David Hampshire, alongside four other recently agreed syllabuses (Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton, Redbridge and Surrey). Each were viewed in terms of ten areas: from the aims of RE to how non-religious world-views were represented, from pedagogy, to what each of the syllabuses deemed as important. The local context of Birmingham was viewed as being of primary importance as 'the position that RE is about transformation not simply learning',

(Hampshire, 2009, p. 5). In relation to the attainment targets the following comment was made: '[h]ere we see that the approaches taken by Birmingham and Hampshire focus more specifically on the pupil than on religion or religions', (2009, p. 5). Once again similarities between Hampshire and Birmingham are made, seeing both syllabuses as being more 'fluid with their content as they are obviously more learner focused', (2009, p. 12). Thus the development of pupils is seen as being paramount within the approach of the syllabus. As previously discussed it is only Birmingham that is seen to disregard the teaching of secular humanism and atheism from RE. I will raise this aspect again in the recommendations I will make in Chapter 9. Whilst others have noted the syllabus' contributions to the Golden Thread of SMSC supporting pupils 'to create a better and more just world', (Coles, 2014, p. 23), Hampshire notes the lack of explicit references, although, Felderhof (2005e) would defend the presence of SMSC throughout the dispositional pedagogy (p. 14ff). Although this five-syllabus review does not set out to serve as an independent evaluation of the 2007 syllabus, it does interestingly show the differences and similarities with other syllabuses devised at the same time, and also raises valid points in regard to the 2007 syllabus on a number of levels. Although the syllabus is unapologetic in its focus to develop pupils, the deliberate omission of non-religious world-views is problematic in failing to address the needs of the city's increasing non-religious population.

The content of the following section will rely on Birmingham SACRE's commissioned work on the evaluation of its own syllabus. As such one will need to be mindful that the following two studies were commissioned and financed by Birmingham SACRE.

3.4.2. Penny Jennings - Teacher and Pupil Attitudes

Jennings (2004) who had previously carried out far reaching work as part of a Cornwall SACRE survey, was asked to look at a means of assessing teachers' and pupils' attitudes in the light of the dispositional approach in Birmingham. The work was undertaken between 2009 to 2011, with Jennings taking a lead in the project and Dr Marius Felderhof, Ryan Parker at the University of Birmingham and myself assisting.

The parameters of this section will not allow for an extensive overview and discussion in regard to the research design of this work, but whilst quantitative large samples would be able to be obtained through the questionnaire data and pre-coded questions allow for computer analysis, semi-structured interviews would allow the capture of information not covered in the questionnaires and allow respondents to clarify responses. Likewise the pupil questionnaires (Year 6 and Year 9) were designed to capture attitudinal responses. A representative diverse group of Birmingham schools were asked to be involved: eight primary schools (six took part) and four secondary schools (three took part). The following comments and analysis can be made, with the qualification that it is understood that the study samples were small. The following is a much-summarised version of the report (Jennings, 2014).

Of the six primary schools participating in the survey, only four teachers completed the teacher survey. Three of these followed the syllabus closely, three followed the exemplar schemes of work closely and all teachers said that they extensively used the resources provided by SACRE (Jennings, 2014, p. 210). Of the three secondary teachers, only two completed the survey. One followed the syllabus closely, one fairly closely, one used the

exemplar schemes occasionally, one not at all. Both stated that they preferred to teach RE thematically and had altered their schemes of work to a dispositional-based approach.

A first preliminary look at the data revealed the following information. Whereas in Year 6 RE was one of the least enjoyable subjects, this was reversed in Year 9 where only PE and games were more enjoyable. Of the Year 6 pupils responding, 100 pupils were asked the questionnaire and almost all of the pupils responded to each item. In turn, the Year 9 survey was completed by 56 pupils. The following table shows the responses to the statements asked of each year group.

Examples of statements asked	Percentage of Year 6 pupils replying strongly agree and agree	Percentage of Year 9 pupils replying strongly agree and agree
RE helps me to understand God	-	68%
RE helps me to understand what people think about God	84%	-
RE is fun	-	65%
It is important to know what other faiths believe	90%	-
I enjoy learning about other faiths	66%	76%
RE helps me to think who I really am	66%	55%
I like RE best when it is relevant to my life	59%	60%
RE helps me to think about why I am really here	-	66%
RE helps me to make sense of my life	-	61%
RE helps me to lead a better life	70%	-

Table 3-2 - Percentage of Year 6 and Year 9 pupils responding strongly agree and agree to statements about RE

In the light of these observations Jennings was able to draw some tentative conclusions in comparison with the previous work undertaken in Cornwall. Birmingham pupil responses compared more favourably to questions on illegal drugs and morality issues around marriage and sexual behaviour, in comparison with the Cornwall pupils (questions asked of the Year 9 pupils). Leading Jennings (2014) to posit, that although the comparisons ‘have no statistical legitimacy’ they ‘serve to encourage the hope that the disposition-based approach in RE will make a major contribution to promoting positive spiritual and moral attitudes in pupils at both primary and secondary levels of schooling’, (p. 213).

One of the most obvious differences between Jennings survey and my own research is that of pupils as participants. Although responses to statements such as ‘RE helps me to think about who I really am’ and ‘RE helps me to lead a better life’ do not indicate that the Birmingham approach enables pupils of faith and none to engage more with RE, they do show in comparison with the Cornwall results, that the Birmingham approach is going some way to making RE more relevant to pupils. Although how far such conclusions can be drawn in regard to this research with such a small data set, must be the source of concern. What Jennings has started to identify is that both pupils and teachers are reacting differently; towards RE and in their actions as a consequence of RE, in response to the dispositional approach. Only a far more reaching research project would be able to demonstrate whether this was the case with more statistically valid data.

3.4.3. Phillip Barnes – Evaluation of the Syllabus

More recently Phillip Barnes (2016) of Kings College, London was commissioned by Birmingham SACRE to review the syllabus. Barnes had previously expressed the syllabus as ‘challenging in a number of respects’, departing from the guidance in the non-statutory national framework, and more favourably, in pursuing the development of character: ‘as the first serious attempt to incorporate the insights of virtue ethics into religious education’, (2008, pp. 81-82). The following is a summary of the more pertinent aspects of Barnes’ evaluation.

The syllabus refers to the development of pupils as set out in the 1988 Act. However Barnes (2016) argues that these aims are too ambitious for RE alone and should be addressed by the curriculum as a whole. In making this claim for RE, Barnes questions whether the syllabus should be more focused on its own intentions, rather than assuming that of the whole

curriculum. The ASC and drafting secretary have never denied that the aims for the syllabus are ambitious, but do not view this as being problematic. Furthermore, Barnes, in developing his comments in regard to the aims of the syllabus, argues that the aims and the attainment targets overlap too significantly. Barnes continues, arguing for reviewing both of these elements of the syllabus, suggesting that the attainment targets should be more specific than they are presently expressed. Consequently, this leads Barnes (2016) to posit if the role of RE as set out in the syllabus were to be lessened, '[t]his could mean that the number of dispositions to be developed by RE is reduced or perhaps that a much smaller range of 'virtues' rather than dispositions should be the focus of development' (p. 8). This leads Barnes (2016) to further question whether dispositions or virtues are synonymous and 'whether the language of dispositions or virtues is more accessible and attractive to educators', (p. 8). Barnes also suggests that in this manner the syllabus may take advantage of connections in present educational discourse and be readily able to make connections with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. In response to Barnes' uncertainty in regard to the language of dispositions or virtues being more accessible, according to the title of Felderhof's (2014) 'Teaching Virtue' discussing many of the dispositions, the two would be seen as synonymous and interchangeable. Although connections with the Jubilee Centre could be advanced, as already outlined in Chapter 2, the focus of their work is not on the religious aspects of virtues, consequently the dialogue may not be as far reaching as hoped for by Barnes.

Barnes comments on the lack of a critical dimension in many of the dispositions, apart from, 'being reflective and self-critical'. Indeed the APPG (2016, p. 10) reported that a number of respondents commented on the over emphasis of SMSC, values and character building in

RE, neglecting critical aspects of the subject. More recently, Clarke and Woodhead (2018) write that the need to raise the academic standard of RE is central to their recommendations of a new resettlement (p. 12). In the light of the concerns in regard to the syllabus, Barnes (2016) suggests the possible introduction of a third attainment target ‘reflecting on faith and religious traditions’ (p. 9) as a manner through which this component could be addressed. Barnes sees that this is a necessary element of modern education and of relevance for RE, for pupils to be encouraged to be self-reflexive about their choices. Barnes (2016) sustains his line of argument, suggesting that the syllabus is in effect ‘shielding pupils from the negative aspects and negative influence of religion’, (p. 110). Although these more critical aspects are apparent in the non-statutory material, Barnes is justified in making this point that this dimension is not explicitly prominent within the syllabus document. This is an aspect that is currently being considered as part of the ASC discussions. I consider this to be a significant point raised by Barnes. With the addition of a critical dimension through a further attainment target or recognition within the ‘learning about’ aspect of religious traditions, the awareness of teachers is raised in regard to the critical aspect of individual dispositions and of the approach as a whole.

Barnes (2016) also raises concern in regard to a central focus on personal development, and as to whether there are other curriculum areas which are better placed to develop the dispositions. Furthering the view that the syllabus may be seen to hold that, ‘the study of religion is of little value in itself’ (2016, p. 10). Barnes questions where the central aim of RE, that of religious literacy, is within this approach. Reed *et al.* (2013) write contrasting their own pedagogy in narrative theology, with that of the dispositions. Reed *et al.* (2013) conclude that when using a biblical text, their pedagogy ‘allows pupils to understand

complex issues concerning character, community and ethics’, whereas the Birmingham approach expects pupils to draw specific moral conclusions from the religions and material encountered (p. 308). Equally, it could be argued that many other pedagogical approaches use RE as a vehicle for the development of other aspects, whether that is religious literacy or skills; this is also true of other subjects, for example the teaching of numeracy for the understanding of fractions, not the love of maths alone. In response to this concern, the syllabus has been forthright in its aim of and focus on development; the aim to develop pupils has not been subliminally hidden. This point is also in contradiction to Barnes’ (2016) comments that have heavily endorsed the dispositional and developmental approach (p. 2). However, with the focus being on teaching religions through dispositions and not in a systematic manner, Barnes (2016) furthers that this may take teachers out of their comfort zone, away from their expertise of teaching the ‘study of religion’, resulting in ‘their expertise [being] demoted’ (p. 2). Consequently, Barnes calls for balance between the need for pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of religion (the study of religion) and the syllabus aiming to develop pupils personally.

Although Barnes raises many valid and critical comments in relation to the syllabus, the evaluation, as a whole, incorporates a list of strengths in the dispositional approach. Firstly, the community involvement in drawing up and supporting the implementation of the syllabus is recognised (Lawrence and Rudge, 2011; Isiorho, 2014). The contribution that RE can offer to the personal development of pupils is seen to be a strength. Importantly, Barnes (2016) comments on how the focus on dispositions reinforces the viewpoint that, ‘religion is ‘a form of life’’ and in that ‘[t]he study of religion cannot be ‘disinterested’ because religion and religious traditions raise fundamental questions about ourselves and how we should

live', (p. 14). Thus reinforcing the perspective that through the dispositions there is a connection and relevance made from religious material to a common, shared concern of how people should live.

This chapter has outlined the historical context of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, the process of the ASC in 2005 in reaching agreement of the 2007 Syllabus. I have explored the main principles; aims and pedagogical devices used in the syllabus and have outlined evaluations of the approach. In the next chapter I will examine what is meant by engagement, what this means in teaching RE and, how the dispositional approach supports engagement.

4. RE-ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED IN RE

4.1. Introduction

A concept central to my second subsidiary research question: Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE? is echoed in the writing of Griffith and Burns (2012), unequivocally stating of learning: '[w]ithout engagement nothing else is possible', (p. 2). In this chapter I will be discussing the concept of engagement. I will explore how engagement is key to all learning and extend the discussion with particular reference to RE.

As formerly stated, my concern stems from my own experience as an RE teacher, reflecting on teaching pupils from a background of no faith, in comparison with those of faith. Some pupils from a background of no faith appeared to be more disengaged in lessons. The initial introduction of the 'religious' provoked apathy and even hostility in response: "Why have we got to learn about them?" "What's that got to do with me?" "Why do we have to learn about their religion?". The pupils did not have a connection with the content being presented and as a result 'shut down' and did not engage. In this chapter I will discuss the multifaceted reasons contributing towards this disengagement.

I will examine how different factors such as curriculum and pedagogical approach have an impact on engagement. I will also discuss internal and external factors impinging on engagement. I will consider whether learning that mainly adds to an existing stock of knowledge or learning that is personally transformative is most engaging. The distinction between a subject-centred curriculum and a child-centred curriculum will be discussed in the context of how each facilitates the engagement of pupils. Finally, I will discuss how each of these approaches enables pupil engagement within RE.

4.2. Engagement and Disengagement

4.2.1. Definitions

In this section I will outline what I mean when referring to both engagement and disengagement within general education, and within RE. I will also outline Ofsted's view of these concepts.

By engagement I am not referring to the busyness of pupils in a particular lesson or with a particular activity. Just because pupils are active in a lesson does not mean that they are highly engaged in what they are doing. Nor does this mean quality learning is taking place or that pupils are making progress as a consequence. Engagement does not equate to the extent to which pupils are entertained within the class. It is much more than this.

Neither am I referring to the quality of pupil behaviour or the level of attainment in a subject, although engagement does contribute to these factors, behaviour and attainment can also be seen as outcomes of successful engagement (Davis, Summers and Miller, 2012). If a pupil is engaged in learning they may behave accordingly, this may have an impact on their attendance, punctuality and achievement (Parsons and Taylor, 2011). I would view punctuality, attendance and attainment as results of engagement, although one could also argue that you could not be engaged if you were not attending school or on time for lessons. Hattie and Yates (2014) also outline factors that contribute towards effective learning including: goal-orientation and accumulated successful practice. Although the term 'engagement' is referred to within the current Ofsted framework (2018) and all three subject reports on RE (Ofsted: 2007; 2010; 2013), no definition of the term is provided. The Ofsted subject reports do not refer to whether a pupil's faith or religious beliefs has an impact on their engagement.

What I mean by engagement is the extent to which pupils are absorbed in and attentive to an aspect of learning. A pupil who is engaged will be connected with the learning process. This could be in relation to the content of what they are learning but also in relation to how that content is offered. This would also mean taking into account the pedagogical strategy and methods used to convey the content, the learning process itself. This can be seen to be a less intense version of what Csikzentmihalyi (2002) refers to as ‘flow’, (Geirland, 1996, p. 2.). Mezirow (1997) also refers to transformative learning, meaningful learning as an active process involving thought, feeling and disposition.

4.2.2. Relevance

Disengagement can occur as a result of the learning not being made relevant to a pupil. The pupil is not attentive to or absorbed in the learning process. It occurs when a pupil is not interested in the content or activity or, on a wider level, is disinterested in the importance of learning and education to a greater degree. Bryson and Hardy (2011) usefully differentiate between ‘engaging students’; actions of teachers in order to create opportunities for engagement to take place and, ‘students engaging’; the responding activity undertaken by students in response to the teacher’s actions. Brown, Collins and Duguid, (1989) argue for learning to be ‘situated’ in practice for it to be meaningful and to avoid disengagement. Although not writing about RE, Parsons and Taylor (2011) contend relevance to life is key: ‘[t]oday’s learners ask that their subjects and learning apply to real-life scenarios’, (p. 39; Oakes, 2015). Moreover, Pritchard (2009) in a similar light calls for learning to be ‘contextualised’ and ‘authentic’ in order for it to be meaningful, and engagement to be maximized (Bruner, 1996). This concept is further verified by recent research in RE culminating in ‘Big Ideas’ concerning the importance of relevance: ‘[i]f young people are to

engage with RE, they have to see that it has some relevance to the world in which young people are growing up today' (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 13). In response to my pupils asking the questions about the relevance of RE, making the content of an RE lesson relevant to their concerns was paramount. Parsons and Taylor (2011) can be seen to concur with this when stating: '[t]he negative consequences of this deficit of engagement in learning would ripple across industry and society for generations. If we fail to make changes to our pedagogy, curriculum and assessment strategies, we fail our students, and jeopardise our futures', (p. 4).

Although the Ofsted subject reports for RE do not give a definition of relevance, 'general' deductions about what causes lack of engagement and increased engagement can be made. The 2007 report states that, '[w]here achievement is very good or outstanding, pupils are engaged with challenging tasks and demonstrate the capacity to explore the meaning and significance of religious belief and practice', (p. 9). Likewise in the 2010 report, challenging learning is stated as increasing engagement through 'stimulating ideas and enquires in ways that encouraged independent thought and reflection', (Ofsted, 2010, p. 22). It is interesting that this is the first reference to pupils reflecting on their learning as being part of what constitutes engagement. Similarly, this can be seen as relating to the terms 'connection' and 'absorption' in my definition of engagement, since the pupil is needed to be part of the process of learning for it to be successful (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989; Pritchard, 2009). The 2013 subject report advocates an enquiry-based approach to the teaching of RE. The report states that effective enquiry 'starts by engaging pupils in their learning – making sure they can see the relevance and importance of the enquiry and how it relates to their own concerns', (2013, p. 23). Similarly, Wintersgill's (2000) research on task setting in RE at

Key Stage 3 in comparison with History and English and, Myatt's (2018) work on low-level tasks and the lack of challenge in RE, confirm the absence of deep engagement. The latter references are more in line with how I perceive engagement and lack thereof. Although I am not advocating an enquiry-based approach *per se*, questioning, relating to pupils' concerns, and reflecting on learning, are key to deeper learning, and my definition of engagement. Through my third research question, I wanted to explore whether the 2007 syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE in this manner.

Closely associated with the concept of relevance is the notion of 'transfer': 'a 'relevant' idea is one that young people can apply to a wide range of situations in the contemporary world in order to make sense of them', (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 13). Being able to transfer what is learnt in a lesson to the wider world means that the knowledge is useful and can be applied to day-to-day situations, rather than it being perceived as unfamiliar and therefore not useful in a young person's life. Wintersgill's 'Big Ideas' acknowledges the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005) who explore the meaning of 'understanding' as being a practical and not just a theoretical exercise. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) distinguish between 'knowledge' and 'understanding': '[t]o understand is to be able to wisely and effectively use—transfer—what we know, in context; to apply knowledge and skill effectively, in realistic tasks and settings. To have understood means that we can show evidence of being able to transfer what we know.' (p. 7).

There are many different explanations as to why disengagement occurs and it is important to note the complexities involved. Some of these factors are outside the control of the

education system in that they encompass influences such as class, parental encouragement and aspiration, whilst others, are within the control of the school and an individual teacher.

4.3. Factors affecting engagement

In this section the discussion will start with analysing the motivation to engage in certain subjects and in particular RE. I will also consider how the subject is perceived and whether this impacts on engagement. The type of learning that takes place within a subject is also integral to engagement. I will discuss this in more depth in relation to two types of learning: additive and transformative. Finally, this section will outline the type of curriculum as being pertinent to pupil engagement. Child-centred and subject-centred curricula will be discussed with a view to understanding what is more convivial to increasing engagement and ultimately for the purposes of my research, supporting pupils' engagement in RE.

4.3.1. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation for learning can be a major factor as to whether engagement takes place. Some pupils enjoy and are interested in a subject for its' own sake. These pupils do not need to know the skills or qualifications that will result since they are intrinsically motivated by the love of the subject. For other pupils, extrinsic motivation is the reason they become engaged. In this case a reward or qualification is the main incentive not the skills or interest in the subject.

One of the reasons pupils are engaged is due to the intrinsic enjoyment they get from a particular subject or aspect of learning. According to Nottingham's (2016) ASK model (Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge), engagement comes under the attitudinal domain, as part of being curious and being open-minded in response to learning. This may be because it

links to an outside interest or connects to another aspect of their lives. Hattie and Yates (2014) refer to 'knowledge gaps' that hold our attention whilst learning. Practically this means that we will seek and pay attention to things that we already know something about, in order to add to this existing knowledge base, since that 'knowledge gap' has relevance for us. Another facet of engagement refers to the activities and work set within a particular subject discipline. Subjects that are more discussion based, involve less writing and include an emphasis on the importance of a pupil's evaluation and opinion, may be more attractive and further court a pupil's engagement. Another aspect of engagement is that it can take pupils out of 'the run of the mill' learning, allowing pupils to learn something completely different or unfamiliar from their day-to-day lives, for example: the aspects of another language or a new subject. It may also be quite simply that a pupil enjoys a certain subject or aspects of a subject: a pupil is engaged in science because they have an interest in biology or a pupil engaged in RE because they love discussion and debate.

Some pupils may not be interested in certain subjects and this may lead to a lack of engagement. A pupil having difficulty in maths or struggling with writing may not be keen on subjects where these skills are employed. Some pupils may be more practically minded and like design or art-based subjects. Other subjects may therefore not be seen as important and disengagement may result. Similarly, career minded pupils may be focused on a narrower career path and not see the benefit of an all round education, other subject disciplines may be seen as peripheral to their needs. For this pupil, the extrinsic or deferred gratification of passing an examination, moving onto further education or a better job will be the incentive to be engaged in a subject whether they like it or not. This can also be linked to the concept of a pupil's self-motivation for being engaged (Davis, Summers and Miller,

2012). Certain subjects may have more authority in terms of extrinsic motivation than others, for example the requirement for English and Mathematics at GCSE to continue further qualifications, or as a requirement on entry to certain careers. Society has created these requirements, which leave some subjects in a more favourable position than others.

RE does not rate highly in the category of extrinsic motivation. If pupils perceive RE as only for the 'religious' or for the furtherance of 'religiously' orientated careers, the response, might well be 'I don't want to be a vicar, so I'm not going to try in this subject, I don't see the point'. Consequently the value of RE is lost. The enjoyment of the subject is not present and pupils cannot see its worth. RE therefore needs to appeal through the intrinsic route to engage pupils. Although this also is not without its concerns as the title of my research intimates. Pupils may well be enabled to overcome the initial difficulty of engaging in RE which might take place through enjoying the methods or pedagogy through which the subject is delivered; from interaction through discussion or participating in role play. As a result, pupils may further be able to gain an interest in the faiths being taught and of learning about other people and their beliefs. The second attainment target for RE; learning from, may also be of interest to pupils in discovering that there is something 'in it' for themselves.

Another element of engagement that needs to be taken into account is the type of learning used. The next section discusses transformative and additive learning in the curriculum.

4.3.2. Additive and Transformative types of learning

This section outlines the differences between transformative and additive learning. Both types of learning have their place within the education system and lend themselves to engagement in different ways. During the course of the discussion it will be argued that RE

contributes to both types of learning: the acquisition of knowledge; ‘learning about’ and, the development of pupils (transformative) through ‘learning from’. Nevertheless, I will argue that through transformative learning there is further capacity to engage, if, in addition to learning knowledge and facts, the pupil is being actively engaged because this learning is personally relevant.

4.3.3. Additive Learning

Pupils need a certain amount of knowledge to be able to interact with the subject matter. This may be used in discussion or as part of answering questions in an examination. In each of these cases the pupil is engaged to a greater or lesser extent. Additive learning requires the development of knowledge and skills. Prior knowledge and skills are built upon and taken further in the next steps in learning. There is no recourse for pupils to evaluate their values or perspective in response to this learning. There is reflection and evaluation of the learning, but not in a transformative sense. Engagement in additive learning is derived from the intrinsic interest in the subject, or the extrinsic motivation of the outcome of the knowledge and skills practiced. As previously discussed, RE does not rate highly in an extrinsic model, although the curiosity and acquisition of ‘facts’ about religions may interest some pupils. The addition of knowledge relates to the ‘learning about’ attainment target. The 2007 syllabus places more emphasis on learning from faith, by learning about religious traditions (BCC, 2007, pp. 5 and 6). In doing so the syllabus inverts the more traditional order of the attainment targets. In this manner knowledge of the religious traditions is only the first stage of learning, the importance is placed not on the acquisition of facts, but as to how this information can lead to the development of pupils through ‘learning from’ it.

4.3.4. Mezirow and Transformative Learning

In responding to my second research question, in understanding engagement and types of learning it is of interest to acknowledge the concept of transformative learning. One of the main exponents of transformative learning is Mezirow (1997) writing in an ethnocentric context of how we learn, Mezirow refers to four processes: elaborating on our existing points of view; establishing new points of view; transforming our points of view and, transformation of our habits of mind. The first of Mezirow's processes applies to additive learning: knowledge contributing to our existing understanding, whereas, the third process describes transformative learning. Although the process of transformation is not exclusively concerned with 'personal transformations' (1997, p. 10), in contrast to additive learning, there is change in the learner's frame of reference. Mezirow states that this encompasses cognitive, conative and emotional elements. In order for this active engagement to take place, Mezirow (1997, p. 10) states that learners need to be aware of their own assumptions and those of others. However, one must take into consideration that Mezirow (1997) was concerned with adult learning whereas my research is focused on the engagement of pupils. As a consequence there may well be differences that need to be acknowledged. These will be explored through the course of this section. Mezirow continues by explaining that transformation occurs in the way that the student views and responds to the knowledge that is gained. This requires more commitment and attentiveness than the learning required for facts and knowledge. As explored in Chapter 2, many pedagogies within RE start with concrete examples and from the experience of the learner, developing more complex and critical aspects as the pupil gets older. Mezirow (1997) acknowledges that transformative learning requires a different form of education commonly associated with children (p. 10) in

that it requires new information to ‘be incorporated by the learner into an already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings and disposition’ (p. 10). As such it needs to be acknowledged that transformative learning may not be possible for younger pupils in terms of their cognitive development. Whereas older pupils at Key Stage Two, Three and Four are able to be reflective and critical in their thinking which Mezirow (1997) contends ‘is key to transforming one’s taken-for-granted frame of reference an indispensable dimension of learning for adapting to change’ and critical for transformation to take place (p. 9). Mezirow argues that a key idea within transformative learning is to enable active engagement to take place in learners’ lives. Types of learning that support this process as outlined by Mezirow include: reflective thought, imaginative problem posing and, participatory and interactive activities. As Mezirow (1997) exemplifies: ‘[t]he key idea is to help the learners actively engage the concepts presented in the context of their own lives’, (p. 10). As a result, where learning is transformative, a pupil may have their perspective changed or affirmed in response to the content being taught. Certain assumptions may be challenged or values changed in response to this experience. This can be seen with more complexity when dealing with pupils rather than adult learners, in terms of associated safeguarding aspects of this process. As previously discussed, all learning to a certain extent involves change and the adjusting of one’s position in relation and response to what has been learned. Within this perspective there are noticeable connections with the previous discussion on the importance of relevance in learning and as such, engagement. Transformative learning is intrinsically more engaging since it immerses the pupil emotionally and cognitively.

Although it must be acknowledged that the significant transformations as a result of this type of learning are rare, in the following discussion, I will be referring to a slightly diluted version of the concept. Such learning experiences enable a pupil to engage at a deeper level because they are absorbed in the approach and content, and are affected in response to what they have learned. There are elements of this transformative process in the ‘Learning From’ attainment target in RE, in that a pupil is required to attend to the information presented and respond to it. This may result in responses from the rejection of the material presented through a critical or negative response to the connection being ignited leading to an embracing of an idea or concept. At the heart of this type of learning is an aspiration to develop pupils in a holistic manner, not just as empty vessels that need to be filled with facts or knowledge. Mindful that such a transformation can be powerful, King (2003) cautions of the responsibility that should accompany learning that is transformative. Although it is important to point out that this type of learning is not aiming to make a pupil religious or to challenge a pupil’s religious belief in that manner. However it must be acknowledged that pupils may be challenged as part of this process, there is the expectation that through this attainment target pupils will learn from what they are learning about. This may be in reference to discussion skills, critical evaluation, responses to a particular belief being discussed, challenge to their previously held views and a chance for the pupil to defend their own values in response to what is being taught. This may lead the pupil to do nothing in response to this experience or it may lead the pupil to actively respond.

O’Grady’s (2008) action research in RE can be seen as an example of this practice. O’Grady engaged pupils in critiquing schemes of work and devising questions and tasks. Reflecting on his research, O’Grady comments on the importance of dialogue as being significant to

the motivation of pupils, within which pupils' responses and reflections were equal to that of the religious content. O'Grady also witnessed that pupils were more easily engaged in active methods and 'real-life' situations. Mezirow (1997) contends that this is key to transformative learning (p. 10; Wintersgill, 2017). Furthermore, O'Grady (2008) observed that 'personal significance was identified as the topic's central category of motivation' which acted as 'an effective bridge between the religious content and the pupils' life-worlds' (p. 369). As such, O'Grady (2008) concludes: '[t]he extent to which learning tasks have personal and social meaning makes the difference between disaffection and engagement' (p. 363). As this research demonstrates, the significance of active strategies and relating the content to pupils' lives, enables a deeper level of engagement to take place. As Mezirow (1997, p. 10) iterates, a key idea within transformative learning is to enable active engagement in learners' lives. Transformative learning in this sense engages the pupil to a degree that the pupil's life is altered in some way. There is the potential for this to take place in each learning encounter, depending on the topic and relation with the pupil. There is potential for learning to be transformative and therefore engaging. Interestingly, the 2007 syllabus aims to develop pupils similarly in a cognitive, affective and conative manner (BCC, 2007, p. 5). Thus the syllabus builds on the additive learning through the cognitive focus, but goes further in engaging pupils on both affectively and conatively. This is achieved through the emphasis on the first of the attainment targets; learning from faith, and the strategy of the dispositions in engaging pupils with content, through which more transformative learning takes place. Mezirow's (1997) work cannot be applied completely to the 2007 syllabus in explaining how pupils engage because of the cognitive limitations of younger pupils in not being able to practice the skills required in transformative learning.

However there are many points of congruence between the concept of transformative learning and the critical, reflective and conative skills outlined within the dispositional approach. As such I contend that the 2007 syllabus lends itself to the concept and practice of transformative learning and as such the engagement of pupils in RE.

Another aspect of learning that has an affect on whether learning is engaging and to what degree, is the type of curricula offered. In the next section I will discuss how aspects of both subject-led and child-centred curricula can have an impact on engagement.

4.3.5. Subject-Centred and Child-Centred Learning

In this section I will examine whether certain types of curricula are more conducive to engagement than others. It is not my intention to advocate one type above another, but to give an overview of each curriculum. It must be acknowledged that the dispositional approach as a syllabus is prescribing content and therefore is clearly subject based, however, I want to explore whether as a subject, an approach can also attend to the ‘child’ within the curriculum.

4.3.6. Subject-Centred

In a subject-centred curriculum the demands, aims and values of that particular subject are paramount. As part of this, certain skills and competencies may also need to be developed and reached by stipulated ages. The curriculum is set around these demands and there is set content that very often needs to be covered. Within Literacy, for example, different genres of writing are taught at different ages as being suitable for pupils to practice and develop their own writing at this level. This is also true of RE, the topics that were chosen would need to be carefully considered, although ethical topics may be taught to Key Stage One

pupils, for example, discussion on abortion would not be suitable, a debate about breaking rules would be deemed appropriate.

Within a subject-centred curriculum, as the name suggests, the aims and content are paramount. The content and skills within this curriculum have been decided as being crucial. For example, the introduction of teaching coding within ICT to primary school pupils is a result of requiring a higher level of competency in these skills in order to meet the demands of industry. Similarly, parts of the literacy and the English curriculum are taught so that pupils will have these skills after leaving school. Many examples in different areas of the curriculum could be cited, however, one argument states that the subject centred aspect of the curriculum drives skills and content to meet the needs of society. Another line of argument advocates a subject-based approach in terms of the richer and fuller lives that pupils will have as a consequence of being recipients of this knowledge. According to the latter perspective, there is not an ulterior motive for pupils gaining knowledge and skills, other than it is to their benefit to be in receipt of it.

According to this type of curriculum, pupils need to see the benefits of gaining skills and knowledge. Some pupils may be interested in the content of Geography lessons and may enjoy that subject. Other pupils may not be so interested in the intrinsic nature and enjoyment of Geography, but know that they need to gain this knowledge in order to be able to answer examination questions and consequently gain a qualification. In the latter example the extrinsic value of the subject becomes important for engagement. This extrinsic value may become more prevalent at Key Stages where examinations are taken, but this line of argument also applies to younger pupils. If pupils, for whatever reason, do not 'buy into' the

skills or content on offer, they can become disinterested or disengaged with that particular subject or on a larger scale with education. Dearden (1968); one of the main proponents of subject-led curriculum argues: '[c]hildren like everyone else, can plainly see the point of something, still find it a bore and be grateful for any devices by means of which the teacher can enliven this part of the proceedings', (p. 23). I contend that in some cases, pupils may not be able to see the point of learning something in particular, unless the relevance to their lives is made apparent.

The issues of engagement as previously stated are a multi-layered. There may not be one factor that causes a pupil to be disengaged. However, the issue can be compounded when a pupil is in receipt of a curriculum that is seen as irrelevant to them and other factors are taken into account, such as the pupil's home background and lack of educational aspiration (Wells, 2009). As such, a pupil is seen as being alienated from their learning since they cannot see a connection to it nor see how they can benefit from it. Thus although the subject based curriculum has many advantages, it may fail to serve the needs of all pupils. Darling (1994) reinforces this view when stating that in a subject-led curriculum, there is a mismatch between what children want to find out and what teachers think children might want to learn. Furthermore, the issues children want to find out may not necessarily be categorised into school subjects. This could consequently lead to a jarring of pupil interest with the subject knowledge. Holt (1965, p. 171) reinforces this perspective when referring to children learning what they most want to know rather than what adults think they ought to know, as being more motivating.

As RE is a subject it must therefore be party to the advantages and disadvantages levied at a subject-based approach. Within RE these concerns originate from the type of content on offer and how this is presented. For some pupils being introduced to 'religion' per se is enough to cause disengagement. Encountering religion without so much of a 'pedagogical warm up' in order to access this content leaves some pupils with only one course of response to disengage. For other pupils a particular religion may be the cause of the engagement or disengagement. Some pupils may not be interested in certain topics prompting such reactions as: 'Oh not Christmas again' and 'Why do we have to look at their festival?' For these pupils the starting point of the subject or topic causes their disengagement. In this manner I would argue that a purely subject-based curriculum, for some pupils, does not facilitate their engagement but actually impedes it and, in some cases may cause active disengagement. However, one must also acknowledge that the converse of this is also true. RE as a subject can respond to the interests of pupils. Whereas Grimmitt (1987) is renowned for advocating the content of religions as being an instrumental for the development of the pupil, Wright (2000 and 2010) sees the RE curriculum as contributing to pupils' religious literacy and the ability to critically evaluate. In order for RE to be effective, pupils need to engage, this cannot take place without pupils' enfranchisement of their learning, without pupils having a shared interest in what they are learning about and from. For this to take place pupils' concerns need to be met. Within the teaching of content and skills there needs to be balance so that there are opportunities to take into account pupils' needs and interests, as part of good teaching, in order to enhance engagement.

Throughout this latter discussion there are still echoes of Loukes' (1961) study on 'Teenage Religion', an empirical study of pupils in their last year at school discussing religion

(Christianity). The study concludes that Christianity in Religious Instruction lessons should be relevant for the pupil making sense of their human condition. Loukes (1961, p. 105) stated that if Christianity was to be made relevant to the life of the teenager it must be in dialogue with the problems that a teenager faces and illuminate meaning and hope into a possible solution. Loukes (1961) stated that, '[i]f the work is well done, the young adult will take into his new life something in which he must believe and by which he must stand', (p. 152). This is a study highlighting the need for the subject to be made relevant to the lives of pupils some fifty years ago. I contend it is still a present concern within the RE community. Although the 2007 syllabus is a subject-led approach, the strategies of the dispositions and the attainment target 'learning from' act as aides to enable pupils to interact with content to a greater degree. The dispositions act as common values in which pupils can enter into dialogue and, as previously discussed in the transformative section, the 'learning from' aspect enables a different level of engagement to take place and therefore can be seen to support pupils' engagement in RE.

4.3.7. Child-Centred

Conversely, in a child-centred curriculum, the needs and interests of the child are seen as being of paramount importance. The pupils' interests and needs drive the content and form of the curriculum. This could be curiosity in a story or particular theme of interest, for example, buildings. The curriculum is then shaped around this interest and may result in a numeracy programme looking at scale and dimensions of buildings, places of worship in RE or a geographic slant looking at different types of housing. The recent work of Mainwaring and Wood (2015) exemplifies this approach. Mainwaring and Wood (2015) encouraged reluctant pupils in their writing, taking their needs into account through a multi-sensory

methodology, resulting in increased pupil engagement. To a certain degree, this way of teaching can be seen in the Early Years and Foundation Stage Curriculum. Although developmental bands and areas of learning are stipulated, there is an emphasis on child-initiated learning. This is balanced with adult-led activities where the teacher is seen as the ‘facilitator’ in the learning process. Thus overall, the use of a more subject or child-based approach can be dependent on the age of the pupil, the subject or topic being taught.

Although many other examples could be cited, one can see how a curriculum could be developed to meet the needs and interests of particular pupils. The difficulty then arises in meeting the needs of all in a class of thirty pupils. Notwithstanding this concern, there are many benefits to this approach. As a result of this curriculum, pupils are leading their learning and are engaged because their interests are being met. The learning is kept fresh and evolves in order to respond to the needs of the pupil. However, this undoubtedly will have an impact on teachers’ planning in adapting and resourcing the curriculum in this manner. Although extrinsic motivation may be present, it is the intrinsic needs of the pupil that are being met. Pupils are engaged in their learning since they are involved and interested. Although, as previously acknowledged, there may well be a myriad of other factors involved as to whether the pupil is engaged. Darling (1994) refers to child-centred learning as reaffirming the individual nature of the child in showing respect for who that child is, not what they will become.

A child-centred curriculum is not without its critics. Dearden (1968) critiques child-centred education on two accounts in relation to need and interest. Dearden argues against the view that a child-centred curriculum is solely based on needs, when stating that every type of

curriculum is a ‘needs’ curriculum in the sense that every curriculum includes a particular set of skills, content or structure because it is believed it is needed and would benefit pupils to be taught in a particular manner. The second concern Dearden raises is that of interest. Dearden maintains that ‘interest’ is socially learned and is external to school and the education system. How would a teacher deem one child’s interest to be of more value to that of another? There would need to be an element of discernment to judge whether the interest was suitable or valid educationally. Dearden (1968, p. 24) points out, within a child-centred curriculum there needs to be an element of selection, in terms of what is in the child’s interest rather, than what they are uninterested in. However, one could contend that any curriculum would demand a level of selection and choice in terms of what is taught. The importance is to balance the ‘needs’ of the subject with the ‘interest’ of the child so that engagement takes place to a greater degree. The tension lies in establishing this balance.

One of the key principles of child-centred learning, as reiterated by Darling (1994) is ‘discovery learning’. Through this learning pupils are encouraged to draw their conclusions from their experiences. This is also a key component in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). An example of this type of learning is enabled through a pedagogical approach known as Philosophy for Children (P4C). This is an enquiry-based model that enables pupils to hone their interest in an object, story or area of content by generating a field of enquiry around it. Pupils then discuss which of the questions they will pursue in a community of enquiry and generate possible answers in response (<https://www.sapere.org.uk>). This pedagogical technique is used in a variety of subject areas and shows how content can be shaped and taught through a more child-centred approach. Another key component of this type of learning is ‘[k]nowledge brought to life in contexts where it is seen important’

(Darling, 1994, p. 26). As previously discussed, this very much echoes the ‘learning from’ aspect within RE, where pupils are encouraged to reflect and reassess in response to their learning. I have also highlighted how the 2007 syllabus focuses on the ‘learning from’ attainment target as being the most significant in order to develop pupils, but also in the engagement of pupils. The dispositions, although stipulated as part of a subject based curriculum, act as shared human values enabling pupils’ understanding and interest to be acknowledged (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions). Rather than starting with content that may not have any relevance, the dispositions allow engagement to take place through the shared understanding of the topic being taught. In this manner, a subject led approach can demonstrate how it can be child-focused, rather than child-centred and support the teaching of RE.

In this section I have analysed a number of factors that impact on engagement. I have argued that internal factors such as transformative types of learning and a balance of subject and child-centred curricula can have more of an influence on the external factors that inhibit engagement. Throughout I have illustrated with references to RE and have briefly explored where the 2007 syllabus differs from other pedagogies and how the approach relates to these factors. In the next section I will discuss these concerns more directly and analyse whether this applies when teaching all pupils RE.

4.4. Why is engagement more of a problem in RE?

One of the concerns central to my thesis is that within RE, engagement may also be affected by a pupil’s religious belief or non-belief. In the light of my second research question, as to whether the 2007 syllabus supports pupils’ engagement in RE I am researching into how significant an impact a pupil’s faith or non-faith is on how they engage in RE.

As previously explored with engagement in general, these factors are multifaceted and interrelated with engagement being a cause for concern for both pupils from a background of faith and none. At the centre of these factors is the perceived value of RE. Some aspects are common to pupils from a background of faith and none. Some families may not see the benefit of learning about the religions of others. This may be because they are families of faith in already having a religion, or families of no faith in having an alternative ideology feel there is no need to learn about those of others, as if RE was almost the purveyor of religions. The reason for this perspective maybe twofold. It could be that there is a simple rejection because of not needing to know about others in having a perspective of one's own. Alternatively disengagement could stem from an understanding of RE as bordering on the confessional as still a form of Religious Instruction, as being nurturing in its aim. As such families from a faith and none faith perspective may see this as being the role of family and community, not from a school subject. As such they may reject RE, as being superfluous. For other families from a background of faith or none, learning facts and more concrete aspects of religions are acceptable whereas 'learning from' faith and relating to one's own faith or ideology is not appropriate. In this respect RE is perceived as overstepping the boundary that impacts on the personal nature of faith that is viewed as separate to what is taking place in the classroom. There is also the issue of how your faith or non-religious worldview is portrayed in the classroom. Concerns range from the accuracy of how your perspective is portrayed to how this impacts on you and whether you are called upon to be an expert and contribute your perspective (Moulin, 2011).

In addition for families from a background of no faith, disengagement with RE originates from a wholesale rejection of religion and consequently a devaluing of the subject. RE is not

seen as having any relevance in their lives. The concerns as outlined for both families of faith and those adhering to secular ideologies are multi-layered and are open to the influence of other factors in terms of wider educational engagement. As such this is not a straightforward issue.

4.4.1. How can engagement in RE be supported?

As previously outlined, RE is not beyond the challenges that affect other curriculum areas: some pupils do not like it, some pupils do not see the benefits of the subject for their chosen career, some do not like their teacher and some pupils do not enjoy RE because they are not achieving. As previously outlined the reasons for disengagement are multi-layered and complex in terms of how different factors interact with each other. In addition there are more RE specific concerns: some pupils have a faith and do not see the benefit of learning about others, some pupils from a background of no faith think that the subject has nothing to offer them, some pupils view the subject as ‘easy’, whilst some pupils may not like to debate or discuss their own views. Conversely some pupils of faith see religion as important and therefore enjoy learning about all faiths and non-religious viewpoints, whilst some pupils with no faith are interested in the academic rigour and critical nature of the subject. The issues of engagement are not straightforward.

In terms of research highlighting concerns around disengagement, the project ‘Does RE work?’ (Conroy, *et al.* 2013) revealed the following aspects as teachers’ concerns: disaffection among higher attainers, the effect of learning styles on engagement, the study of methods used to impact on attainment and attitude and pupils’ ownership of their learning. In this manner, how RE is presented to pupils and pedagogies used may have differing levels of impact on pupil engagement. Likewise, extrinsic and intrinsic types of motivation

are not seen as effectively supporting pupil engagement. This leads me to question whether extrinsic and intrinsic engagement is different in faith schools.

The Church of England report, 'Making a Difference?' (2014) states that in 70% of the Church of England Secondary Schools visited, RE was judged to be good or better. The report (2014) continues stating that '[t]hese findings contrast sharply with the figures from the 2013 Ofsted survey of RE in secondary schools without a religious designation, where only 44 of the 90 schools visited (48%) were judged to be good or better' (p. 9). Although this report shows, of the schools inspected, RE provided in Church schools was deemed to be more effective (by 22%), it could be argued that this should be the case in schools with a religious character. The report does not necessarily show that pupils in RE perform better in religious schools because of the religiosity of the pupils, since this is not known. Thus the ethos and culture of the school must support all pupils to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic value of the subject. What is worth noting is that schools with a religious designation would have parents who would be more predisposed to belief and that as stated in the report, RE when effective was deemed to be an important subject alongside others in terms of its academic credence (2014, p. 7). In this manner the intrinsic interest in the subject, from pupils in families more predisposed to faith, consequently impacts on the extrinsic value of the subject, having parity with other academic disciplines. Further to this, Goodall and Ghent's (2014) research documents the positive influence of parental belief and engagement on children's learning. This further demonstrates that pupils' engagement can be supported if there is an intrinsic interest at a family level.

4.4.2. Is RE more relevant to pupils of faith?

It needs to be acknowledged that there are some concerns which affect pupils from a background of faith to a greater degree. These range from not being concerned with learning about other faiths since they have a faith of their own, to how their faith is represented in the classroom. By pupils of faith I refer to pupils who belong to a faith. Although as previously discussed in the opening paragraph of this section, some of these concerns may also be shared by pupils from a background of no faith, from being disinterested in RE to how their perspective is represented in the classroom. Within this category there will be varying degrees of practice and knowledge, but the basis of faith will be present in the life of the pupil. Engaging in RE for most pupils from a background of faith is less of a concern since there is a common point of reference, the pupil of faith has a background in aspects of religion and is able to access similar aspects in the religions being taught. For these pupils there is an intrinsic engagement with the subject because it is part of their life experience. These pupils understand the dialogue and the language of ritual and beliefs and as such, are sometimes more disposed to learn about other traditions in relation to their own. Indeed, Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) refer to pupils of faith as ‘more likely to encounter virtue language in their daily interactions’ (p. 30). For some pupils of faith, the opposite is the case. The concern that some families have from a background of faith is not seeing the relevance of learning about the beliefs of others. For these families, through a misunderstanding of RE; as confessional and nurturing, RE is not needed. The nurture of faith is seen as the responsibility of the family and their own faith community. For some of these pupils, the extrinsic verification of external qualifications is the factor that engages. Although faith per se may not be the overall problem, another concern that some pupils of

faith encounter is as to how their faith is being portrayed in the classroom. The work of Arweck and Nesbitt (2011; Nesbitt, 1998) corroborates this. Researching pupils with mixed faith heritage, they concluded that ‘Religious Education neither stimulated their thinking nor connected to their experience’, (p. 37). Similarly, the work of Moulin (2011) revealed that pupils found their religious traditions stereotyped and simplified in RE lessons. After experiencing intolerance, some students were reluctant to become the spokespeople for their faith, with some even disinclined to reveal their religious identities to their peers. In this case it is the manner in which the subject content of RE is presented that is the cause for concern.

Having acknowledged that some of the factors impinging on engagement are common to all pupils, and whilst understanding that there may be some factors that affect pupils of faith to a greater degree, I will now address the concerns for pupils from a background of no faith.

4.4.3. How can RE be made relevant to pupils from a background of no faith?

In the introductory chapter I referred to pupils from background of no faith in this manner: ‘I am referring to pupils who do not belong to an institutional form of religion and, may state that they do not have a religion; they may or may not have a personal ideology to which they adhere’. This section will explicitly refer to exploring why I think engagement within RE is more of a concern for pupils from a background of no faith. I will analyse the possible causes for disengagement and explore why this is a growing concern. I will cite empirical studies to support these concerns. In my experience of teaching pupils from a background of no faith, it does have an impact on how some pupils engage with the religious beliefs being taught.

It is important to have an understanding of the number of pupils this involves. Although teachers may not necessarily be aware of the faith of the pupils they teach (there is no reason why a pupil needs to declare this and it is irrelevant to performance data purposes). However, it must be noted that the most recent Census information (2011) does not pertain to pupils (under eighteen years of age). Nonetheless, in Chapter 1 I outlined statistics to document the growing trend of people reporting to not being affiliated to a religion. Moreover, as Clarke and Woodhead (2015, p. 16) state this is likely to continue to rise with more people becoming spiritual or non-religious outside of a traditional institution. Clarke and Woodhead (2015. p. 8) claim further that equal numbers of younger people in Britain report having no religion as to those reporting they do have a faith.

When discussing pupils from a background of no faith, I am referring to pupils whose family background does not follow a faith, who do not belong to an institutional form of religion or traditional belief system, or pupils who reject their family's faith. However, I would also contend depending on a pupil's ability that even if a pupil is not part of a faith or traditional belief system, they are still able to hold an ideology and be able to articulate views or rejection of belief. These pupils will still have a perspective in response to the world around them, however, this will not be from a given faith or an institutional religion. For these pupils religion does not play a significant role in their daily lives. However a rejection of religion may play a more prominent role. This accounts for a considerable number of pupils who have never practiced a religion, yet adhere to the secular practice of Christmas each year, but have never practiced the religious celebration of Christmas.

For such pupils, who do not have experience of religion, RE can cause them to disengage with learning. Woodhead (2018) confirms this when stating that many ‘nones’ are indifferent to religion. As such, neither intrinsic nor extrinsic forms of motivation will support engagement since pupils are not interested. Additive forms of learning do not serve to support engagement since there is not the interest in the knowledge in the first instance. As early as 1965, Goldman (1965) writes of how some syllabus authors needed to make endeavours to relate biblical material to children’s experiences. However as Hull (1984, p. 38) states further, not many young people are interested in Parsee death rituals until they have been interested in the problem of death for themselves. Accordingly relevance can be seen to be of paramount importance in order for the concerns of pupils and the concerns of religious traditions to be addressed. The content of faiths whether that be ritual, ceremony, belief or scripture need to be addressed in a wider, common and more accessible manner in order for pupils to see how they relate to their lives. In returning to Hull’s example, if the concept of death were discussed in terms of current affairs or news relative to pupils, it could then be further pursued by exploring questions to which pupils are concerned before then encountering what takes place in Parsee death rituals. In this manner obscure and unrelated religious practice is made meaningful to pupils, by making it relevant to their concerns and lives.

With this in mind, for pupils with a background of no faith their starting point may or may not be different to those of faith. Some pupils may have an interest in others and become engaged by wanting to learn about faith because of their friends or their family background as such that learning about others is viewed with importance. Other pupils have a sense that religion and belief are completely unimportant in their lives and cannot see the relevance in

learning about others, let alone relating it to their own lives. Therefore appealing to the intrinsic motivation of the subject is not appropriate. The starting point of a lesson presenting this pupil with ‘facts’ about faith may not engage and may even possibly further alienate. In this manner, for a disenfranchised pupil, a subject-centred or additive focus will do little to support engagement since the pupil is already disengaged. This may be due to their home background that may be less than supportive of RE. For example, some parents with a background of no faith, as with some parents of faith, refuse to allow their children be part of visits to places of worship or to learn about certain religions. Some pupils are not encouraged to see the relevance of the subject on the basis of skills developed alone. This pupil is not engaged because despite their home background, they feel alienated from the subject and cannot see how it relates to them. If an approach were to open up a shared starting point to overcome the initial disengagement then this would allow for more potential engagement to take place. Jennings (2004) conducted a pupil survey on behalf of Cornwall SACRE in regard to attitudes and beliefs to RE. Although this survey was carried out over ten years ago, and with a very different context to that of Birmingham, Jennings discovered that 73% of pupils completing the survey (totally nearly 4000) claimed not to belong to a religious group and saw RE as having no relevance to their own spiritual or moral development. Jennings claims, as a consequence, teachers may experience difficulties in teaching ‘learning from’ religions since these pupils will find objectives from the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus such as ‘reflect on the meaning’, ‘reflect on the experiences of others’, ‘evaluate responses to ultimate questions’ difficult to consider without a faith background. For other pupils, similar to those in Jennings’ study, learning facts about faiths is engaging but they cannot see the personal relevance of the subject. For these pupils, the

extrinsic motivation of the subject may support their engagement through knowledge acquisition and gaining a qualification. Whereas, the 'learning from' aspect of RE is seen as not being relevant. This type of pupil values the academic discipline of RE but does not see personal relevance.

For some pupils from a background of no faith, the academic discipline of engaging with the beliefs of others in order to state and argue their opposing opinion and to develop critical skills may be one route into RE. Such pupils can be fascinated by religion and want to argue against the practices and rituals being taught. Certain pupils may be from strong atheist or humanist backgrounds where they are brought up to respect the views and beliefs of others, but do not necessarily hold these beliefs themselves. They value the intrinsic nature of RE in that it develops skills and critical thinking which will be of use to them in other subjects. Through RE their curiosity is sated, they are able to discuss, debate and hold an argument, evaluating and reflecting on the beliefs of others. For this pupil, education and RE is important and valued. This pupil is engaged in a different manner, in almost critiquing the subject (Bennett, 2015). Nevertheless, this pupil is engaged.

Within this debate there are still implications for the comments made in Rudge's (1998) article 1998, 'I am nothing' does it matter?' Rudge raises many significant points around the nature and purpose of RE in relation to the engagement of pupils. The comment 'I am nothing' (p. 155), originated from a book scrutiny conducted during an Ofsted inspection. As part of this written work, Rudge comments that pupils described themselves by their religion as 'Muslim' or 'Sikh' however, John with no 'traditional faith background' refers to himself as 'nothing'. I believe that this raises two important points firstly, for Rudge

questioning the experiences that John may have to contribute to RE and secondly, the type of RE that John was in receipt of resulting in responding in such a self deprecating manner, as if he were not part of the ‘classroom dialogue’ in not belonging to a traditional belief system. There needs to be a shared arena for John to encounter faith traditions in a manner that is relevant to him to be able to respond. John is alienated in not being able to learn from religion and see the ‘self in religious terms’ (Baumfield, 2009). This can be seen in relation to the historical significance of RE’s roots as a confessional subject, with John not ‘investing’ in a religious tradition and being unable to see the significance and relevance of the subject. This raises further questions as to the relevance of John’s experiences as a pupil from a background of no faith, what can pupils like John gain from RE if they reciprocate with such a comment as ‘I am nothing’? (Erricker, 2010 and *et al.* 2011; Baumfield, 2012).

Other studies corroborate Rudge’s concerns. Barnes (2007) comments that in order to facilitate ‘true engagement’ hermeneutical means must be found to enable the concerns of pupils and the values of religion to be brought into meaningful dialogue. Thanissaro (2012) measuring pupil attitude towards RE, accounting for pupils’ experience and home faith background, comments, ‘[t]here was significantly more negativity by those of no religion towards RE as compared with those affiliated to a religion’, (p. 208). As previously discussed, RE does not rate highly in extrinsic measures whilst additive learning does little to support engagement in this instance. Conversely, Woodhead (2016b) states that whilst the ‘[n]ones may reject organised religion’, [...] ‘they do not reject all it contains.’ (p. 258; 2012). Thus whilst religion per se may be perceived as unimportant, leading pupils from a background of no faith to state that ‘they are a nothing’, there is not a comprehensive rejection of all aspects of religion. In conclusion, Thanissaro (2012) expresses an anxiety of

utmost significance: '[t]he question of how Religious Education should approach children who have no religion of their own is at the centre of an ongoing debate on the role of RE in the late post-modernity' (p. 208).

In this chapter I have established the context of the importance of engagement for learning. I have outlined what I mean by engagement, and have discussed internal and external factors that impinge upon it. I have outlined types of curriculum that may be more conducive to engagement and have also critiqued these models. I have explored how these factors impact on RE. Finally, I have also discussed whether a pupil's belief or non-belief can be an additional influencing factor as whether they engage in RE to a greater or lesser extent. In the next chapter, research design, I will outline how I consider examining this premise.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the choices made in relation to the research design and methods to explore my research question.

I wanted to ascertain the extent to which teachers think the pedagogical approach of the 2007 syllabus has had an impact on pupil engagement. This could have been considered in a number of ways. In order to address this question I needed to explore what teachers think of the syllabus.

In the second section of this chapter, I will outline the research designs most suited to examining my research question. I decided to use a survey design and adopted a mixed methods approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The reasons for this approach and choice of methods: questionnaires and interviews will be outlined. The advantages and consideration of the disadvantages of this design as a whole and, the individual methods will be discussed and considered.

The third area that I focused on is the selection of participants. The questionnaire was sent to the broadest number of participants, I was able to send the questionnaire to all schools in Birmingham, whereas I selected teachers to interview through the analysis of the questionnaire responses. This selection process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7: Interview Findings.

The fourth section will discuss how both methods were piloted before the main study was carried out. This was to both increase the validity of my research and to check the readability and responses of questions (Robson, 2011). To pilot the questionnaire, both

primary and secondary teachers were involved. This gave the opportunity to check both the understanding of the questions and to feedback any comments about the process in general.

In the fifth and sixth sections, questionnaire and interview designs will be outlined. For questionnaires, I needed to be mindful of which type of question produces which type of answer, and considered these choices in response to the information that I wanted to ascertain (Robson, 2011, p. 245). The interviews that I conducted were semi-structured. This allowed for there to be flexibility in the questions that were asked. Thus although I devised an interview schedule, the questions were able to be adapted during the interview.

The final sections will discuss the issue of validity, analysis of findings and explore the ethical concerns that I needed to consider in order to start my research. I consider which analysis was fit for purpose. Finally, I will discuss the ethical implications of my research. Throughout this discussion I will refer to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2011 guidelines, designed to support researchers to the highest ethical standards. I will outline the actions that I undertook before conducting my research in order to be compliant with the guidelines.

5.2. Research Design

The selection of a research design is based on the nature of the research problem, the researcher's experiences and the audience (Creswell, 2009). There must be logical connections from the research question to the design, following through to the methods selected. Whilst some educational researchers outline research design in terms of quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research (Creswell, 2009), others outline design

in terms of the approaches towards research survey, ethnography and case study (Robson, 2011; Hakim, 2000).

5.2.1. Philosophical Outlook

Creswell (2009, p. 10) writes of research that is not committed to any one philosophical view and how this allows more freedom of choice to use methods that would best meet your research purposes rather than being constrained by a particular philosophical paradigm. This approach opens up many possibilities to be able to use different methods and practices. This allowed the freedom to use the design most suited to my research: that which I felt most suited my experience as a teacher, adviser, researcher and, the audience of my research. A pragmatic approach to my research was flexible and not restrained by a philosophical outlook. Importance is placed upon the methods and design being suitable for my research question and not a perspective that needed to be adopted before embarking on one's research (White, 2009). In this manner I was not be committed to a limiting research paradigm. The 'what' and 'how' of research are the most important factors (Creswell, 2009, p. 10). The practical application of answering my research question is of foremost importance, although I have read work on educational theory as part of this process (Thomas, 2007).

With this in mind the strategy that I adopted was survey design, which provided a description of trends, attitudes and opinions. This concurs with Robson's (2011) comment that the majority of surveys are carried out for descriptive purposes providing information about 'people characteristics' and the relationship between those characteristics.

5.2.2. Designs Considered

Within the area of RE it is important to gain insight into the subtleties of meanings and perspectives conveyed. For this reason an ethnographic approach was considered. This approach would have been more time consuming but it may have offered possibilities for detailed information to be discovered. This approach was adopted in a recently published study on the effectiveness of RE, 'Does RE work?' (Conroy *et al.*, 2013). Writing of his involvement in this project, Lundie (2010) views the research process as being developed alongside and in dialogue with the participants. In terms of my research, the number of people involved and the time frame I am working within make this approach impractical to be replicated by one person.

Another design that could have been carried out is a quasi experiment. This would have involved carrying out a more comparative study and looking at one school using the Birmingham Syllabus, and a similar school in a neighbouring LA with a comparable population and using a different syllabus. Within this design lesson observations, interviews and reviews of material could have been carried out. Comparisons could be made between the two schools on a number of different levels; while this would be a small-scale study, wider reaching implications could be posited. Although there can be seen to be many positive aspects of this design, it is not as suitable for the purposes of my research. My research centres on the Birmingham approach and although contrasting it with another approach or agreed syllabus would be an interest, I wanted to focus my efforts, time and direction on the Birmingham pedagogy.

5.2.3. Choice of methods

The methods that I used were questionnaires and interviews. Traditionally stemming from both quantitative and qualitative approaches this allowed both breadth and depth to the coverage of my question by drawing from the strengths of both methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). I used the results of the questionnaires to aid the planning for the qualitative next steps in my research. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2007) refer to this as ‘sequential triangulation’ (p. 115). Teachers were the focal point of my study as they are the day-to-day practitioners working with pupils in schools. Teachers have an in-depth understanding of their pupils. They are able to track pupils’ learning and understand their needs. What is crucial to my research question is gaining an understanding of teachers’ thoughts of their pupils’ learning in response to the dispositional approach. The pedagogy centres around pupil development and how pupils respond to subject matter presented through dispositions. This is a step removed from what pupils are actually doing in lessons and understanding this interaction would not be possible if directly approaching pupils by interview or questionnaire. It is therefore vital that I spoke with teachers to understand what is happening in their classrooms. As an outside researcher observing or asking pupils about their learning I may have missed some of the nuances of the day-to-day interaction. It is therefore important to gain teachers’ understanding of the process.

I had confidence in teachers’ judgments and their unique understanding of the context and learning in their classrooms. Teachers are better able to understand the context of their school environment and population. This is the key to asking teachers and not basing it purely on literature, academic or pupil opinion.

When I decided on which design to use it is also of importance to consider the audience of the research. Robson (2011, p. 240) maintains surveys provide data that is intelligible for the lay audience to understand. The potential audience for my research is a mixture of teachers, faith communities and academics. As such, clearly presented data is highly important in order to avoid confusion and to be able to present the research in a simple and straightforward manner. A design that allowed this to take place with relative ease should be of utmost consideration. In raising some of the problems commonly encountered when using surveys, Robson (2011) refers to surveys ‘as generating large amounts of data, of often dubious value’ (p. 239). However, Hakim (2000, p. 77) raises one of the attractions of using survey design is its transparency and accountability that are made accessible to other parties.

5.3. Questionnaires

Denscombe (2010) asks a pertinent question: ‘When is it appropriate to use a questionnaire?’ (p. 156), answering: when working with large numbers, when wanting to ascertain straightforward information and when standardised data is needed. These qualifications suited my research for a number of reasons. There are 424 schools in Birmingham, which could have generated a large amount of data, and the majority of information that my study ascertained from questionnaires was fairly straightforward. This method is complementary to the in-depth information that I gained from interviewing a smaller number of teachers in regard to their views. In using both of these different methods diverse aspects gained: large scale data on straightforward information; in-depth information about teachers’ opinions. There are a number of different types of school in Birmingham which can be categorised by age, location, ethnic and religious diversity. Therefore asking standardised questions will be valuable.

Robson (2011) refers to four main types of questionnaire: postal, Internet surveys, face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007) agree with this typology but add 'self-administration' as another way in which questionnaires can be administered as being low in cost and time effective as opposed to an interview survey. This is appealed as a part-time researcher in terms of both being conscious of time and the financial constraints, whilst not wanting to be dismissive of the importance of the data collection phase of the study.

There were many advantages and disadvantages for using each type of questionnaire. Robson, (2011) provides an overview of each type of survey and an evaluation against characteristics such as cost, length and rapport. In order to use this method in a balanced and honest manner I needed to acknowledge these concerns. In terms of planning, cost and organisation, questionnaires are considered relatively easy to arrange. Standardisation of pre-coded answers can assist both the researcher and respondent. However, this can also bias the findings towards the researcher's perspective, whilst in asking questions on sensitive matters (such as religion) answers could become less reliable. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) citing Sudman and Bradburn, state that questionnaires offer little opportunity for the truth in answers to be checked, whereas Robson (2011, p. 240) states that people do respond with a 'social desirability response bias' in order to be seen in a favourable light. I was mindful of this factor.

5.3.1. Types of Questionnaire

For the purpose of this study I decided to use an online questionnaire for a number of reasons. Although Robson (2011, p. 248) cautions against the use of this form of survey with the general population, due to Internet access issues, this is less of a concern with the

teaching profession. There may also have been concerns in terms of the participants' screen size and the loading speed which may impinge on the use of this type of survey; the use of a postal questionnaire would remove this issue. However, the cost of posting 400 questionnaires was one of the deciding factors for using the electronic alternative. Robson (2011, p. 248) advises against an overly long on-line survey that may result in a lower response rate in terms of the time that it takes to complete. Before piloting, I estimated that my questionnaire would take about 30-45 minutes to complete and decided to ask a series of questions to those taking part in the pilot study to elicit such information.

In contrast to postal surveys, on-line surveys are considered to be low in cost to administer and the speed of data collection made this method a favourable option. Unlike postal surveys, where the data would need to be re-entered, on-line survey data can be manipulated into a central database with greater ease. These are advantageous considerations for my study. However, the response rate for an Internet survey is typically lower than that of a paper-based survey, although personal emails to participants have been found to improve response rates (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). It must also be noted that there is far from a consensus of opinion in regard to what constitutes 'a good response rate', with percentages ranging from 60%-75%. Although response rates maybe lower, one would be more likely to obtain complete sets of data since Internet surveys are found to have fewer missing entries. However, it must be noted that these response rates refer to surveys with the general public. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) refer to higher response rates with 'specialised' samples of participants. With a younger teaching population, an on-line questionnaire was seen to be more appealing and in using this as a tool I was being both responsive to my research participants and increasing the integrity of my research. This also

correlates with the presentation of the survey. The layout of the survey on screen needs to be planned and taken into consideration. The more advanced a page layout correlates with reduced completion rates (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This was the reason for keeping my layout uncluttered, clean and simple.

There were various online survey programmes at my disposal. After seeking advice I decided to use Bristol Online Survey. The tool is practical and results can be easily exported to Excel for analysis. Robson (2011, p. 253) raises an important consideration regarding the dichotomy of both producing a questionnaire that your participants will understand what you want from them and are happy to give it, whilst being true to your research and overall intentions of the study. This was seen to be key in the pursuit and integrity of any successful research project. The timing of administering the questionnaire is also significant. Too close to the end of a term and teachers would be likely to ignore it, too near the start of a term and teachers' priorities for the term ahead would be of importance. Robson (2011, p. 239) refers to securing the involvement of participants to be accepted as a likely hazard in almost all surveys. I decided to administer my questionnaire in the spring term hopefully avoiding such pressured times of the school year, particularly in secondary schools with changes to the examination system.

5.4. Interviews

Denscombe (2010) refers to the benefits of using interviews when gaining insight into '[p]eople's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences' [...] 'a method that is attuned to the intricacy of the subject matter' (p. 174; Edwards and Talbot, 1999, p. 100). This method gave an in-depth understanding to my research question complementing the online

questionnaire. Indeed, Robson (2011, p. 279) comments on how interviews lend themselves to be used in combination with other methods.

5.4.1. Types of Interview

Robson (2011) refers to three types of interview: fully structured (pre-determined questions with fixed wording), semi-structured (the interviewer has a guide and checklist of topics which can be modified) and unstructured (the interviewer has a general area of interest but will let it develop). Fully structured interviews do not allow for any spontaneity in the response of the participant. This could prevent important responses from being made and recorded. Unstructured interviews, at the other end of the spectrum, could be seen as too chaotic. With this in mind I decided to use semi-structured interviews that provided a framework for questions but also allowed for the opportunity of more spontaneous responses.

Denscombe (2010) goes further adding to this typology one-to-one interviews, group interviews, focus groups and Internet interviews. I chose to use one-to-one interviews. Whilst focus groups have many beneficial factors, the detrimental aspects of this method were considered too complicated to override whilst not being entirely suited with the aims of my study. Factors such as members of the group being influenced by others, participants being from different settings and pooling responses together could create difficulties. Internet interviews were rejected as being too similar to questionnaires.

In using semi-structured interviews I was able to expand on queries, issues and references. It also allowed the interview to be a more organic process and for the interviewee to reveal information and viewpoints in a less formal arrangement. This type of interview relies on

the interviewer's skills to guide the discussion back to the purpose of the interview and to not allow the interviewee to monopolise with their own agenda. Denscombe's (2010) list of skills includes: being attentive, sensitive to feelings, adept at using probes and non-judgemental. As part of the piloting exercise I was able to write a list of questions with prompts and considerations that supported the interview process. This flexibility is not afforded in a questionnaire involving large numbers of people, and when all of the participants are asked the same questions regardless of their experience.

Kvale (1996) refers to interviews as 'interview conversation' asking the question, '[i]f you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?' (p. 1). Similarly, Ponterotto (2005) refers to the interview process as 'a dialogue', whilst Wertz *et al.* (2011) refer to interviewees as 'original sources of meaning and purpose' (p. 360). These views resonate the practical element that attracted me to this method. Importantly, as the aim of the overall research question focuses on what teachers' think, this reading of interviews alludes to the nuances of using this method (Pring, 2000). Carr and Kemmis (2002, p. 84) also echo this concept referring to people as 'social actors' interpreting society around them, whilst Gunter and Ribbins (2003) refer to this as 'humanistic' in practice.

5.4.2. Practicalities

Another decision I made was how to record the interview process. Dexter (2006, p. 55) refers to the fact that, '[r]apid recording, [making notes] plus a look of interest, is an encouragement' against the use of a recording of the interview which may inhibit the interviewee in some way. Although transcribing the interviews may be costly, having the entire interview transcript would indeed be a valuable research tool. These can also be used as a source of verification by the interviewee since they could be returned for checking and

signing. Silverman (2000, p. 126) validates this point and maintains that the recording of the interview allows the researcher to return to the data in the original form as often as needed. Although Kvale (1996, p. 166) states that transcripts should be used with due care and consideration and viewed as being translations from one language to another. The nuances of what are observed and noted need to be carefully portrayed in the findings so that the tones of that moment are not lost during the writing up and analysis. I decided to record my interviews. The advantages of doing so far outweigh the disadvantages. This enabled a complete record to be made, whilst offsetting the time it will take to transcribe the interviews. As such, the time for this to be completed needed to be factored into the planning of fieldwork. Field notes will also be taken to record key comments and also as a personal preference to aide the interviewing.

Denscombe (2010) comments on the high response rate and validity of interviews since the interviewer can clarify with the participant sitting opposite them. The venue for the interviews will also need to be considered. Whereas it was more time consuming for me to travel to schools and visit teachers individually, participants felt more at ease in their own place of work. Time to co-ordinate and prepare the arrangements for the interview must not be underestimated in order for the interview to go smoothly. Permission of the interviewee will be sought prior to the interview and a consent form signed on the day. The timing of the interviews will need to be carefully considered as time in the school day can be pressured and space can be at a premium in some school settings. Of import, Robson (2011, p. 281) comments that an interview lasting less than thirty minutes is unlikely to provide valuable information. Ideally I wanted the interview to take place in just less than an hour in terms of being a reasonable time to gather valuable information whilst not making unreasonable

demands on the time of the interviewee. If less than an hour, the interview would be able to fit within the most usual timing of a lesson or Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time.

The relationship between how I used both methods also needed to be taken into consideration. I carried out the questionnaires first and then used this data to feed into the interview process. Creswell (2009) refers to this as ‘sequential mixed methods’ (p. 14; Richards, 2013). In this manner large scale generalised results will be ascertained and then more detailed explanation will follow. The questionnaire data revealed certain information that I followed up at interview, whilst my knowledge of individual school settings also supported the choice of interviewees. In this manner both breadth and depth was gained. This led to the triangulation of both sets of results to reveal underlying themes in order to give an overview of the research. As such I needed to consider how I selected the participants for my research.

5.5. Selection of Participants

There are 424 schools in Birmingham to which the questionnaire could have been sent. Catholic schools, however, do not follow the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE. This therefore brings the potential number of schools to 361. This total comprises of 65 Secondary schools, 44 Special schools and 252 Primary schools. This included a mixture of LA schools obliged to teach the syllabus, Diocesan schools that have opted to teach the syllabus and a range of academies which have the choice of whether to teach the syllabus or not.

In terms of Special schools, there is a range within the city, from teaching pupils with autistic disorders to pupils with profound learning difficulties. The questionnaire was sent to all 44 of these schools, acknowledging that some of the questions in regard to teaching methods and pupil response to the teaching of RE will not be able to be answered by all teachers in regard to pupils' aptitudes. The questionnaire was sent to primary school RE coordinators. The majority of these teachers are non-specialists and this will have a bearing on what questions are asked.

In sending the questionnaires out to 361 schools I asked the widest possible number of participants available to me. There was no sampling as part of my research. I asked the whole population, all co-ordinators of RE in primary and specials schools and heads of department in secondary schools.

In terms of interviews I decided to interview twenty teachers since I did not need to gain in-depth information on a large scale. I interviewed 'key players' (Denscombe, 2010). This aspect of my research is not about interviewing a representative sample so that I can draw some generalisable conclusions and percentage responses from the participants interviewed; I wanted to focus on gaining quality first hand detailed insight into professionals' opinions. As part of 'sequential triangulation' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2007, p. 115) the information that I gained from teachers' questionnaires guided me as to the selection of interview participants. One of the main reasons for selecting teachers for interview was to further explore comments that they had made in their questionnaire responses. The interesting comments that I followed up were mainly in three areas. Firstly there were responses from teachers stating that the dispositional approach was engaging their pupils. In

terms of my research questions it was important to have the opportunity to further explore these views. Secondly, conversely, teachers voiced criticisms of the syllabus; I wanted to find out more about their reasons for this opposition. Thirdly, some teachers offered a unique perspective that I wanted to explore further. Calling these teachers to interview gave the opportunity to discuss these views at length. Where several teachers had responded in a similar manner it was important to examine themes. This would not be a representative sample of teachers being chosen for interview, but an exploration of themes expressed by teachers in their questionnaires. As well as following up comments made in the questionnaires, I also considered including a variety of teachers with differing qualifications, type of schools, experiences of teaching and experiences of the 2007 syllabus, as well as personal details although ultimately the interviewees chosen will be part of an unrepresentative sample. Another manner in which I was able to select the interview participants was through my individual knowledge of schools. Selection of questionnaire participants and of interviewees will also be discussed at the start of Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

Both methods were piloted before the main studies were carried out. This both increases the validity of my research and also allows the readability and responses of questions to be verified.

5.6. Pilot

5.6.1. Questionnaires

In order to pilot my questionnaires I asked both primary and secondary teachers, 5 in total. Before the questionnaire went on-line the teachers were emailed a copy of the questionnaire to complete electronically, resave and return (Appendix 4: Pilot Survey Primary and

Special). The pilot study revealed that teachers responded answering questions in the manner for which I intended: ticks when needed, Likert scales answered in the correct manner and on the whole ranking questions answered according to the rubric given. The questions and readability of the questionnaire were deemed to be good. As a result of the pilot I amended the wording of a few questions, however, major alterations were not needed. The reflections made after the full survey are discussed in Chapter 6: Questionnaire Findings.

5.6.2. Interviews

I trialled the interview schedule with a total of four teachers. Firstly, I conducted interviews with two teachers (Appendix 6: Pilot Interview Schedule). Once the changes and refinements had been made to the original schedule, two further teachers were interviewed. Teachers were chosen because I was working in their schools at the time. I could have asked colleagues and teachers on SACRE to be part of the pilot process since they would understand the nuances of questions. However, this would not have been as realistic or valid as asking teachers at random to test the schedule.

Following the first pilot a few refinements were made but the major change was the introduction of case studies. The updated question presents interviewees with a series of case studies and asks how the interviewee, in response to each ‘pupil’, would support his or her engagement. After this revised schedule was piloted, (Appendix 7: Revised Pilot Interview Schedule) interviewees revealed that they had warmed to the studies and one teacher stated how much she had enjoyed the exercise.

On average the pilot schedule took thirty minutes to complete. This is about the length of time, if not a little shorter than I had anticipated, however in foreseeing the logistics in different schools I know that I had enough time to complete the interviews during the course of one lesson. The interview schedule was reviewed once more in the light of the questionnaires being conducted. A direct question asking what the dispositions are and their intention was added.

5.7. Questionnaire Design Overview

This section does not afford a full discussion of the questions chosen for my questionnaire. This detail is provided in Appendix 5: Questionnaire Design. This current section will give an overview of the structure of my questionnaire and discussion as to the reasons for the design and inclusion of questions (Appendix 9: Primary Survey and Appendix 10: Secondary Survey).

5.8. Designing a Questionnaire

Denscombe (2010) and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) focus on how to devise questions and construct a questionnaire, which questions to use for which purpose and, the use of scaling. The main concern when devising questions was to consider the answers that one is wanting in return. Denscombe (2010) refers to responses falling into two categories ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’. The latter will be suitable for my research into teachers’ views. Robson (2011, p. 245) writes of how questionnaires use largely closed questions, which is certainly the case at the start of my questionnaire.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) refer to the use of ‘anchor statements’ which allow for a degree of discrimination in response. Whilst seeking to acknowledge difficulties, it was

useful for the purposes of my research to use a series of these types of questions. However, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) cite Redline *et al.* reporting this type of question is often ignored, misread or incorrectly completed. Gorard (2003, p. 101) refers to the important consideration of readability. Robson (2011, p. 239) can be seen to concur stating that if questions are incomprehensible or ambiguous, the whole process is rendered a waste of time. Robson (2011) continues with a checklist of avoiding problems in the wording of questions. Most helpfully, keeping language simple, keeping questions short and avoiding leading questions.

Denscombe (2010) refers to the precoding of questions and answers as an advantage allowing for the ‘speedy collation and analysis of data by the researcher’ (p. 169; Robson 2011, p. 266). Denscombe (2010) also states that precoding makes it relatively easy for respondents who have their answers spelt out for them. This only being true of structured and closed questions. I precoded some of my questions in terms of those requiring participants to rank and order statements, in line with Denscombe’s comment. Denscombe (2010, p. 162) likens the designing of a questionnaire to walking on a tightrope, between coverage of vital issues and the questionnaire being brief enough for people to respond to it. This sentiment is also echoed in Robson’s (2011, p. 253) advice; that part of the art of devising a questionnaire is reaching a balance between respondents understanding what you want from them and the questions being meaningful and faithful to your research. Robson also (2011, p. 382) highlights the issue of authenticity. This encompasses such concerns as ensuring the respondents are part of your target population and to check that one is not analysing multiple surveys that have been completed by the same person. In this manner, the dual role of professional and researcher was advantageous in that I had knowledge of the

majority of the RE coordinators in Birmingham and can personalise emails to participants. This further ensures that the correct person received the questionnaire.

I circulated two questionnaires. The secondary questionnaire is different to the ‘primary and special’ questionnaire in that it asks specialist teachers if they have an undergraduate qualification in RE, whether they have a post graduate qualification in RE and the name of their degree. The other questions remain the same for both questionnaires (Appendix 9: Primary Survey and Appendix 10: Secondary Survey).

5.8.1. Section 1: Respondent Details

‘Section 1: Respondent details’ incorporates the use of closed questions, aiming at gaining factual information about the teacher and their school in a succinct manner. The questions cover how long a teacher has been teaching RE, how long the teacher has been co-ordinating RE, whether the teacher has a qualification in RE, whether the teacher has a religious affiliation (and if so to select which one from the list provided, and also to rank how important their religious affiliation is in their life) what type of school does the teacher work in and, the name of the teacher’s school. Whilst only I saw these details, an overview of my participants and their school settings was gained. Individual teachers and settings were anonymised in the findings. However, if themes were found in a certain type of school, teachers could be contacted for the interview to ascertain more qualitative information.

5.8.2. Section 2: RE

The first questions in this section asked teachers about the aims of RE. The question was asked twice; once in reference to the teacher’s own view and secondly, in relation what the teacher thinks are the aims commensurate with the dispositional approach.

The aims listed originate from the SCAA Model Syllabuses for RE (1994a; 1994b; 1994c). I thought it best to use an existing set of aims for a number of reasons, even though they are twenty years old. These five statements from the SCAA Model Syllabuses capture five aims that have recurred in various forms throughout academic discussion, documents from central Government advising local policy and therefore locally agreed syllabuses. Secondly, these aims were used by Astley *et al.* (1997) in their research into aims and methods. Astley *et al.*'s research demonstrates teachers perceive a clear link between aims of the subject and methods used to fulfil these aims. The use of Astley *et al.*'s methods has been crucial to my own questionnaire design.

5.8.3. Section 3: Agreed Syllabus

The next series of questions are about the agreed syllabus and teachers' familiarity with the approach. I expected there to be a range of responses. The next question asked teachers about the methods that they use to teach RE, for example: studying religious festivals, observing film clips of religious activities and studying religions through a thematic approach. The list of 27 teaching methods was taken from Astley *et al.* (1997). Astley *et al.*'s list is quite extensive in listing 27 methods, I felt that it was important to use it in its entirety.

The subsequent group of questions contains a number of statements about RE and the 2007 syllabus, for example: 'Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions' and 'The dispositions do not change the teaching of Religious Education'. I thought that it was important to have statements phrased in both a negative and positive manner as good practice. The 'negative' comments also reflect some of the criticism levelled at the Birmingham approach and these also needed to be taken into consideration.

In presenting the statements in both a positive and negative light I was able to keep teachers thinking and responding in a fresh way rather than responding in a nonchalant manner and ticking all of the boxes in a similar fashion down one side of the Likert scale. The final question applicable to all teachers gave the opportunity to comment on anything about RE and or the syllabus that they have previously not had the chance to do. Teachers took that opportunity to comment on issues that they found were important, that I did not ask.

The final section only applied to teachers who have taught RE according a different agreed syllabus to Birmingham 2007; asking whether the Birmingham approach has influenced the way that the teacher thinks about RE; the methods that the teacher uses; and, how pupils from a background of no faith have responded to the teaching of RE through the introduction of the dispositions. This asked teachers to compare the engagement of pupils with the 2007 syllabus and other syllabuses. This question was usefully combined with the background information on the type of school and population of where the teacher is working. The final question asked teachers to comment on anything they feel they have been unable to comment on so far as part of the questionnaire. It was important to ask this question again in this final section for the teachers answering in conjunction with experience of teaching a different syllabus. (Appendix 9: Primary and Special Survey; Appendix 10: Secondary Survey; Appendix 11: Questionnaire letter of consent).

5.9. Interview Design Overview

This section will discuss the selection of questions chosen for my interview schedule (Appendix 12: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule). As already discussed in the research design section, the interviews that were conducted were semi-structured. This allowed for

more flexibility in the questions that are asked as part of the interview. As with the previous questionnaire design overview this section will not afford a full discussion of the detail my schedule. This will be provided in Appendix 8: Interview Design. This present section will give an overview of the composition of my interview schedule and discussion as to the reasons for the design.

The participants were selected because of my knowledge of schools or because of teacher's questionnaire responses. The data from the questionnaires triggered the interview selection. Although I referred to particular questions in my schedule, in practice they were asked in a different order or adapted depending on how the interview transpired. This allowed for flexibility in adapting questions depending on a teacher's school setting or their level of expertise. Likewise, if the interview participant was selected because of their response in the questionnaire, I was able to probe further into these responses. This is the benefit of semi-structured interviews.

5.9.1. Background

The first few questions aimed to gain background information and to settle the teacher into the interview. Question 1 asked for the teacher to outline how RE is delivered in their school. This was to get an overview of the structure of RE which can sometimes pertain to the importance of the subject in a school. Question 2 asked the teacher why it is important to teach RE. In this manner the teacher is asked to reflect on the importance of the subject before any reference is made to a specific syllabus or pedagogy. Question 3 asked what are the challenges in teaching RE? Teachers responded referring to their local situation or national challenges to the subject. This further allowed an understanding of both their knowledge and understanding of RE and, the context and status of RE in their school.

5.9.2. Teaching

The forthcoming questions ask about teaching and the practice of RE. Question 4 asks teachers about the methods they use to teach RE. This allowed interviewees to expand on the responses given in the questionnaire and to discuss the reasons for using certain methods. Question 5 asks the teacher to comment on a successful lesson that they have taught. In asking this question I was able to find out the teacher's understanding of what constitutes 'successful' without reference to the Ofsted guidance and criteria. It allowed teachers to expand on the methods referenced in the previous question and introduced the concept of engagement. This is key to my research question and allowed teachers to respond in a more open manner before I asked further questions about the dispositional approach.

5.9.3. The 2007 Syllabus

The following questions were about the syllabus. Question 6 referred to the two attainment targets: Learning From Faith and Learning About Religious Traditions, and asked teachers to comment on what they thought of them. The emphasis on learning from faith is key to the dispositional approach in developing pupils through religious traditions. Question 7 asked teachers to comment about the dispositions. I wanted to ascertain whether teachers understood the approach and the reasons for using the strategy of the dispositions (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions). Further questions were posited after this initial understanding was gained to ask teachers whether the approach works and what they thought about teaching in this manner. Question 8 asked teachers about what most supports engagement; aims of the subject, a particular pedagogy or the day-to-day methods, and if one of these aspects has more gravitas. In essence this question is asking teachers to reflect on their understanding and practice about what supports engagement of their pupils.

Question 9 presents interviewees with a series of case studies on pupil engagement. In Chapter 4 I explored the multi-faceted aspects of engagement and I wanted to extend this understanding into the interview process. The question asked in response to each ‘pupil’ how the interviewee would engage that pupil. The case studies included a pupil disaffected with RE (Billy), a career minded pupil not seeing the benefit of RE (Sunita), a religious pupil whose family does not see the reason for learning about other faiths (Abdul) and a pupil for which learning from faith needs to be made apparent (Sarah).

The final two questions of the interview schedule gave teachers more scope to respond about the dispositional approach, asking if there is anything that they particularly dislike or like about the approach, whether there is anything that they wish to add to their previous comments. Whilst being good practice, this also ensured that teachers had the opportunity to state anything else particular to their teaching and school setting. (Appendix 12: Semi-structured Interview Schedule; Appendix 13: Information letter to head teacher; Appendix 14: Information to Interviewee; Appendix 15: Interviewee letter of consent).

5.10. Validity

Validity also needs to be taken into consideration. There are two types of validity: internal and external.

5.10.1. Internal Validity

In order to contribute to internal validity my questionnaire and interview schedule should be unambiguous and easily answered by the participants. Questions that do not make sense or confuse the participant contribute to weak internal validity. This is why the piloting of research instruments is important in order to check the participants’ understanding of

questions and review the type of responses expected. Internal validity is also high when participants are able to respond in a truthful manner. Occasionally giving the freedom of response by asking an open question can also contribute to a higher internal validity, allowing participants the freedom of choice to respond. As Robson (2011) comments, if interviews and questionnaires are not seen to represent the respondents' true opinions, the internal validity of the research could be considered a problem. Whilst Hakim (2000) views the internal validity of interviews to be strong since people can be interviewed in detail to reflect their accurate experiences.

5.10.2. External Validity

External validity refers to whether your research instruments will be able to give you data that can be used outside of the immediate context of smaller scale research, as to whether they can be generalised to a wider population. This type of validity may be more of a concern when sampling is used. A study would have a high level of external validity if the sample taken matched the rest of the wider population. This is less of a concern for my questionnaire since I sent it to all schools that teach the 2007 Agreed Syllabus. No sampling was involved, however, I also considered whether the participants that responded to my questionnaire were representative of the wider teaching population: were they teachers who were more interested in RE; who took the time to reply; who had encountered problems with the subject and wish to make this known. Thus there still may be a concern in gaining external validity.

External validity could be more of a concern with my second method, interviews. As already stated, with such a detailed and time-consuming instrument I was not be able to offer an interview to all teachers using the syllabus. A selection process was deployed. Participants

for interview were selected for a variety of reasons. Firstly, participants were selected as being representative of the wider population, ensuring higher validity. In this instance my research would be 'protecting' its validity by being able to justify the selection of the sample chosen (Hakim, 2000). Another reason for a participant being selected for interview is because of their responses made in the questionnaire. In this case, the external validity may not be high but the pursuit of a line of enquiry from a qualitative perspective of the research could be seen to outweigh this concern. The final reason for selection for interview was from my knowledge of the school and envisaging that the answers at the interview would be significant from a particular school or teacher. There are valid reasons for this line of direction but may not contribute to external validity.

Another consideration regarding the external validity of my research is whether the study could be widened and be considered true of the larger population. This is difficult in terms of my research regarding an agreed syllabus as it is only currently taught in Birmingham. If the agreed syllabus were taught in another areas of the country, the same methods could be employed and results could be compared. In terms of the process, thinking, design and piloting of the questionnaire and interview schedule, as far as I am able to ascertain, the external validity is as strong as it can be.

Another consideration to be viewed with caution is if I were to seek to generalise from what people write in the questionnaire or say at interview, to assuming this is reflective of what they actually do in practice (Robson, 2011, p. 239). This could be a real concern with many of my questions being concerned with practical aspects of teaching. As Robson (2011) warns: '[t]he lack of relation between attitude and behaviour is notorious', (p. 239).

Triangulating the data of both a questionnaire and interview transcript of a participant allowed me to check for consistency in answers.

5.10.3. Reliability and Replicability

Another aspect of validity considered was the reliability of my research instruments. My questionnaire was carefully considered and included a range of questions: from closed questions asking for straightforward factual answers; scaling questions asking participants to read a statement and rank according to a set number of levels and; fully open questions giving participants a free choice of response. The range of questions and choices within questions will be explored at many stages of the data analysis phase. The importance of reliability of the instruments was also strengthened with ‘triangulation’ in gaining a holistic picture from more than one instrument in order to test my research.

I opted to conduct interviews using a semi-structured model. This had many advantages already outlined and, by its very nature is a flexible and adaptable tool. This, therefore, might not increase the reliability in terms of the schedule being repeated, since a question may be asked in a slightly different manner each time. Replicability is another aspect of validity that needed to be considered. I considered would the same findings be obtained if the study were to be conducted again, by someone else or somewhere else. In order for the study to be strong in this area I ensured that in respect of both of these factors, as far as I can oversee, the data from the research would be similar to that I have conducted. There are some factors that may impinge on this. If the research were to be conducted by another researcher, they may not have the knowledge of local situations and settings, which may affect the data. Another facet of replicability is the interviewer effect. Whether the unknown researcher conducting an interview would get different responses to the adviser asking

questions as part of her research project. I cannot change this factor but need to acknowledge that this could be an aspect that might change if the study were to be repeated.

Some of the concerns with validity can only be acknowledged since some aspects of the research process cannot be changed; other factors can be foreseen and acted upon.

5.11. Data Analysis Methods

There are many purposes for analysis: description, explanation or interpretation (Denscombe, 2010). There were a mixture of these purposes needed for my research. The important factor in analysis is that it is fit for purpose, regardless of the methods being used to gain the information (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). It is also important to consider what will happen with the data from my questionnaires and interview schedules before the analysis stage of the research is reached (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Analysis does not exist in isolation and needs to be seen as extending from the original research intention.

5.11.1. Quantitative Analysis

The data that I reported was a mixture of nominal data (numbers of schools, categories of schools and percentages) and ordinal data (Likert scale results). I was supported in analysing my data through the use of a database. I then had the flexibility to export and manipulate the data in order to look for themes. In terms of data display, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue the better the display, the more researchers are on a reliable route to data analysis. ‘You are what you display’ (p. 11) is the dictum which Miles and Huberman advocate, that a systematic, powerful display contributes towards a more iterative and self-conscious attitude towards their use and understanding. For free response questions I reported the themes that

have emerged, stating what was common for both primary and secondary respondents and where their responses differ. There are also ethical considerations to take into account. I realise that I must report what teachers have stated, even if this information contradicts the intentions of my research. Thomas (2010) refers to not only drawing attention to points of interest in analysis, but also points of ‘trouble’. I have endeavoured to do this as I analysed my data, drawing connections from data that served both my purposes and research question, but also unintended outcomes of my research. I have offered explanations and reasons for possible connections and differences.

5.11.2. Qualitative Analysis

Denscombe (2010) maintains that for interpretivists, the aim of analysis is to provide an account of how things work focusing on terms such as: *how* and *why* things happen, *who* undertook the research, *when* and *where* the study took place, *what* alternatives exist. When writing of qualitative data, Miles and Huberman (1994) promote the isolating of patterns and processes to generate thoughts for the next wave of data collection. This is even more pertinent as that this can inform, illuminate and supplement quantitative data. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that one should be able to gradually elaborate a small set of generalisations from the body of knowledge gained. Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) usefully identify analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction refers to the process by which data is selected, abstracted and even transformed from field notes or transcriptions. There is an emphasis that this is part of the process of analysis since the data is being filtered and selected through the researcher’s decisions regarding codes and the patterns selected. This is important to note in taking care and attention in organising the data

from both sets of methods, whether this be numbers or images (Salkind, 2011). The nature of the data obtained through interviews needed to be appreciated. By interviewing I have gained much deeper and richer information, more than could be gained through questionnaires: opinions, beliefs and anecdotal information was acquired. Mason (2002, p. 64) verifies this when stating that during interview one is not simply 'excavating facts'. Nevertheless, Trochim (2006) warns of the danger of over extensive analysis in which the reader may get lost.

Thirdly, Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to conclusion drawing and verification. This process starts as the data is collated, looking at patterns, explanations and regularities. Miles and Huberman state that the conclusion drawn is only half of the 'story', that conclusions are also verified as the researcher proceeds with the research. I manually analysed my data rather than using one of the packages available (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). This three-stage process is not to be viewed in isolation, it is cyclical and interactive. This can be seen in contrast to quantitative analysis that is associated with being conducted after data collection (Denscombe 2010). The decision to employ two different methods, which work in dialogue with each other, is once again viewed as valuable.

5.12. Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations have been discussed with my supervisor and my research has been approved by the University's Ethical Committee (30.6.14).

Mason (2002) and, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) raise the importance of informed consent during research. I asked for this before questionnaires and interviews were conducted (Appendix: 11: Questionnaire letter of consent, and Appendix 15: Interviewee

letter of consent). Participants were informed as to who will see the findings and how the findings will be reported. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised and participation was clearly made optional. A cover sheet was provided at the start of the questionnaire and before the interview was conducted which outlined the right for the participant to withdraw from the process at any stage, prior to the submission of the thesis (Appendix 13: Letter to head teacher; Appendix 14: Information letter for Interviewees). Participants are reported anonymously, names or revealing details are not recorded in the thesis. Original data has been securely stored throughout the research and will be until the end of the examination process is completed (and for ten years thereafter). Participants were provided with a summary sheet at the end of the research process, thanking them for their involvement and providing an overview of the key findings of the research.

5.12.1. BERA

The BERA 2011 guidelines are designed to support research to the highest ethical standard. The guidelines are advisory but it is hoped that they will be adhered to as ‘a set of principles and advice’ (BERA, 2011, p. 4). The Council hopes that the guidelines will support researchers in ‘weighing up’ all aspects of their research process to reach an ethically acceptable position in which their actions ‘are considered justifiable and sound’ (BERA, 2011, p. 4). A large section of the guidelines are devoted to the responsibilities towards participants, outlining how participants should be treated fairly and sensitively regardless of a certain range of factors. Faith and age are the most pertinent factors in my research regarding pupils’ and religion (the latter is considered by BERA to be especially sensitive). Potential risks to individuals have also been considered. Some of the questions asked may have been considered intrusive in terms of asking teachers about their teaching and their

pupils. The anonymity of participants will hopefully overcome some of this concern. Emphasis is placed on involving participants in the research so that they understand what is taking place at each point in the process. This is an important consideration and one that suits the intentions of my research design. Another aspect that BERA highlights, is to be mindful of the impact of the research on the normal workload of the participants. These considerations have already been discussed in terms of the length of the interview and the time for administering the interviews and questionnaires.

Finally, BERA highlights the responsibility that researchers have in making their results public for the benefit of the research community and all of those involved. The guidelines therefore have more far-reaching implications regarding the development of knowledge, rather than being a checklist of considerations to follow during research.

I was also be mindful of these guidelines when I analysed my findings. In chapters 6 and 7 I will examine the results of my research.

6. FINDINGS: QUESTIONNAIRES

6.1. Introduction

In the course of this chapter I will give an overview of findings from my questionnaires. The aim of this chapter is not to present every response, and to this end I have clustered responses around emerging themes (Booth, Colomb and Williams, 2008). The ensuing discussion will take place in Chapter 8: Discussion.

In the next section I will outline the respondents' details through the information gained in the first section of the questionnaire. Some of these details, as I will highlight, may be of importance throughout the discussion in reference to other questions, since they may shape other responses given by that participant (de Vaus, 2001).

6.2. Questionnaire respondent details

Information about questionnaire respondents and their schools	Number of schools or teachers/Percentage of total number of teachers
Total number of schools in Birmingham	424
Total number of schools teaching the Agreed Syllabus	361
Total number of teachers responding to the questionnaire:	103
Primary teachers	69 (67%)
Secondary teachers	28 (27%)
Special school teachers	6 (6%)

Number of teachers co-ordinating RE:	88 (85%)
Primary/Special	66 (75%)
Secondary	22 (25%)
Number of schools who sent in more than one teacher response:	9 (9%)
Primary/Special	3 (3%)
Secondary	6 (6%)
Number of faith schools:	8
Church of England Primary)	7 (7%)
Islamic (Secondary)	1 (1%)
Number of teachers with specialist training:	36 (35%)
Primary/Special	10 (10%)
Secondary	26 (25%)

Table 6-1 Questionnaire respondent details

There are a total of 424 schools in Birmingham. My questionnaire was sent into 361 schools. The questionnaire was not sent to teachers in Roman Catholic schools, who are not required to follow the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Some teachers in Roman Catholic schools may draw from the syllabus and indeed use the resources produced, but this is not required. From a total number of 361 schools where teachers could respond, 103

teachers, and representing 93 schools, returned the survey (26% of schools where teachers could respond). This included: 6 special school teachers, 69 primary school teachers and 28 secondary school teachers.

Two different questionnaires were devised: a primary and special school survey and a secondary school survey. The difference occurs in subject specific training and Key Stage 3 questions included in the secondary questionnaire. For the purpose of this chapter I will make it clear if I am referring to the primary/special findings or secondary findings alone, and when I am referring to the combined results.

The teachers are from a range of schools: from Church of England primary schools, one form to three form entry primary schools, academies to LA schools, grammar schools, schools with sixth form colleges to single-sex schools. The schools serve many different areas of the city with a range of diverse populations in terms of socio-economic and demographic factors.

Type of school / Years a co-ordinator	Less than a year	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-10 years	Over 10 years	Total
Primary/Special	29	12	17	9	8	75
Secondary	4	0	0	11	13	28

Table 6-2 Number of years as a co-ordinator

Table 6.2: Number of years as a co-ordinator: shows the number of years that the respondents to my survey have been leading the subject in their school.

There are a large number of teachers leading the subject with experience of less than a year.

The APPG on RE (2014) substantiates this when referring to the teachers responding to their

research. The report states that over 80% of the schools had a regular turnover of RE leaders, ‘most holding post for between one and three years’ (p. 11). Teachers in the first years of the profession, and relatively new to RE, may respond to questions differently and this may have a bearing on other answers throughout the questionnaire.

Secondary teachers were asked a series of questions in regard to their training. These questions referred to qualifications in RE: with 68% of the teachers studying RS or Theology as part of their undergraduate qualification, and 86% having a teaching qualification in RE. This is a marked difference to the figures provided by the APPG (2014, p. 4) who reported over 50% of teachers of RE in secondary schools have no qualification in the subject.

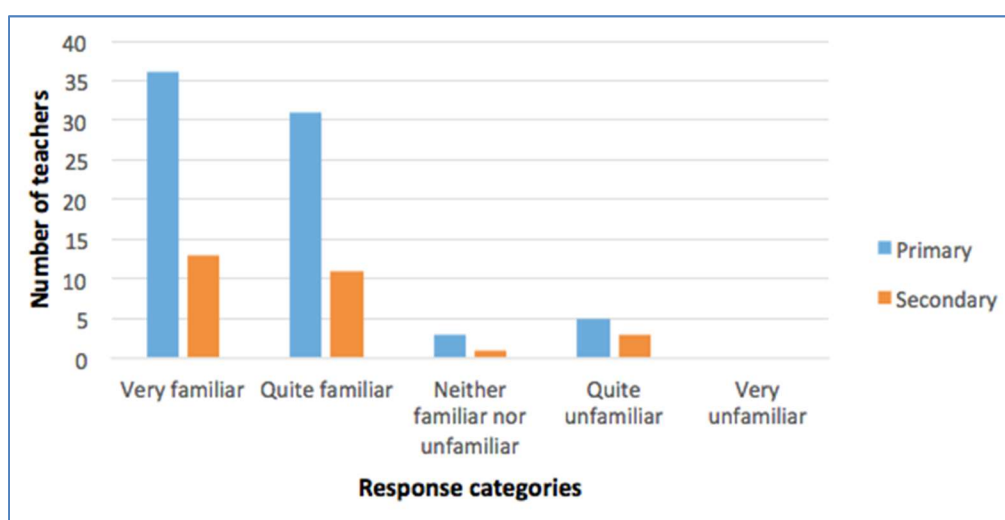


Figure 6-1 Primary and secondary teachers’ familiarity with the Birmingham approach of teaching through the dispositions

Figure 6.1 shows teachers’ responses as to how familiar they are with the Birmingham approach to teaching through the dispositions.

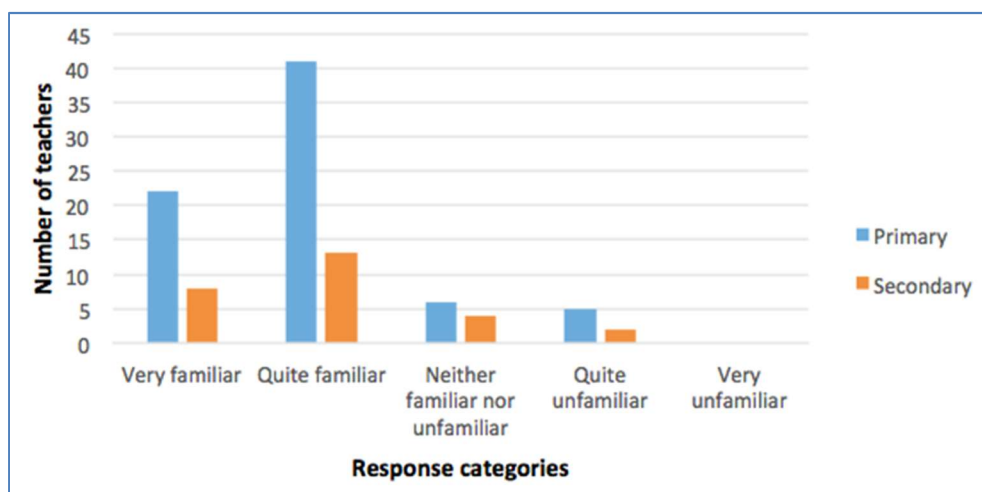


Figure 6-2 Primary and secondary teachers' familiarity with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed syllabus

Figure 6.2 shows teachers' responses as to how familiar they are with the Birmingham syllabus. Five responses were available to select. There are two bars for each of the responses showing primary and secondary teacher responses separately. Whereas 22 primary/special teachers and 8 secondary teachers state that they are 'very familiar' with the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, no teacher selected that they were 'very unfamiliar' with the syllabus.

Overall teachers were more sure in stating that they were 'very familiar' with the approach of the dispositions than the actual syllabus (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions and Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus). More teachers were comfortable in selecting 'quite' rather than the 'very' category. In the 'neither familiar nor unfamiliar' category there were double the number of teachers that selected this category for the syllabus than the dispositional approach. It is interesting to note that no teacher selected 'very unfamiliar' in response to either question. The results give me confidence that the vast

majority of the teachers answering my questionnaire have stated they have knowledge about the dispositions and how the approach works pedagogically.

64% of all teachers had taught another syllabus. These teachers will have some background and understanding of teaching RE from another syllabus or another pedagogical approach, even if that was the previous Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. This is of import since it means that the vast majority of teachers were able to answer the questionnaire in the context of 2007 syllabus with prior knowledge of a different approach to RE.

Another question asked about teacher's religious affiliation, and how important this is to their life. 65% of the teachers stated that they had a religious affiliation, of these 72% confirmed that their religious affiliation or worldview was 'very important' or 'quite important' in their life.

Religion/Percentage of Respondents	Primary	Secondary	Total
Atheism	5%	0%	4%
Christianity	50%	44%	49%
Hinduism	1%	0%	1%
Humanism	1%	0%	1%
Islam	15%	15%	15%
Sikhism	8%	4%	7%
None	16%	26%	19%
Other	3%	11%	5%

Table 6-3 Religious affiliation

Table 6.3 shows the respondents' religious affiliation from a range of eight religious groups. Nearly half of the respondents stated that they were Christian whether they were primary or secondary teachers. 15% of both primary and secondary teachers stated that they were Muslim. Taking into account that more primary teachers answered my questionnaire, there

were more primary teachers to secondary teachers stating that they were Atheist (P -5%, S - 0%) and also more Sikh primary teachers (P - 8%, S - 4%). However there were more secondary teachers who stated that they were 'none' (S - 26%, P - 16%) and also more secondary teachers stating that they were 'other' (S - 11%, P - 3%).

6.3. Aims of RE

As part of my exploration into the pedagogy of the 2007 syllabus I wanted to find out whether the aims of the syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE. During the course of the questionnaire teachers were asked about aims for the subject twice, once in relation to what they personally thought was important and secondly, what was their opinion of the aims that are most important in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

However, problems were encountered as to how the survey mechanism allowed teachers to record their responses. I had asked what is the highest, most important aim, and, what is the lowest, least important aim. I had stipulated that teachers needed to record their answers using the numbers 1 to 5 in order to rank their responses. What some teachers actually answered was 'what is the importance of the aim?' In these cases the responses I got were not a ranked 1 to 5, but sometimes, for example in the case of one teacher a series of '1s' as a response, indicating that all of the aims were of equal prominent importance. As such, out of 103 teachers, 46 ranked both questions correctly and answered as I had stipulated. I will now present the responses and analyse the data of these teachers. In effect I am presenting a sample size of 46 teachers. However, if I were to incorporate the other teachers' incorrect rankings, the data presented would be nonsensical.

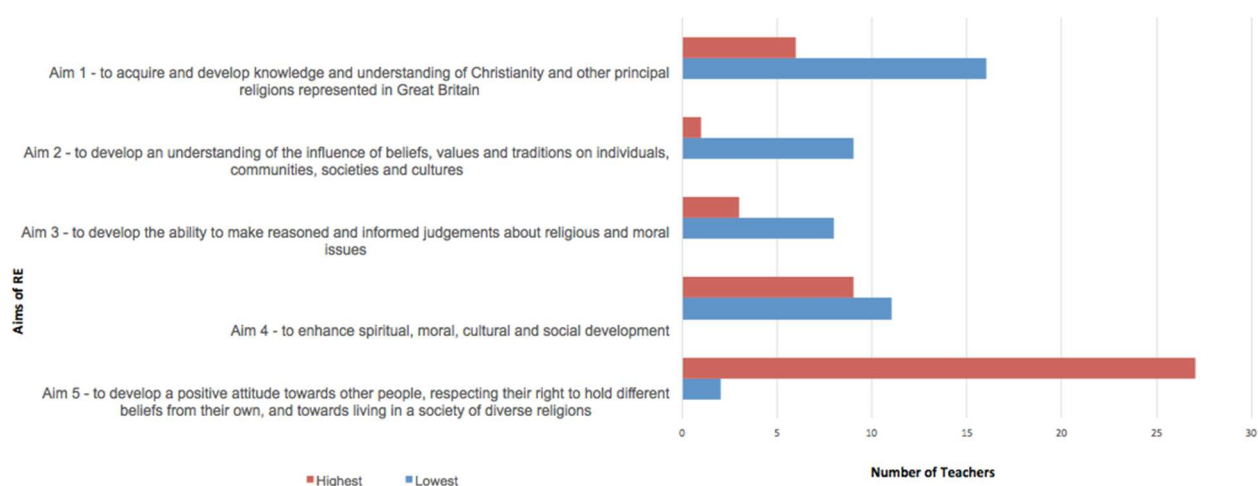


Figure 6-3 Teachers' personal highest and lowest ranked aims for Religious Education (correct responses of primary and secondary teachers combined)

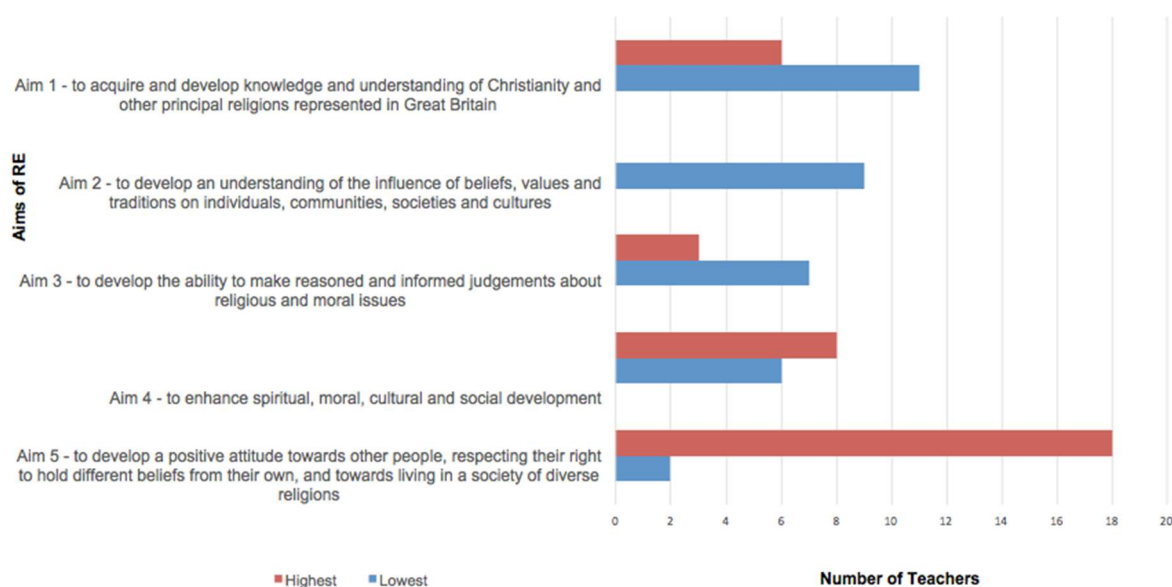


Figure 6-4 Teachers' personal highest and lowest ranked aims for Religious Education (correct responses of primary teachers)

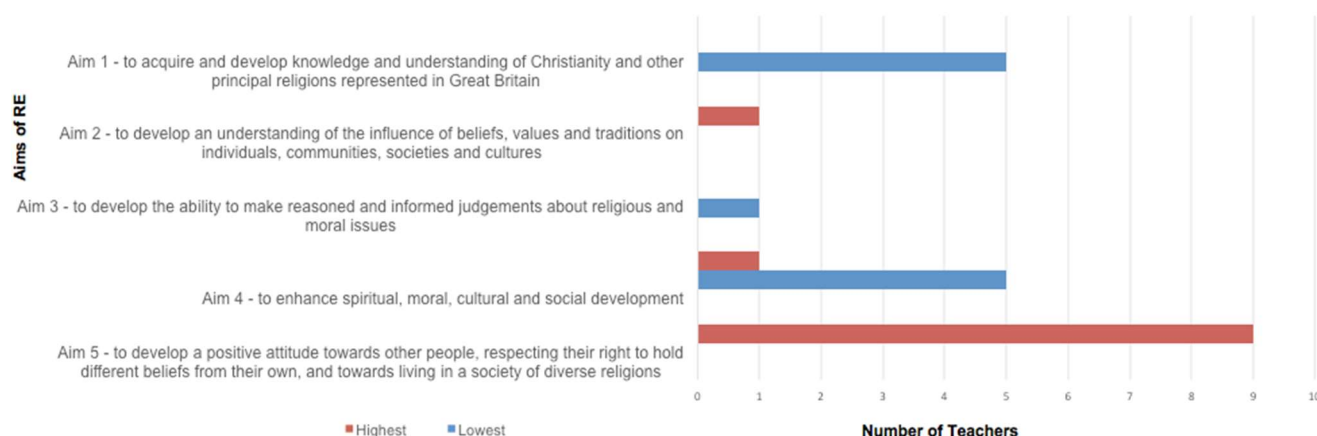


Figure 6-5 Teachers’ personal highest and lowest ranked aims for Religious Education (correct responses of secondary teachers)

Figure 6.3 shows primary and secondary teachers’ personally ranked aims for RE, it records the highest ranking aims and the lowest ranking aims. Figure 6.4 shows the equivalent data for primary teachers and Figure 6.5 shows the corresponding data for secondary teachers. Aim 5 is by far the highest ranked aim for both primary and secondary teachers respectively. Aim 5 focuses on the development of positive attitude and respect towards others. As the emphasis on fundamental British values grows more prominent on school agendas, this aim may be seen as akin to achieving some of the same intentions and therefore a reason why this is seen as important to teachers. The second highest ranked aim for primary teachers (see Figure 6.4) is Aim 4, which extols the SMSC development of pupils. Both aims 4 and 5 can be seen as being of importance to teachers due to being referenced in the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2012), and as such, by some pertinent to an individual’s role as a teacher. Whereas Aim 2 and Aim 3 were jointly ranked highest aims for secondary teachers (see Figure 6.5). These aims can be seen as exemplifying skills needed in GCSE specifications and as such will be more significant to secondary teachers. The aim viewed as personally least important for combined responses was Aim 1; developing knowledge and

understanding of religions. Additionally this was closely followed by two other aims as least important for primary teachers. Aims 2 and 3 incorporate an understanding of the 'influence' of religions and the ability to support pupils to make 'reasoned and informed judgements'. These aims may be interpreted as not being within the role of the primary teacher, alluding to a more confessional aspect of the subject. Teachers may question whether it is within their remit to support pupils to understand the 'influence' of different faiths. For primary teachers, the choice of these aims as having less importance may also reflect teachers' views as not having the skills or confidence to achieve these aims as non-specialists (Broadbent, 2008) therefore not selecting them as important to them personally. Another aim ranked with low importance for secondary teachers was Aim 4 which was also the second highest ranked aim overall. As specialists, some secondary teachers may view the softer and less tangible aims of SMSC (Aim 4) as not being part of their role in teaching an academic subject. No primary teachers selected Aim 2 as a highest ranked aim, whereas no secondary teachers selected aim 1 or aim 3 as a highest ranked aim. Overall the highest ranked aim (Aim 5) and the lowest ranked aim (Aim 1) were selected by both phases of teachers in higher numbers.

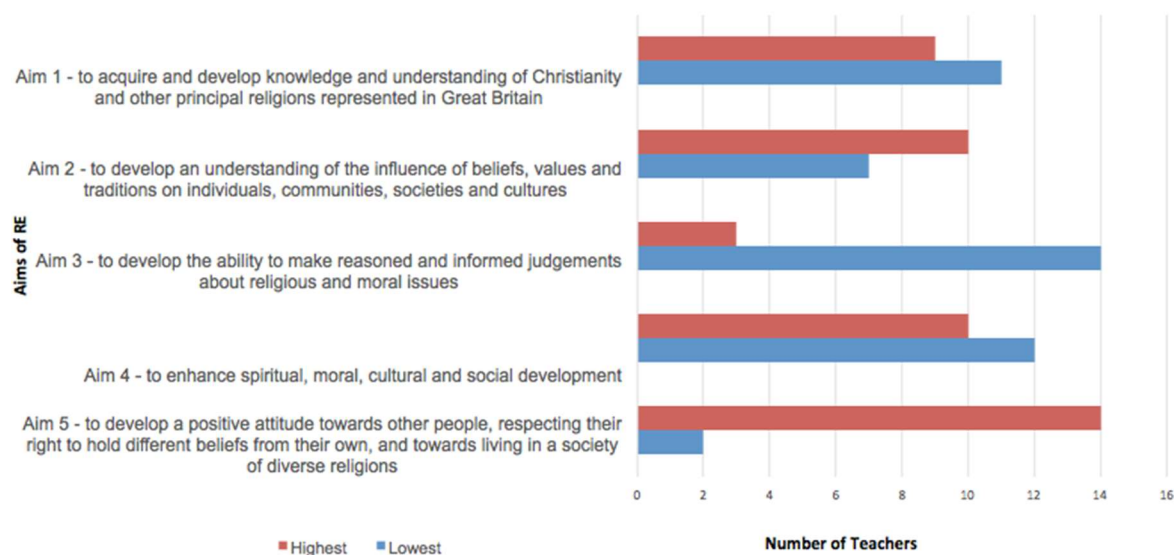


Figure 6-6 Teachers' opinion of the aims that are most important in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, ranked highest and lowest (correct responses of primary and secondary teachers combined)

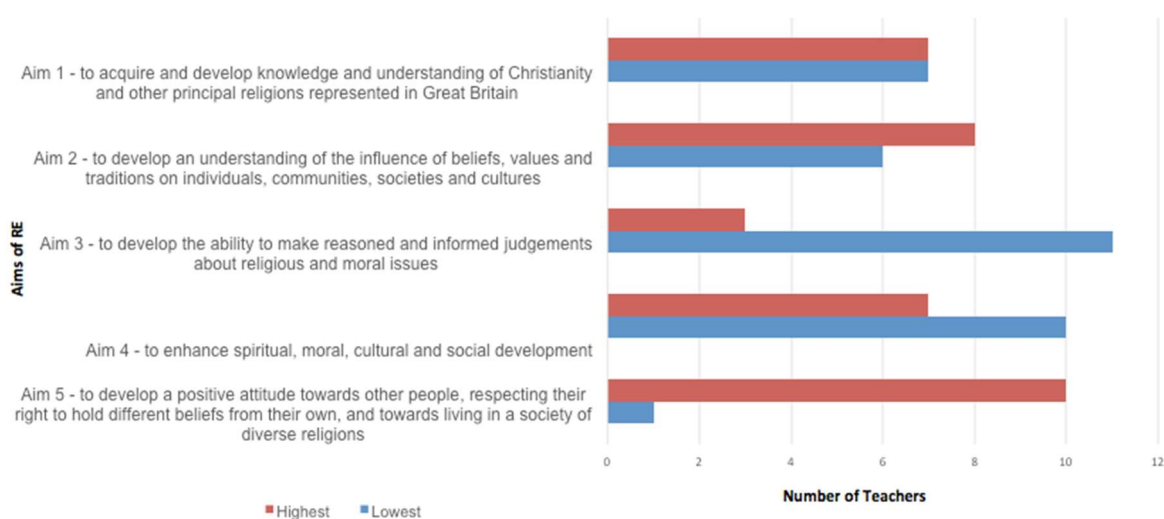


Figure 6-7 Teachers' opinion of the aims that are most important in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, ranked highest and lowest (correct responses of primary teachers)

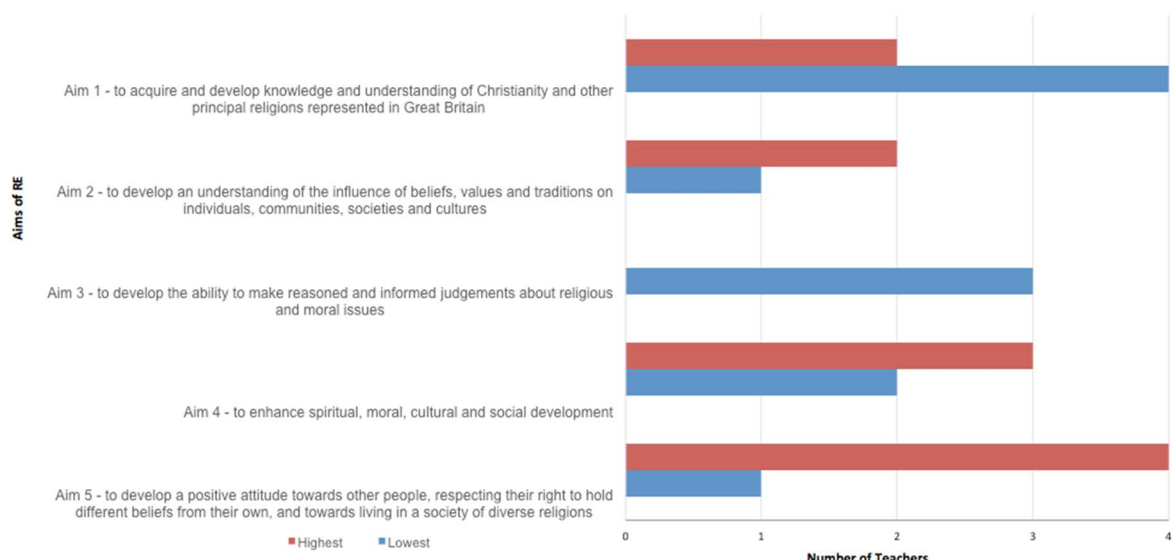


Figure 6-8 Teachers’ opinion of the aims that are most important in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, ranked highest and lowest (correct responses of secondary teachers)

Figure 6.6 shows primary and secondary teachers’ opinions of the aims that are most important in the 2007 syllabus: it records the highest ranking aims and the lowest ranking aims. Overall Aim 5 was viewed as being the most important aim by both primary and secondary teachers in higher numbers (See Figures 6.7 and 6.8). Primary and secondary teachers’ ranking of the aims as most important for the syllabus is more evenly distributed than the personal ranking of these aims (See Figure 6.6). This could mean that teachers are not on the whole clear (apart from those selecting aim 5) which aim is most akin to that of the syllabus. Conversely, it could mean that teachers think that there are a range of aims that are important in the syllabus, that the syllabus addresses a multitude of aims through its approach, or, that one overall aim does not particularly stand out. The least important aim

for the syllabus as ranked by the highest number of primary teachers is aim 3 (see Figure 6.7). This suggests primary teachers do not see that the syllabus' aims support a pupil's ability to develop, make reasoned and informed judgements to a greater degree; this is countered by a higher number of primary teachers viewing the syllabus' aims supporting the development of attitudes and respect of others (Aim 5). This again may be due to the prominence of fundamental British values permeating through all aspects of the school curriculum and beyond, and as such primary teachers perceiving it to be of utmost importance in RE too.

Secondary teachers (see Figure 6.8) ranked Aim 1 (acquiring and developing knowledge) as one of the aims least applicable to the syllabus. In using religious traditions as vehicles by which the dispositions are taught, it is reasonable to see how more specialist teachers may have drawn the conclusion that knowledge of religions per se is not of importance in the 2007 syllabus. Likewise secondary teachers did not select Aim 3 as a highest aim as delivered by the syllabus.

Interestingly, there is agreement with what primary and secondary teachers ranked as personally most important and what primary and secondary teachers ranked as being most important for the syllabus, with the highest number of teachers ranking aim 5 in this category. It may be that this aim reflects a current mood in the light of negative media coverage of certain aspects of faiths, terrorist incidents and the promotion of fundamental British values; there is a need for respect and the development of an understanding of one another. Anecdotally, when Felderhof (2017), drafting secretary of the syllabus, was asked which aims were more commensurate with the 2007 syllabus, he responded by stating Aim

4 and Aim 5. These two aims did receive the highest number of rankings by both primary and secondary teachers, personally and for the syllabus.

I also asked teachers about their views on RE and the syllabus. A free response question asked teachers whether the 2007 approach had changed the way teachers thought about RE. There were a number of differing responses to this question, with some teachers responding that it had not changed their thinking, others stated that their thinking had always been in line with the syllabus' aims, whilst some teachers responded that their thinking had been changed in the light of the syllabus. One secondary teacher responded in the light of the latter comment: *'No – think my philosophical approach to RE is similar to that of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007'*, (Teacher 88 - Secondary). Another secondary teacher commented: *'No – I am familiar already with an approach to studying religions through themes and 'bigger' questions. It does, however, make planning easier in terms of recognising and plotting specific dispositions'* (Teacher 94 - Secondary). Whilst a primary teacher remarked in response to her background: *'No, but probably because of my upbringing. My father is a Hindu, my mother a closet Bible reader! I have friends from all faiths as I grew up so saw and experienced lots of traditions, I knew we had a lot in common so I have always had this approach to Religious Education'* (Teacher 26 - Primary).

Another teacher stated that her thinking had not been changed with the introduction of 2007 syllabus and still preferred to teach as she had prior its introduction: *'No! I still like to teach RE in a more factual and less spiritual way'*, (Teacher 101 - Secondary). Whilst for another secondary teacher, the syllabus confirmed what she was already doing: *'It does what I found myself trying to do with Birmingham's previous syllabus. For RE to have relevance, it needs*

the opportunity to give expression to the subject to demonstrate its modern day relevance' (Teacher 95 - Secondary). Another secondary teacher was more definite that her thinking had changed since the introduction of the 2007 syllabus: *'I am now much more likely to focus on shared understanding and beliefs rather than facts and figures about religions'* (Teacher 90 - Secondary).

Although the primary teachers responding to this question were a lot larger in number, the majority (31 teachers out of 42 responses) stated that the Birmingham approach had changed the way they thought about RE: *'Yes I think it has encouraged us to see Religious Education as teaching about the links between religions and not stand alone lessons about individual faiths. I think that it has made R.E. much easier to teach. I think that it has made R.E much more 'fun' instead of quite serious and cold (not that it isn't serious now) but the links seem more about celebrating religions/cultures/traditions of the many, as opposed than simply learning the facts'* (Teacher 33 - Primary). Whereas another primary teacher stated: *'It has shown me the importance of linking the religions together and relating the religions to children's lives, rather than teaching a stand alone lesson about one religion which children may not access easily'* (Teacher 24 - Primary).

6.4. Methods

6.4.1. How often do teachers use certain methods?

The list of 27 teaching methods used in my survey is taken from the research by Astley *et al.* (1997). Their study shows a correlation between the aims of RE and certain methods used to achieve this aim. Although the list of 27 methods is extensive, I decided to use Astley *et al.*'s list in its entirety. I want to see if there is a relationship with the aims affiliated with the 2007 syllabus through teachers' opinions, and the methods used frequently by teachers.

Although Astley *et al.*'s study gained the opinions of secondary teachers, it is important to note that I asked primary, special and secondary teachers.

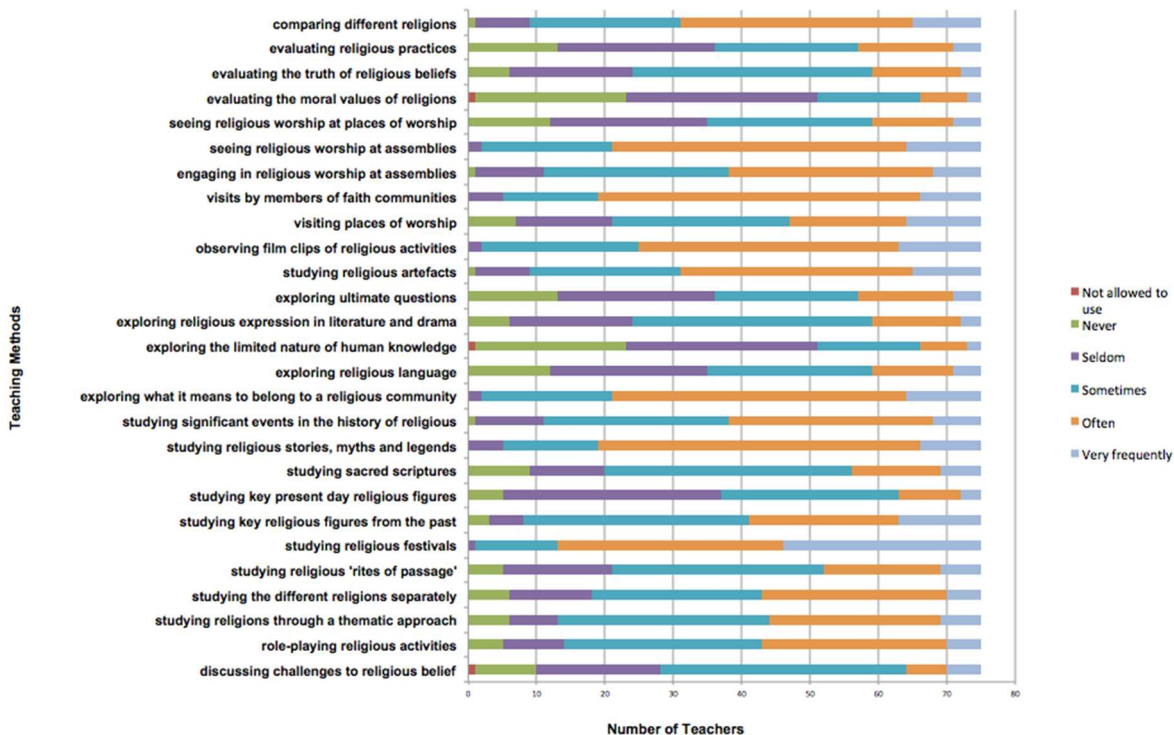


Figure 6-9 Frequency of methods used by primary teachers

Figure 6.9 is a bar chart that shows the frequency of how 27 methods are used by primary teachers. For the purposes of this graph I will not comment on every single method, but will summarise particular methods of interest or because of their frequency of usage. The most ‘very frequently’ used method is studying religious festivals. It was not surprising to see that a method based on religious festivals was used most frequently in primary schools. It is a method that non-specialists feel more comfortable in using and can be taught in a cross curricular manner with other topic based subjects, such as art. Primary teachers also use many methods more ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’ demonstrating a wide range of methods being

used. The methods used 'seldom' by primary teachers, exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, evaluating moral values of religions, and evaluating religious practices, I would suggest are seen by primary teachers as being too difficult for their pupils and, challenging methods to use as non-specialists. Interestingly, a number of methods were selected by six teachers in the 'not allowed to use' category: discussing challenges to religious beliefs, exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, engaging in religious worship at assemblies, seeing religious worship at assemblies, seeing religious worship at places of worship, evaluating the moral values of religions, evaluating the truths of religious beliefs, and evaluating religious practices. Again, this could be that primary teachers deemed these methods to be too difficult for their pupils to access and too challenging and confrontational to comprehend as non-specialists. What is also of interest is that three of the methods selected by four different teachers, involve aspects of collective worship. This may seem to suggest that for this small number of teachers, collective worship is seen as separate to RE, and methods that incorporate worship should not be used to teach RE. However the wider relationship between RE and Collective Worship will be explored at length in my discussion chapter.

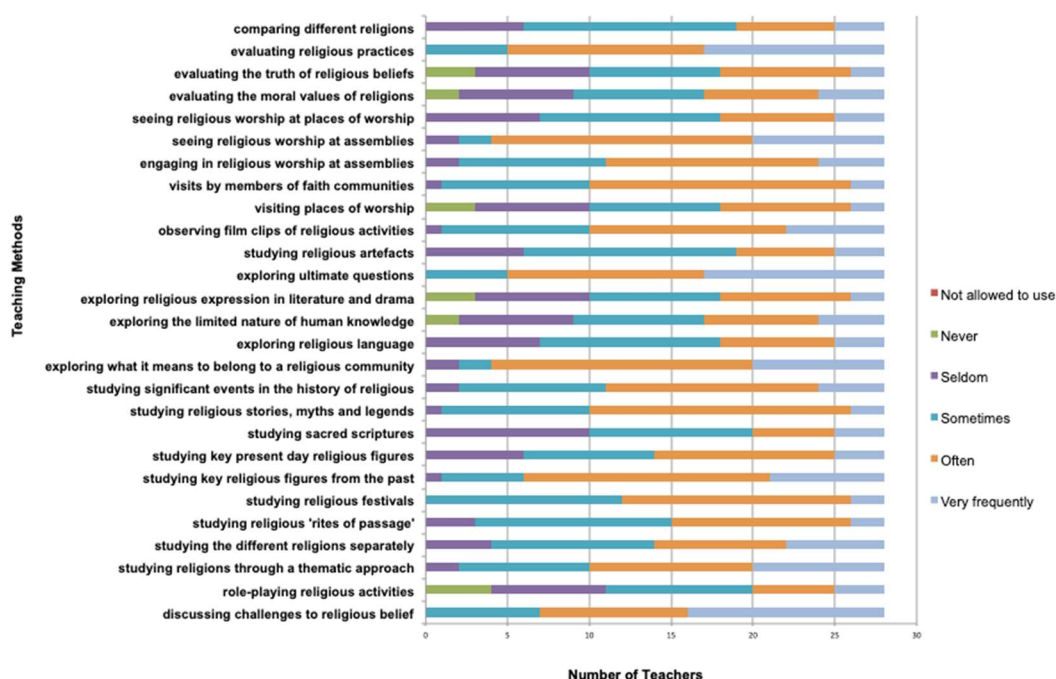


Figure 6-10 Frequency of methods used by secondary teachers

Figure 6.10 is a bar chart that shows the frequency that the 27 methods are used by secondary teachers. For the purposes of this graph I will not comment on every single method, but will summarise the use of particular methods and patterns in the frequency of usage. The methods used frequently by secondary teachers (discussing challenges to religious belief and exploring ultimate questions) include many of the skills required of candidates by the specifications at GCSE (DfE, 2015) such as evaluation and critical awareness. I would therefore expect to see these methods used in higher frequency. Many of the methods 'seldom' and 'never' used include more creative aspects of learning such as the use of drama and art. With curriculum time at a premium, I expect that secondary teachers feel that they cannot afford the time to be used on more creative methods. Visiting places of worship was another method in this category. It is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers to be allowed out of school on curriculum visits and the logistics of organising trips

only compound this problem. It is interesting to note that secondary teachers stated there were no methods that they were ‘not allowed to use’, this may be due to them having the confidence as specialists to have a fuller range of methods at their disposal.

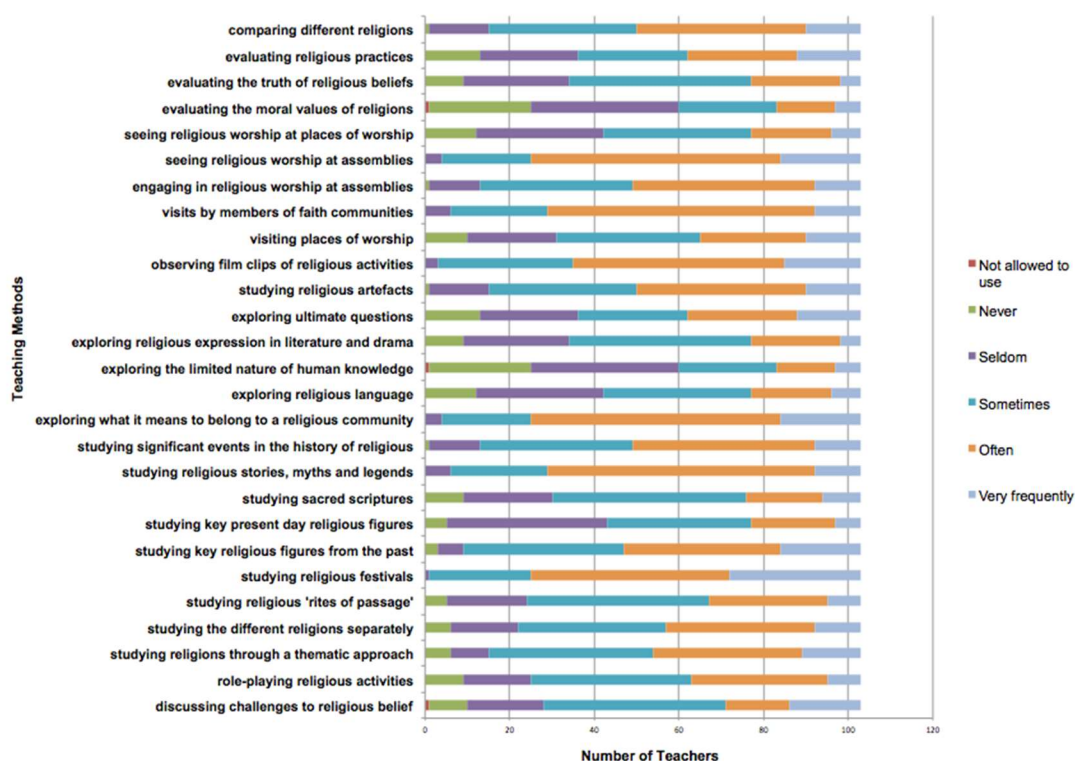


Figure 6-11 Frequency of methods used by primary and secondary teachers

Figure 6.11 is a bar chart that shows the frequency that the 27 methods are used by both primary and secondary teachers. Interestingly, all of the 27 methods were used at some point by both primary and secondary teachers. There were some methods that were used by both primary and secondary teachers in similar frequency. Methods used most often: studying religious stories, myths and legends, exploring what it means to belong to a religious community, visits by members of faith communities, and seeing religious worship at assemblies. These methods can almost be seen as the foundation tools for any teacher of RE.

Of interest, 'seeing religious worship at assemblies' is a method used frequently in RE. As already discussed in the primary section, the three methods associated with collective worship (engaging in religious worship at assemblies, seeing religious worship at assemblies and seeing religious worship at places of worship) were selected as 'not allowed to use' by four separate primary teachers. The connection between RE and Collective Worship will be further explored as a theme in both my interview and discussion chapters. In the 'sometimes' frequency, studying sacred scriptures is used by both sets of teachers. In the 'seldom' category primary teachers and secondary teachers selected exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, seeing religious worship at places of worship and evaluating the moral values of religions. Some primary and secondary teachers never used the following methods: exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, and evaluating the moral values of religions.

There were some methods which were used differently by primary and secondary teachers. The method used most frequently by the greatest number of primary school teachers was studying religious festivals by 29 teachers 'very frequently' and 33 teachers 'often' whereas the highest number of teachers using this method for secondary teachers was in the 'sometimes' category by 12 teachers. Secondary teachers used discussing challenges to religious belief by 12 teachers and exploring ultimate questions by 11 teachers 'very frequently' in higher numbers, whereas correspondingly these methods were used in higher numbers for primary colleagues in the 'sometimes' category by 36 teachers and 23 primary teachers in the 'seldom' category. 15 secondary teachers use studying key religious figures from the past 'often' whereas the highest number of primary teachers (33) used this method 'sometimes'. In the 'sometimes' category secondary teachers selected methods: exploring

religious language seeing religious worship at places of worship, and comparing different religions. These methods were selected in higher number by primary teachers in different categories: exploring religious language and seeing religious worship at places of worship, and, in the 'never' category, comparing different religions. 17 secondary teachers selected exploring religious language as 'seldom' used, whereas 35 primary teachers stated that they use that method 'sometimes'. 3 secondary teachers stated that they 'never' use evaluating the truth of religious beliefs, whereas 35 primary teachers stated that they 'sometimes' use this method. The difference in usage of certain methods may be due to the specialist nature of secondary teachers and also the need to develop certain skills in pupils at this level. Likewise, the non-specialist nature of primary RE teaching and the confidence lacking in some teachers at primary level, may explain decisions to use certain methods.

Overall these methods were used in the 'very frequently' and 'often' category by both primary and secondary teachers: studying religious stories, myths and legends, exploring what it means to belong to a religious community, visits by members of faith communities, and seeing religious worship at assemblies. The following methods were not used frequently by primary and secondary teachers in the 'seldom' or 'never' categories: exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, seeing religious worship at places of worship, evaluating the moral values of religions, exploring the limited nature of human knowledge, evaluating the moral values of religions. As I have explored before, 'seeing religious worship in places of worship' may not be used because of the logistics involved in organising a visit. This method may also not have been selected by teachers due to a matter of semantics as to how this method is phrased. Visiting a place of worship mid week may involve the study of the building and what takes place there, but rarely involves 'observing

religious worship' at that time of the day. As such teachers may have not selected this method because it is simply not seen during the course of a visit.

I also explored whether the methods that teachers use had changed since teaching through the dispositions and using the 2007 syllabus. One of the qualitative response questions asked whether teachers had changed the methods they use in the light of teaching the dispositional approach. The majority of teachers responded that they had not changed their methods: *'No, we have always used methods/teaching materials which engage with issues of morality, spirituality and ultimate questions'*, (Teacher 84 - Secondary). There were a number of primary teachers who stated that they could not answer this question either due to the fact that they had only been teaching a few years or had only ever taught the 2007 syllabus and therefore had nothing with which to compare. Some teachers (mainly primary) stated that the syllabus (referring here to the non-statutory lesson plans) supported their use of other resources and methods: *'The syllabus provides additional ideas to support and the use of the 'Faith Makes A Difference' DVDs are useful as it is sometimes difficult to find material on the internet which is suitable for KS1 and KS2'*, (Teacher 41- Primary).

Other teachers responded that they had reconsidered the methods that they use in the light of the syllabus. This primary school teacher stated: *'Yes – it has made me more open to use a range of things, drama role-play/prayer/stories that have nothing to do with RE but have strong connecting links to themes/dispositions'*, (Teacher 68 - Primary). Whilst another primary school teacher responded: *'Yes. It is now more discussion, video and story/role-play based than before. Lessons are more practical. Children are more directly involved in lessons rather than just being taught facts'*, (Teacher 74 – Primary). This is also confirmed

by another primary colleague: *‘I have included more role-play and hot seating activities. I get children to empathise with key figures in stories. Children are more involved with making important decisions in various dilemmas,’* (Teacher 20 - Primary). This is corroborated in the quantitative responses from teachers where discussing challenges to religious belief, role-playing religious activities, exploring what it means to belong to a religious community, observing videos of religious activities and evaluating religious practices are used sometimes, often and frequently. A secondary teacher commented in the light of the syllabus that she was: *‘More open to discuss controversial issues and questions’*, (Teacher 86). Moreover, another teacher commented in the light of this change: *‘The lessons feel much more open to those children who are not from faith background’*, (Teacher 33-Primary).

6.5. The Dispositional Approach

6.5.1. Teachers’ views on pupils’ religious affiliation and engagement

In the survey I asked a question about whether the dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a faith and from a background of no faith, once as a quantitative ranking question and then as a ‘free response’ question. I will now examine both sets of responses.

Statement / Ranking and percentage of teachers	Primary					Secondary					Total				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith	12	47	28	11	2	11	36	36	17	0	12	44	29	13	2
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith	15	47	28	9	1	11	36	32	17	4	13	44	29	12	2

Table 6-4 Teachers' responses to the statement 'the dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith/pupils from a background of no faith'

Table 6.4 shows teachers' responses as to whether the dispositions increase the engagement of faith, firstly for pupils of faith and secondly, for pupils from a background of no faith. The range encompasses responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The first point of note is that the range of responses to both of the statements is very similar and sometimes identical for primary and secondary teachers respectively. In terms of the responses to 'strongly agree' for both statements, there were no major discrepancies between primary and

secondary teachers. The responses in relation to 'agree' for both statements received the same ranking for secondary teachers and primary teachers respectively, with relatively more primary teachers (47%) choosing this response than secondary teachers (36%). More secondary teachers (36% and 32%) selected 'neither agree nor disagree' for both statements than primary teachers (28% and 28%). Likewise more secondary teachers (17% and 17%) 'disagreed' with both statements than primary teachers (11% and 9%). This may be due to secondary teachers as specialists being more confident in responding in a more negative manner than primary teachers. Although teachers were less likely to ascribe their thoughts to the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of ranking (as Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 327 state, 'most of us would not wish to be called extremists') 44% of all teachers 'agree' in the case of both statements, although followed with some teachers (the majority of whom were secondary) stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement at 29%. In some cases this tentativeness and uncertainty was clarified in their longer responses where teachers stated that they were unable to answer either way because of the pupil population in the schools where they had taught or were teaching currently: a teacher having experience in a mainly mono-faith school would not be able to compare pupils of faith and none, and as such would have to neither agree nor disagree with the statement. A few teachers also responded with comments such as, '*I do not feel that I have made a considered study in order to answer this question accurately*', (Teacher 25- Primary). Other teachers answered either in favour (or not) but qualified their responses with an opposing statement. In the qualitative responses there were more comments in favour of the dispositions supporting pupils of faith and no faith. This could be because respondents who advocate a

response in support are more inclined to take the time and effort to respond (Denscombe, 2010).

Firstly, I will look at the comments disagreeing with the statements. Some of these responses are made due to the teacher not noticing a difference: *'I have noticed no difference between the progress, and how well the children access the curriculum, of those children with or without a faith background,'* (Teacher 41- Primary). Others thought that it might not be due to the dispositions alone, there can be many different factors to take into account when engaging pupils: *'Not necessarily so. I have no faith background myself and at school was always engaged in RE. I think the delivery is very important and schools should make it 'engaging' and interesting to pupils (as with all subjects),'* (Teacher 17 - Special). Another teacher responded in regard to the lesson plans (and not the syllabus) where a disposition is encountered every three weeks: *'However, we found that sometimes, some pupils became confused when a series of lessons moved quickly between different faiths,'* (Teacher 25- Primary). In regard to the 'shared values' aspect, a secondary teacher responded: *'No – I don't think mine realise they link to them,'* (Teacher 101 - Secondary). Another teacher responded to this question stating of their pupils, *'they find the spiritual side of teaching very hard to respond to as they have no knowledge of any religions they lack understanding,'* (Teacher 29 - Primary). This teacher had responded in an unfavourable manner towards the 2007 syllabus' approach throughout the questionnaire, stating of the syllabus 'an interesting experiment that has failed'. It will be of interest to follow up the comments made by this teacher and understand their reasons for responding in this way.

Two secondary teachers individually commented on the approach of the dispositions, far from creating engagement, the approach could alienate pupils in RE: *‘No- I think it could be off putting – not everyone ‘feels something’ when they look at art,’* (Teacher 97 - Secondary) and *‘However, when we first used some of the lesson materials (several years ago now) we needed to tone down the ‘should’ nature of the dispositions to a more explorative one as students were suspicious of the aims of RE which required them to become or be anyone,’* (Teacher 84 - Secondary). Interestingly, one teacher stated, *‘but we need to be careful that we don’t over reward the spiritual response [...] this is a classroom of learning and investigation, questions and curiosity – not a faith lesson,’* (Teacher 97 - Secondary). These statements encompass the confessional nature of the dispositional approach. I will explore this aspect in more detail in both the interview and discussion chapters.

There were also teachers that stated the dispositional approach does not just help pupils of no faith, but pupils of all faiths as well: *‘I see no difference between the participation and understanding levels of children with a no faith background and children with faith’* (Teacher 15 - Primary) and *‘I’m not sure. I think the dispositions help for ALL pupils,’* (Teacher 100 - Secondary).

Teachers who were undecided as to whether the dispositions supported pupil engagement made the following comments. In response to this statement, a few teachers stated outright: *‘I have not observed evidence to illustrate either way,’* (Teacher 59 - Special). There were a number of teachers who responded ‘not necessarily’, two secondary teachers responded, *‘I think they respond well, but not necessarily better-many pupils, of faith or none, can be very interested to study a religion as it is. I think the dispositions are an important tool to*

demonstrate the relevance of Religious Education, but great RE does not necessitate the dispositions or a thematic approach to Religious Education,' (Teacher 94 - Secondary) and *'Not necessarily – pupils of no faith may still be interested to learn about the content and practices of a faith without knowing the dispositions,'* (Teacher 96 - Secondary). Interestingly, the majority of teachers responding in this manner were secondary specialists, a high proportion of whom having both a longer length of teaching experience and specialist knowledge to be able to qualify their responses. It would be of interest to clarify at interview why some teachers stated that they had not thought about the teaching of RE in this manner before.

Other teachers commented in favour of the dispositions enabling engagement of pupils with no faith. Many teachers responded in terms of the dispositions making connections between their pupils' lives and people of faith. A primary school deputy responded with: *'Yes because they can link it to their life, religion becomes less mysterious and children can understand concepts more clearly'*, (Teacher 40 - Primary). Another primary school teacher stated: *'I believe pupils with no faith background respond better to the teaching of Religious Education because they are able to make links through shared values although they do not share the same religious beliefs. It allows children to see the similarities between people of faith and people of no faith'*, (Teacher 23- Primary). Whilst this primary school teacher responded: *'Yes – they see that everybody can live through the dispositions, not just people of faith. They could feel isolated if it was not taught through the dispositions'*, (Teacher 8 - Primary). This was further substantiated by teachers commenting that the dispositions enable pupils of no faith to feel included in lessons, as one primary teacher in a mixed populated school stated: *'Looking at human qualities first rather than religious*

actions/beliefs means no one is left out. Children from no faith background among a religious majority or with dogmatic religious teaching can feel alienated and 'other'ed. I think it would be hard to be alienated by study centred on dispositions', (Teacher 18 - Primary). A teacher in a Church of England primary school commented: 'Yes I think so. They relate to the motivation behind the actions. Children who say they are atheists have really enjoyed it,' (Teacher 26 - Primary). Another teacher, secondary trained, reinforces this view stating 'finding that they can relate to them in some way' [...] 'They feel more included, less likely to say 'I'm not religious, so this isn't anything to do with me!'. And finally another teacher reflected on how important the dispositions are for pupils to see the relevance of RE: 'Yes because they cannot argue with the relevance of lessons if the dispositions can be seen as having value to all. It provides a more neutral way into the lesson content for pupils as you can establish how we all feel about the dispositions e.g. belonging before using a religion as an example to help understand this,' (Teacher 98 - Secondary).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement/Response	Primary					Secondary					All responses				
1. I prefer to teach religions separately	4	7	28	29	7	0	7	10	7	4	4	14	38	36	11
2. The dispositions are important in teaching Religious Education	18	37	11	7	2	6	11	8	3	0	24	48	19	10	2
3. The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith	9	35	21	8	2	3	10	10	5	0	12	45	31	13	2
4. The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith	11	35	21	7	1	3	10	9	5	1	14	45	30	12	2
5. The dispositions hide the differences between faiths	8	22	24	18	3	1	6	13	8	0	9	28	37	26	3
6. The dispositions do not change the teaching of Religious Education	4	16	26	27	2	2	10	7	8	1	6	26	33	35	3
7. The dispositions do not change pupils' attitude towards Religious Education	3	14	31	25	2	2	9	11	6	0	5	23	42	31	2
8. Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions	15	34	15	7	4	3	7	12	6	0	18	41	27	13	4
9. The dispositions help pupils to understand Religious Education through shared attitudes	17	41	11	4	2	1	15	9	3	0	18	56	20	7	2
10. The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives	19	37	14	3	2	4	15	6	3	0	23	52	20	6	2

Table 6-5 Teachers' responses to the disposition statements

Table 6.5 shows three levels of response: primary, secondary and all teachers, to several statements about the dispositions. Teachers were asked to respond from a range of choices: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. The statements are numbered. The numbers for each statement are referred to before the statement in the following discussion.

In response to the statement 1 ‘I prefer to teach religions separately’, a higher number of primary teachers responded neither agree nor disagree (28). Primary teachers, the majority of whom were less experienced, were either unsure of whether teaching religions separately was preferred or did not have the opportunity to teach in this manner and were unable to comment. However in higher numbers, 36 primary teachers disagreed/strongly disagreed with teaching religions separately, thus implying that they are in favour of the reverse of this statement, teaching religions thematically, which is how the dispositions are planned. Secondary teachers’ responses to the same statement were more evenly split across all categories, with 7 teachers agreeing/strongly agreeing, 10 teachers neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 11 teachers disagreeing and strongly disagreeing. In qualitative responses many secondary teachers referred to the loss of knowledge in teaching through the dispositional approach. However their responses to this statement do not out rightly show that they prefer to teach religions separately in order to develop that knowledge of religions.

Whilst 55 primary teachers (17 secondary teachers) agreed/strongly agreed with statement 2 ‘the dispositions are important in the teaching of RE’, 11 primary teachers and 8 secondary teachers neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement and 9 primary teachers and 3 secondary teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement. Overall this shows

that both primary and secondary teachers think that the dispositions are important in the teaching of RE.

In response to statement 3 ‘the dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith’ overall all responses were in favour with 44 primary teachers and 13 secondary teachers strongly agreeing/agreeing with the statement. Likewise, 46 primary teachers and 13 secondary teachers strongly agreed/agreed with statement 4 ‘the dispositions support the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith’. However it must be noted that the number of secondary teachers neither agreeing nor disagreeing for statement 3 and 4 were proportionally higher than primary teachers. Either more secondary teachers were being more cautious in response to the statements or are not sure about the impact of the dispositions. At interview many teachers qualified that they had not thought about RE in this way before, and therefore stated that it was best to respond in a neutral manner.

More primary teachers were undecided in response to statement 5, ‘the dispositions hide the difference between faiths’ with 24 primary teachers neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Correspondingly, the majority of secondary teachers (13 teachers) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. At interview teachers qualified that I was asking questions that they had not thought about and so were unable to answer. This neutral position at least qualifies that teachers were not definite that the dispositions do hide differences between faiths or that the dispositions do not hide differences between faiths.

In response to statement 6 ‘the dispositions do not change the teaching of RE’ 26 primary teachers and 7 secondary teachers were undecided responding neither agree nor disagree. 20 primary teachers and 12 secondary teachers strongly agreed and agreed with the statement

whilst 29 primary teachers and 9 secondary teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed. The distribution of response is fairly equal against all three major areas of response thus showing that both primary and secondary teachers are not out rightly convinced either way as to whether the dispositional approach changes the teaching of RE.

Statement 7 states ‘the dispositions do not change pupils’ attitudes towards RE. The majority of primary teachers were split between neither agreeing nor disagreeing (31 teachers) and disagreeing/strongly disagreeing (27 teachers). Whereas the responses from secondary teachers were more diverse with 11 secondary teachers strongly agreeing/agreeing, 11 neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 6 disagreeing/strongly disagreeing. In regard to the latter statement, as I would discover through my interviews, many teachers were able to qualify that they had not thought about RE in this way before and were unable to comment. However, the secondary response to this statement shows that secondary teachers are more cautious in their responses than their primary colleagues.

Primary teachers were more convinced by statement 8, ‘RE makes more sense teaching through the dispositions’ with 49 primary teachers agreeing/strongly agreeing with this statement, 15 neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 11 primary teachers disagreeing/strongly disagreeing. This may be partially due to the number of newly and recently qualified teachers that answered my questionnaire, in only teaching the 2007 syllabus these teachers simply do not have another approach to use in comparison. Secondary teachers were less sure with this statement, with 10 teachers strongly agreeing and agreeing, 12 neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 6 disagreeing/strongly disagreeing.

Teachers were more in favour of statement 9, ‘the dispositions help pupils to understand RE through shared attitudes’ with 58 primary teachers agreeing/strongly agreeing, 11 primary teachers remaining undecided (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) and 6 primary teachers disagreeing/strongly disagreeing. Similarly secondary teachers were also in favour of this statement, with 16 teachers agreeing/strongly agreeing, proportionally more secondary teachers remaining undecided (9 teachers neither agreeing nor disagreeing) and 3 teachers disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with the statement. This favourable reaction was also echoed in response to statement 10, ‘the dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives’, with 56 primary teachers agreeing/strongly agreeing, 14 primary teachers remaining undecided and 5 primary teachers disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with this perspective. Correspondingly for secondary teachers 19 agreed/strongly agreed, 6 undecided and 3 teachers disagreed/strongly disagreed.

In conclusion, teachers are mostly in favour of the dispositional approach and using values in their teaching, however, secondary teachers were more cautious in their responses than their primary colleagues. The agreement for the dispositions can be viewed in response to the following statements: disagreeing with statement: 1. ‘I prefer to teach religions separately’; agreeing and strongly agreeing with the following statements: 2. ‘the dispositions are important in the teaching of RE’; statements 3 and 4 ‘the dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith/no faith’; 8. ‘RE makes more sense teaching through the dispositions’; 9. ‘the dispositions help pupils to understand RE through shared attitudes’; 10. ‘the dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives’. Agreement with these statements shows strong support for the dispositions and the syllabus’ approach. However, there were certain statements that both primary and

secondary teachers were unsure of: 5. ‘the dispositions hide the differences between faiths’; 6. ‘the dispositions do not change the teaching of RE’; 7. ‘the dispositions do not change pupils’ attitudes towards RE’. These statements were phrased in such a way that many teachers stated that they just had not thought about RE or their pupils in this manner before and so were unable to make a comment.

6.6. Qualitative responses on the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus

In this next section, I will analyse participants’ qualitative answers in response to what they thought about the syllabus. The questionnaire asked ‘What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? I would appreciate a detailed answer to this question’. Firstly I will explore what teachers thought were the strengths of the syllabus.

6.6.1. Strengths

Analysis of both primary and secondary teachers’ responses highlighted a positive reaction to the number of faiths represented and available to teach in the syllabus. This was viewed as progressive since it represented the connection with the faiths ‘lived out’ in the city where teachers work: even when this included less known faiths such as Baha’i. One teacher commented on the connection that her children in a Christian school were able to make when learning about the Trinity because they had previously learned about the Trimurti within Hinduism: *‘they were fascinated that these two faiths might share what at first seems an alien idea’, [...]* *‘I don’t think that they were expecting that. The discussion was brilliant’*, (Teacher 26 - Primary).

The materials and resources produced in order to support the syllabus were considered to be a strength of the Birmingham approach (see Appendix 1: Training and support materials for schools). The schemes of work, lesson plans and film materials were mentioned in a number of responses. This was also viewed as positively contributing to enable non-specialist teachers to feel more at ease when teaching the subject.

Another area of congruence amongst teachers was the freedom that the syllabus provided. The majority of teachers thought that the syllabus gave them freedom to explore the dispositions. Teachers responded positively in regard to the flexibility they now have and that this enables them to choose what is right for their pupils, whilst allowing them to exercise their professional judgement. Whilst some respondents highlighted this aspect in a positive light, others expressed a concern that there was too much freedom. Another area considered to be a strength was how the syllabus enabled the teachers to contribute towards the SMSC agenda and the duty to promote fundamental British values (DfE, 2014).

The majority of the teachers commented on how good it was to teach through shared values, allowing RE to be more relevant, meaningful and enabling pupils to relate it to their own experiences. Additionally, several respondents went on to comment how the values made it more relevant for them as teachers. One respondent stated, *'the content is introduced in such a way that the children can hook their own experience on to the concepts so rather than being abstract they have some understanding of what they are learning about'*, (Teacher 40 - Primary). Another stated, *'Pupils are a lot more switched on to what it means to have a faith and what it means to put that faith into practice'*, (Teacher 58 - Primary). In addition one teacher commented, *'And although it doesn't explicitly speak of the non-faith*

experience, the themes offered are human themes and allow the inclusion of secular ideas and of seeing the moral and spiritual value of non religious lives’, (Teacher 18 - Primary).

Of note, many teachers praised the spiral strategy of the disposition pedagogy as aiding the return to previously taught concepts and how this enabled progression. Assessment was an area that was seen in both a positive and a negative light in both primary and secondary responses: positively that there are not levels in the syllabus, negatively that there needs to be more guidance in order to better support teachers to assess using this approach.

6.6.2. Weaknesses

I also asked teachers to comment on what they perceived to be the weaknesses of the 2007 syllabus. One teacher commented that they did not think that the pupils were aware of specific dispositions whilst being taught. Whereas another teacher commented as to whether this approach should be part of her role as an RE teacher, *‘For me the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus lie with the dispositions’ [...] However, I am suspicious of aims which seem to ‘require’ the development of, for example: ‘Creating Unity and Harmony’. [...] ‘but I am also not sure about them being a character trait which an Religious Education teacher tried to develop’, (Teacher 84 - Secondary).*

One of the main weaknesses drawn out of the responses was that as a result of teaching through the dispositions there was a perceived lack of knowledge about faiths as opposed to teaching religions more systematically. Primary teachers responded in terms of not being able to teach a large part of a religion in regard to previously taught topics such as ‘festivals’ and how the dispositional approach seemed ‘bitty’. One teacher sums up these concerns when responding: *‘I found the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus appeared to be written by many*

different people, all coming together with their own viewpoint which resulted in a weak and wishy washy scheme of work. The dispositions were confusing and overcomplicated for primary children and lessons often flitted from one area to another’, (Teacher 44 - Primary). Another teacher commented: *‘I think there needs to be a major rethink of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. It was an interesting idea and I can see what they were aiming for but as I said previously the children need to have a solid grounding in the major religions before they try to develop their learning from religion (AT2). Maybe if Primary schools were to teach the basics of the religions it would be appropriate for the secondary schools to then concentrate on the learning from religions’, (Teacher 29 - Primary).* I thought that this was such an interesting comment and one which was a thread through this particular teacher’s responses, that I decided to ask this teacher to interview.

In 2014 the DfE announced specification changes for GCSE and A level subjects (DfE, 2015). Responding to a question about these new requirements, secondary teachers answered by stating how the Birmingham approach may have a detrimental impact on pupils’ preparation for a more knowledge-based approach at Key Stage 4. This is illustrated with the following secondary teacher’s comment: *‘I think that Key Stage 3 has to provide the basis for Key Stage 4 and so it [the syllabus] may need to be rethought when the new GCSE is published’, (Teacher 101 - Secondary).* Of further consideration is the Key Stage 3 pupils’ experience which is being condensed to two years to give more time to the teaching of GCSE, or that RE is taught as an integrated humanities course (APPG, 2014). A response to such concerns can be seen in the devising of projects with an increased focus on developing pupils’ religious literacy and deeper understanding (for example: The Understanding Christianity Project, 2017; The APPG report on religious literacy, 2016).

A few teachers commented on the exclusion of non-religious worldviews illustrated by: *‘Is there any place for teaching about the group of people who do not have a religion (agnostic/atheist)?’* (Teacher 22 – Primary). Whilst another teacher commented in response to the weaknesses of the syllabus, *‘I still think that Humanism ought to be included’* (Teacher 96 – Secondary).

Another area of consternation referenced by a number of teachers was the actual wording of the dispositions and the difficulty in understanding their terminology, *‘Some of the dispositions are quite wordy and on first glance look difficult or confusing’* (Teacher 73 - Primary).

6.7. Patterns in the data

In this section, I will progress from presenting and describing elements of my data, to analysing it through looking at connections between different responses. In the first section, I will examine one of these associations in more detail. I will explain why I have chosen to demonstrate this example and I will examine possible reasons for the connections. In the second section, I will outline some of the themes that I examined which did not reveal anything of note or as intended.

Out of the various patterns examined, I have chosen to present the length of a teacher’s experience as a co-ordinator and the methods used to teach RE. I thought it would be of interest to see whether the length of a teacher’s experience has an impact on the methods they use. For example, whether newer teachers, in only having experience of teaching the 2007 syllabus, use some methods more frequently or less frequently than others as a consequence.

As I used the methods outlined in Astley *et al.*'s study (1997), I would also like to see if there is a relationship between the aims which teachers saw as important for RE and the methods used to deliver this aim. Although my question was slightly different to that used in Astley *et al.*'s research, I asked about the frequency of method usage, whilst Astley *et al.*'s study asked teachers to rate how effectively a method fulfilled a given aim. I also asked teachers about the aims they thought were akin to the dispositional approach it would be interesting to see how different these were to the personally important ranked aims by teachers. This exploration is pertinent to my research in examining whether, by teaching through the distinct approach of the dispositions, teachers use certain methods more frequently. In turn, in conjunction with analysis of interview responses, whether these methods are seen to further support the engagement of pupils.

1 discussing challenges to religious belief	2 role-playing religious activities
3 studying religions through a thematic approach	4 studying the different religions separately
5 studying religious 'rites of passage'	6 studying religious festivals
7 studying key religious figures from the past	8 studying key present day religious figures
9 studying sacred scriptures	10 studying religious stories, myths and legends
11 studying significant events in the history of religious traditions	12 exploring what it means to belong to a religious community
13 exploring religious language	14 exploring the limited nature of human knowledge
15 exploring religious expression in literature, drama and art	16 exploring ultimate questions
17 studying religious artefacts	18 observing film clips of religious activities
19 visiting places of worship	20 visits by members of faith communities
21 engaging in religious worship at assemblies	22 seeing religious worship at assemblies
23 seeing religious worship at places of worship	24 evaluating the moral values of religions
25 evaluating the truth of religious beliefs	26 evaluating religious practices
27 comparing different religions	

Table 6-6 Methods used in Astley et al.'s 1997 study

Table 6.6: shows the list of methods used in Astley *et al.*'s study. These methods are referred to by number in figures 6.12, 6.13 and 6.14.

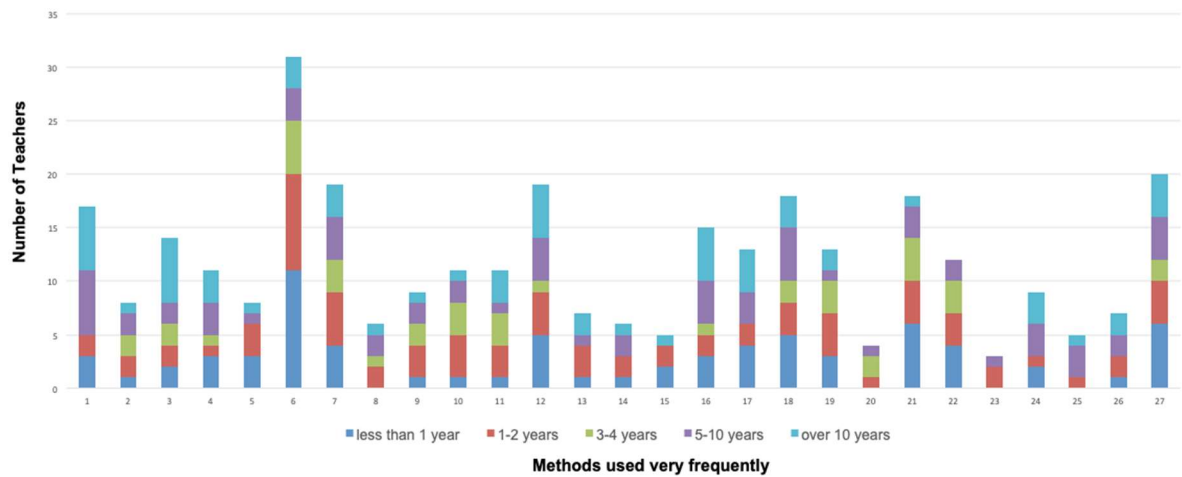


Figure 6-12 *Methods used very frequently, by a teacher's length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (all teachers)*

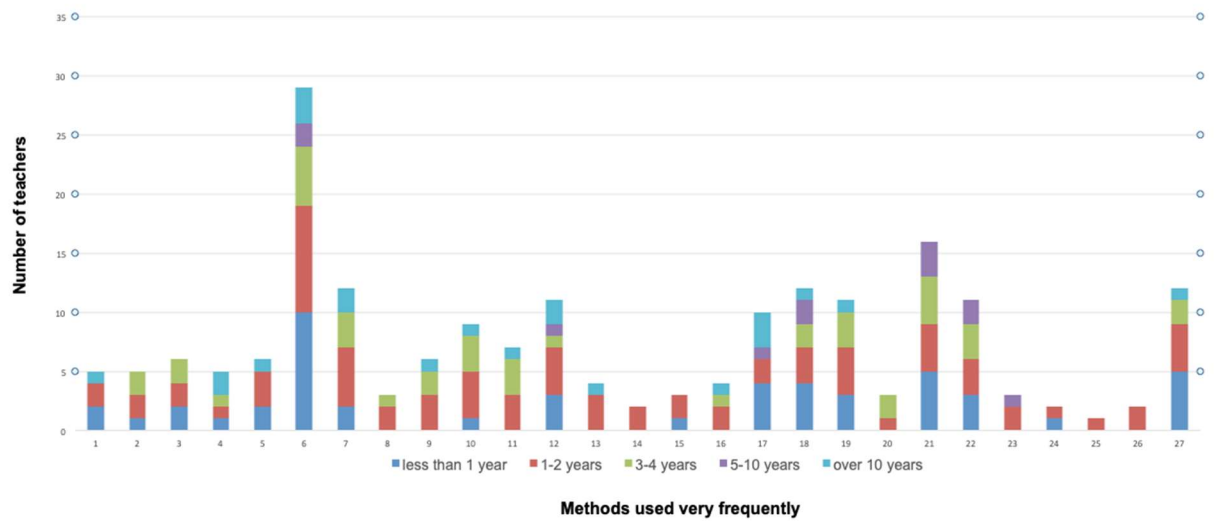


Figure 6-13 *Methods used very frequently, by a teacher's length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (primary teachers)*

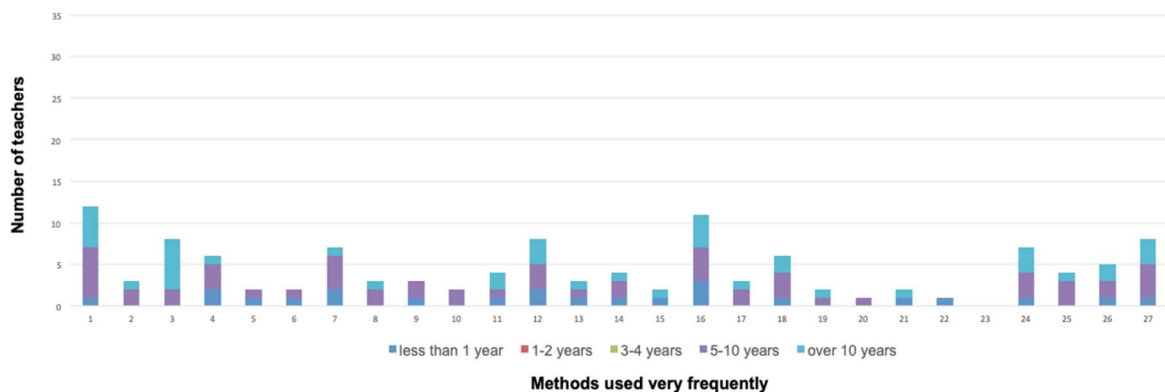


Figure 6-14 Methods used very frequently, by a teacher's length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (secondary teachers)

Figure 6.12 shows the 27 methods used very frequently on the horizontal axis and the total number of teachers (primary and secondary) on the vertical axis. The chart is stacked, for each method the bar shows the number of teachers for each of the following categories of experience: less than one year, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-10 years and over 10 years. Figures 6.13 and 6.14 show the same data for primary and secondary teachers respectively. Figure 6.12 shows method 6 (studying religious festivals) was selected by primary and secondary teachers as most frequently used, with proportionally less experienced teachers using it 'very frequently'. Methods 27 (comparing different religions) and 12 (exploring what it means to belong to a religious community) were also most frequently used with more equal representation of the experience of teachers. Methods 1 (discussing challenges to religious belief), 3 (studying religions through a thematic approach) and 16 (exploring ultimate questions) are used proportionally more frequently by teachers with more experience (in the 5-10 years and over 10 years experience).

Method 6 (studying religious festivals) was selected by higher number of primary teachers (Figure 6.13) and can be seen as a 'safer' route into teaching about religion, with a 'set' remit of information, beliefs and practices around any given tradition. It is a method or theme that non-specialists feel more at ease in delivering, and teachers with less experience can feel more comfortable in teaching. Likewise, method 12 (what it means to belong to a religious community) offers the less experienced teacher tangible facts and elements of the 'outward' experience of religion, to grasp and feel more at ease delivering. Method 21 (engaging in religious worship at assemblies) was also chosen in higher numbers by primary teachers. These three methods selected in higher numbers were closely followed in higher numbers by methods 7, 17, 18, 19, 22 and 27. This suggests that primary teachers, the majority of whom were less experienced, use a wider range of methods on a more regular basis.

Whereas, secondary teachers (Figure 6.14) selected methods 1 (discussing challenges to religious belief) and 16 (exploring ultimate questions) in higher numbers. These methods may be seen as needing either a greater degree of subject knowledge, and, or, experience and greater confidence in teaching: both of which pertain to a teacher who has more experience of teaching and more experience as a subject co-ordinator. In terms of participants responding to my questionnaire, the secondary teachers had more experience of teaching than the primary teachers. It is interesting that method 3 (studying religions through a thematic approach), is used more frequently by all teachers with more experience. At interview I needed to explain to some less experienced teachers what method 3 entailed as they were unsure of what it meant. This might go some way to explaining the reason as to

why teachers of less experience stated they were not using this method frequently, since they were just unsure of the terminology.

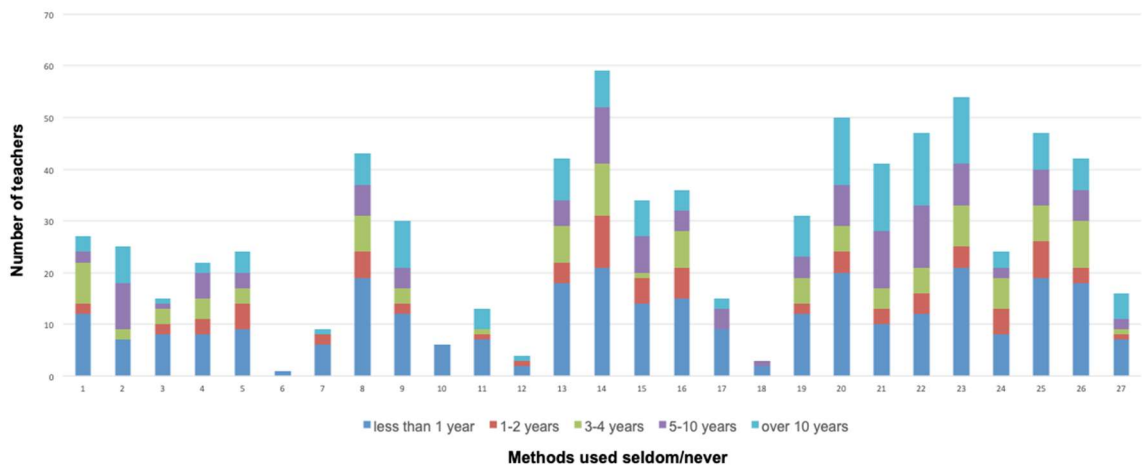


Figure 6-15 *Methods used seldom and never, by a teacher’s length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (primary and secondary teachers combined)*

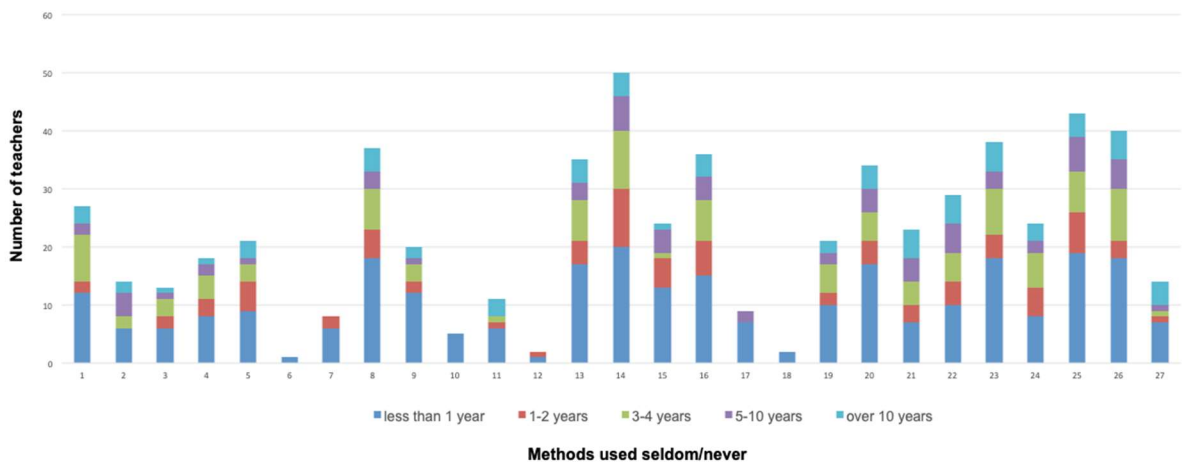


Figure 6-16 *Methods used seldom and never, by a teacher’s length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (primary teachers)*

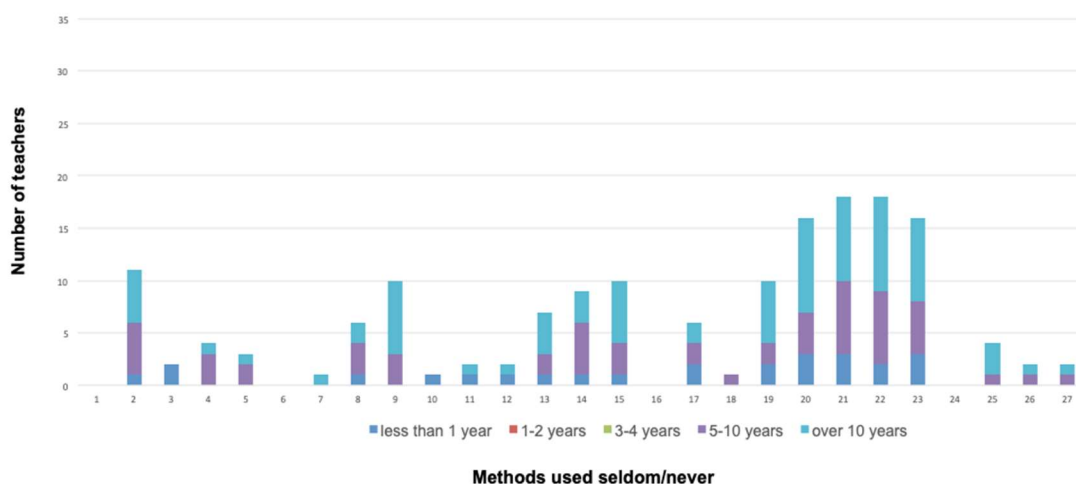


Figure 6-17 Methods used seldom and never, by a teacher’s length of experience as a co-ordinator of Religious Education (secondary teachers)

Figure 6.15: shows the 27 methods used seldom and never on the horizontal axis and the number of teachers on the vertical axis. The chart is stacked, so for each method the bar shows the number of teachers for each of the following categories of experience: less than one year, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-10 years and over 10 years.

Figures 6.16 and 6.17 show the similar data for primary and secondary teachers correspondingly. Figure 6.15 shows more methods not being used that frequently (seldom/never) by a larger number of primary and secondary teachers. Of particular note, method 14 (exploring the limited nature of human knowledge), 8 (studying present day religious figures), 20 (visits by members of faith communities) 25 (evaluating the truth of religious beliefs) and 26 (evaluating religious practices) are not being used as frequently as other methods. Methods 21 (engaging in religious worship at assemblies), 22 (seeing religious worship at assemblies) and 23 (seeing religious worship at places of worship) all of

which incorporate collective worship, are also not as frequently used by teachers of all age ranges of experience. The overall data shown in Figure 6.15 is closely followed by the data in Figure 6.16 for primary teachers. Figure 6.16 shows newer co-ordinators with less experience have not selected as many methods used 'seldom' or 'never', suggesting that they are still using a wider range of methods than their colleagues with more experience as co-ordinators. This further suggests that primary teachers with less experience as co-ordinators are still 'trying' out methods as a newer member of the profession, not unexpected in order for these teachers to see what works for them and their pupils. This is not to be the case for secondary teachers the majority of whom have five or more years of experience as seen in Figure 6.17, of who it would seem are more selective in the methods used, selecting 'seldom' or 'never' for more methods and in proportionally higher numbers. From this one could deduce that teachers with more experience are more familiar with the methods that work for them in terms of their teaching style and their pupils and do not need to return to trying or using a wider range of methods. Conversely, it could also mean that teachers with more experience as co-ordinators continue to use the same methods that they always have done, using a set repertoire and are not open trying new methods. Overall, both sets of data; frequently used and seldom/never use methods demonstrate that there are indeed relationships between the length of a teacher's experience and the frequency of the methods that are selected.

In addition, secondary teachers use methods 20 (visits by members of faith communities), 21 (engaging in religious worship at assemblies), 22 (seeing religious worship at assemblies) and 23 (seeing religious worship at places of worship) less frequently. The less frequent use of method 20 may be due to the time and logistics involved in organising a visitor to a class

that is taught once a week, whereas primary teachers teacher the same class most of the time. Methods including assemblies (21, 22, and 23) may not be used as frequently as secondary teachers see their role as distinct to that of the collective worship co-ordinator and as such may not refer to these methods.

There were a number of themes that I examined, which did not reveal any connections. In this section, I will demonstrate one of these explorations.

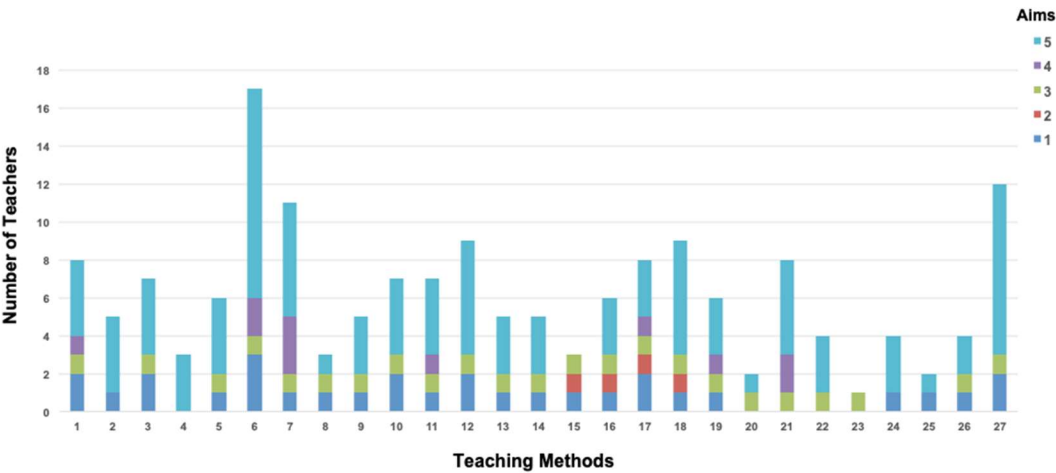


Figure 6-18 Personal aims primary and secondary teachers ranked highest and methods used very frequently

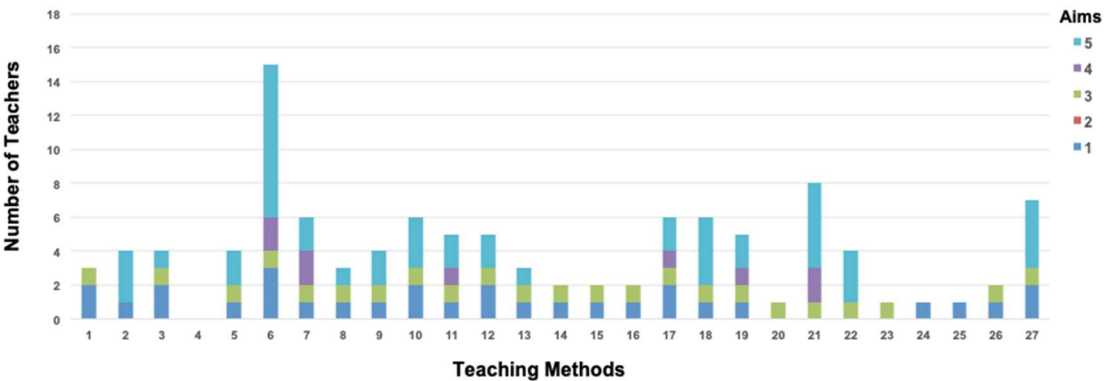


Figure 6-19 Personal aims primary teachers ranked highest and methods used very frequently

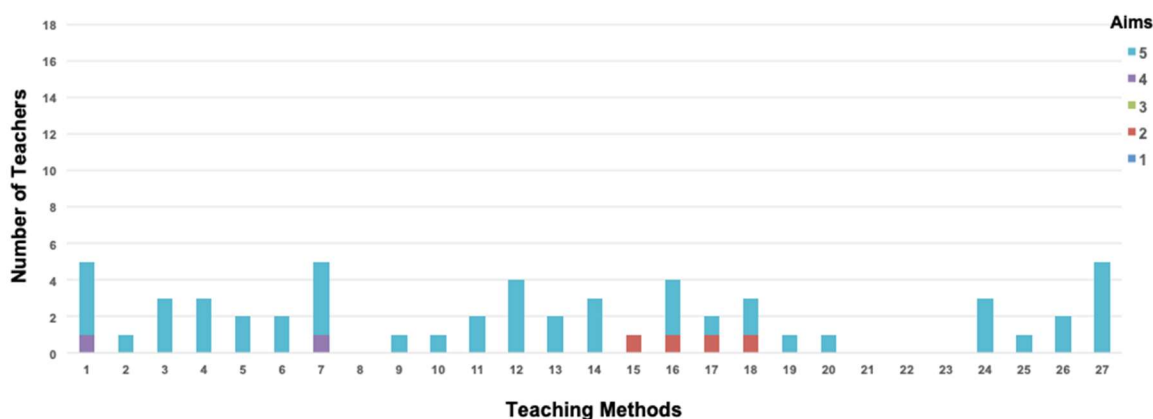


Figure 6-20 Personal aims secondary teachers ranked highest and methods used very frequently

Number of Aim	Description of Aim
Aim 1	to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain
Aim 2	to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures
Aim 3	to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues
Aim 4	to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development
Aim 5	to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions

Table 6-7 SCAA Aims of Religious Education

Figure 6.18: Personal aims teachers ranked highest and methods used very frequently, shows teachers' personal aims for RE against the methods that they use very frequently. The methods used frequently are on the horizontal axis and the number of teachers shown on the vertical axis. This data is very influenced by the numbers of primary teachers. I will examine the data for primary and secondary teachers separately in this section. The most frequently used method is 6 (studying religious festivals). This method was selected in the majority by teachers selecting Aim 5, followed in higher numbers by methods 27 (comparing different religions) and 7 (studying key religious figures from the past). There was only one method (17: studying religious artefacts) that was used frequently by teachers (eight in total) in each of the highest ranked aims. Method 23 (seeing religious worship at places of worship) was selected as being frequently used by one teacher who selected Aim 3 as personally most significant. Method 20 (visits by members of faith communities) and method 25 (evaluating the truth of religious beliefs) were similarly selected as frequently used by teachers in smaller numbers (two in total).

Figure 6.19 shows primary teachers' personal aims for RE against the methods that they use very frequently. There are wider ranges of methods selected with method 6 (studying religious festivals) and method 27 (comparing different religions) as being selected in higher numbers. As previously discussed, there were no primary teachers who ranked Aim 2 as being personally significant.

Figure 6.20 shows secondary teachers and their personal aims ranked highest and the methods used very frequently. Secondary teachers selected Aims 2, 4 and 5 in highest personal preference (four teachers selecting Aim 2, two teachers selecting Aim 4 and the

majority of secondary teachers selecting Aim 5). As there are fewer secondary teachers not all methods were used in a 'very frequent' manner.

In examining the pedagogy of the 2007 syllabus I thought it would be important to look at what teachers thought were the important aims of RE. In my survey I asked teachers about this twice: once about their personal aims and then again about the aims that they thought were important in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Of further interest I wanted to observe whether there was any connection between the aims that teachers viewed as important and the methods that they use frequently. Astley *et al.*'s (1997) research demonstrated through the study of 210 teachers, 'religious educators perceive a clear link between methods and aim', (p. 171). I used the same 27 methods in my study. Whilst Astley *et al.*'s study focused on secondary school teachers, my study was completed by teachers from primary, secondary and special schools, with a majority of primary school co-ordinators. Whereas Astley *et al.*'s study asked teachers to rate how effective a particular method was at fulfilling a given aim, from 'ineffective' to 'very effective', my study asked teachers to rate the frequency of methods used on a five point scale.

On examining the links between the methods used, there is very little difference in the range of methods selected in accordance with teachers' aims that they viewed as personally important for RE.

This leads me to surmise that the personal aims that teachers selected do not have much of a bearing on the day-to-day methods that they use. This further implies that the aims teachers selected have no predictable impact on the manner in which they teach. Even if the aims are seen as important to teachers, they do not inform their day-to-day practice. In Birmingham,

one of the possible explanations for this may be due to the schemes of work provided for teachers. The majority of teachers that responded to my questionnaire were teachers in primary schools. There are a high proportion of primary schools that use the Faith Makes a Difference schemes of work provided by SACRE, where the activities and methods are outlined. As such, a teacher's personal aims for RE are much less relevant in shaping their selection of methods and activities, since in the main, this is already provided for them.

At this point, it still remains to be seen whether the pedagogical approach of the syllabus influences engagement, through the methods frequently used by teachers. However, from the previous exploration it would not be too presumptuous to state that if the methods used to deliver the syllabus do have an impact on pupil engagement, in deploying the approach of the syllabus to a greater degree, this is not a result of the aims of teachers having an influence on the methods they use. The aims of the syllabus maybe more apparent in the methods chosen by the authors of the schemes of work produced by SACRE.

Throughout my research on teachers' views, I have been exploring whether the pedagogical approach used to teach RE has an impact on the engagement of pupils. A teacher's religious affiliation can be seen as contributing to this perspective and perception. Looking more closely at the respondents' own beliefs and aims as to why they think RE is important, may reveal a connection. There may be a difference between the aims that are classed as important by teachers from a particular religious tradition or a difference between whether teachers of faith see a particular aim as important, in contrast to teachers who do not have a faith. After looking at the data there was found not to be any connections between a teacher's religious affiliation and any of the other factors, for example a teacher's response

to the statement 'the dispositions engage pupils of faith/no faith' with the religious affiliation of the teacher. On reflection, a teacher's own beliefs and religious affiliation should not affect their professional judgement and practice. Whilst stating the latter, however, it must be noted that there were proportionally more Christian teachers, than other faith and none faith groups, 'agreeing' that the dispositions support the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith.

Other themes examined which did not reveal anything of note include: a teacher's response to dispositional statements, for example 'the dispositions do not change the teaching of RE' and the methods teachers use frequently, the reason behind this being whether a teacher was in favour of the dispositions or not may have an impact on the methods used to deliver their RE. As previously mentioned this would have less impact due to the majority of primary teachers following a prescribed set of lesson plans. Likewise, the aims that a teacher selected as personally most important, and responses to various statements about the dispositions, did not reveal any connection. Interestingly, at interview some teachers divulged that they had not thought of RE in that manner before and as such aims would not have influenced other areas of their practice. A final connection that I pursued was whether the length of a teacher's role as a co-ordinator would have an impact on what the teacher personally thought was important in RE. I had surmised that the 'era' in which teachers trained in may have had some bearing on their outlook and perspective on RE, however this was found not to be the case.

I have also looked at my data with the view to see whether it revealed certain 'types' of teacher, where responses to questions were typical. These explorations encompassed: a

teacher in a mainly white British populated school; an experienced secondary specialist; a primary school teacher new to leading the RE team; teachers with faith; teachers with no faith; a teacher in a faith school; and a teacher sceptical about the agreed syllabus. On closer examination, this analysis did not reveal anything worthy of mention since the teachers' responses were so diverse.

6.8. Themes emerging from questionnaire data to inform interview design

Although I have already outlined my interview schedule, additionally, in the light of the survey responses, I now wish to explore in more detail certain themes that have emerged from the questionnaire data.

Relative to my research questions (Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE? and Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?) it was interesting to note that the aims that teachers selected as being 'most important' did not have much of a bearing on their day-to-day practice or their choice of methods used in the classroom. In assessing whether the dispositional approach encourages a greater degree of engagement, it would be of further interest to ask teachers at interview what relation they saw between the aims that they chose and why this did not seem to inform their choice of the methods. In turn, I would also like to explore whether the methods chosen were seen to be conducive to promoting the dispositions, and furthermore, whether this impacts on the engagement of their pupils.

Related to my first research question (Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE?) is the data on the frequency of method used as ranked by teachers. At interview I would like to ask teachers about these

methods. In particular, I would like to follow up the three methods connected with Collective Worship. As both primary and secondary teachers stated that they use these methods ‘often’. Four primary teachers stated that they were ‘not allowed’ to use one or more of these methods. I would also like to ask teachers what relationship they perceive between RE and Collective Worship. With values being used as part of Collective Worship, I would like to see if there is a closer connection between RE and Collective Worship because of the dispositional approach used in the 2007 syllabus.

Connected to whether the aims of the syllabus aligns with teachers’ understandings of the aims of RE and whether the syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils from a background of no faith is a second theme emerging from my questionnaires. This theme encompasses three aspects of the dispositional approach: the confessional nature, shared values and, the language of the dispositions. One secondary teacher highlighted the confessional nature of the Birmingham approach, I would like to interview this teacher to explore their anxieties in regard to firstly, being ‘required’ to develop pupils in this manner and, secondly, whether this role is solely the responsibility of a teacher of RE. Overwhelmingly, many primary and secondary teachers in their questionnaire responses highlighted the shared values of the syllabus. I want to look more closely at why teachers think that in teaching through values, RE becomes more relevant for themselves to teach and their pupils to learn. Lastly, another facet that was referenced by a number of teachers is the language of the dispositions as being difficult to understand, and as such not actually being referenced in their classroom teaching. Further exploration will inform whether this has an impact on pupil engagement, the focus of my second research question.

Related to my third research question (Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?) another area of concern raised by teachers in the ‘free response’ questions asking about the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus, is the perceived lack of knowledge about faiths that pupils have as a result of being taught through the dispositions, rather than to a more systematic teaching of religions. The majority of teachers referring to this as a concern were primary teachers, referring to the format of the schemes of work produced by SACRE, not the actual syllabus. However, in not delivering a more ‘conventional’ format to lessons, I want to ascertain whether primary non-specialists are more out of their ‘comfort zone’ in delivering more abstract concepts from the dispositions than away from concrete knowledge and facts. Moreover, whether teachers think this impinges their pupils’ engagement. In pursuing these aspects I would like to interview a range of teachers including those who have shown that they are in favour of the dispositional approach and those who have expressed concern with the 2007 syllabus. This will give me the opportunity to ask more direct questions to both kinds of teachers. In total 52% of teachers stated that they were willing to be approached for interview. This comprised 54% secondary participants and 52% of primary and special participants, 54 teachers in total. In my research design I stated that I would interview 20 teachers. As part of my choice of interviewees, it will be important to have a range of teachers who have taught other syllabuses and also a selection of teachers who have taught for different lengths of time and have different experiences as a teacher. I will also look at the demographics of the teachers’ schools to ascertain the populations of pupils’ faiths. However, the main reason behind the need to interview is to understand the examples and responses given in the questionnaires. I want to discover the classroom practice behind the assumptions given, and

to examine why teachers responded in the manner that they did and how this impacts on their classroom practice. I have found the collation of the survey findings and the analysis of the data most insightful in giving me an overview of my research at this stage. I will now reflect further in the next phase whilst interviewing teachers.

7. INTERVIEW FINDINGS

7.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present an overview of the responses gained during the interview process. It will not be practical, or desirable to present the responses of each interviewee to every question. To this end I have grouped questions together and will present representative examples and themes given in response. I will also look at any outlying responses. The findings will be presented in this chapter with the ensuing analysis Chapter 8: Discussion.

The next section of this chapter outlines the considerations through which I selected the interviewees. I will also introduce a penportrait of each interviewee whilst maintaining their confidentiality.

7.2. Selection process

53 survey participants stated that they were willing to be interviewed. In my research design I proposed to interview 20 teachers, thus I will need to select interview participants. I created a spreadsheet of the survey participants willing to be interviewed.

One of the main reasons for selecting teachers for interview was to further explore comments that they had made in their questionnaires. Some teachers responded in support of the dispositional approach and referenced examples of how it was working favourably in their school. It was important to have the opportunity to further explore these views. Conversely, some teachers voiced criticisms of the syllabus in their questionnaires and I wanted to discover more about their reasons for these opinions. Thirdly, some teachers offered a distinctive perspective in relation to the syllabus and I wanted to explore this

further. Asking these teachers to interview gave the opportunity to discuss these views in greater depth. Where several teachers had responded in a similar manner it was important to represent these themes, although this would not be a representative sample of teachers being chosen for interview, but an exploration of themes as expressed by teachers in their questionnaires. In line with the themes to be explored, interview participants were also selected for a number of other reasons: the population of their school; in order to ensure that a mixed representation of teachers and a variety of types of school in Birmingham were interviewed. By ‘a mixed representation of teachers’ I wanted to include teachers with RE qualifications and none, teachers with a variety of years’ experience leading RE, teachers who had completed their training recently along with teachers who had not recently trained and teachers with a range of personal details such as gender and age. In referring to ‘variety of types of school’ I wanted to survey teachers from the range of schools eligible to teach the Agreed Syllabus, from local authority schools to academies to faith schools and schools from different geographical areas of Birmingham. Although the primary reason for interviewing were the responses given in teachers’ questionnaires.

Some potential interviewees were excluded, since although they offered revealing answers in the shorter response questions, their longer responses were not as detailed as other teachers who had replied similarly in the shorter answers. In this case, it therefore made sense to ask teachers to interview with fuller detailed responses. Other teachers who stated that they were available for interview had either not completed the longer response questions, or did not do so in any revealing depth. As such it was difficult to select these teachers for interview without knowing more information when other teachers had responded to a fuller extent. In a few cases teachers had since left their school or were

currently on maternity leave which made it difficult to follow up for interview. A small number of teachers who completed the questionnaire were new to Birmingham and stated that they did not know a lot about the syllabus or the approach, as such I thought that it would be futile to interview some of these individuals. If I had a larger interview population and more time it may have been of interest to interview these teachers; as my current research remit stands I could not afford this luxury. Another reason for not interviewing some teachers was that they had responded incorrectly and had not ranked the aims of RE as instructed. It was therefore difficult to call them to interview as there was not a clear picture of their view.

The following table shows the list of school types from which I selected 20 teachers for interview. The survey designated each teacher an identification number. With this being long and unwieldy, I have allocated teachers a number corresponding to the total number of teachers completing my survey. I have also included the teacher's description of their school as completed in the question.

Number for School	Identification of School	Type of School (as described by interviewee)	Type of school	Number of years leading RE and training experience
		Special		
1	Teacher 38	A range of different ethnicities. Cognition and language school	Local Authority, primary special	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
2	Teacher 4	Pupils with cognition and learning difficulties. Multi faith school	Local Authority, secondary special	Less than a year, secondary non-specialist
		Primary		
3	Teacher 29	Majority Muslim populated school with small white minority	Local Authority	5-10 years, primary non-specialist
4	Teacher 41	Predominately white school with probably 15% of other faiths	Local Authority	5-10 years, primary non-specialist
5	Teacher 43	Quite white British school	Academy	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
6	Teacher 50	Mainly Muslim school	Academy	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
7	Teacher 60	Church of England School, Mainly Muslim (70%)	Academy, Church of England	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
8	Teacher 66	Junior School, Slightly more diverse than we were	Local Authority, Junior	3-4 years, primary non-specialist
9	Teacher 69	60% white and then other ethnic minorities	Local Authority	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
10	Teacher 74	Predominately white school. 10ish% non-white	Academy	5-10 years, some RE training as part of teaching degree
11	Teacher 7	Majority Muslim	Academy	3-4 years, some training as part of

				teaching degree
12	Teacher 13	80-90% Muslim	Local Authority	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
13	Teacher 14	It's a mainly white school. We do have lots of children from different ethnicities	Local Authority	Less than a year, primary non-specialist
14	Teacher 22	Infant School, British white English. Very few children of other heritages	Local Authority, Infant	Less than a year, previously taught in Catholic sector
		Secondary		
15	Teacher 92	Islamic School, totally 100% Muslim heritage	Local Authority Islamic	Over 10 years, teaching qualification in RE
16	Teacher 94	Academy 99% Muslim populated	Academy	5-10 years, undergraduate degree in RS and teaching qualification
17	Teacher 95	From the 'white highlands' to increasing numbers of pupils from Muslim background, academy	Academy	Over 10 years, undergraduate degree in Theology and teaching qualification
18	Teacher 97	Biggest religious group in the school is Muslim, then Christian, Hindu, Sikh and then Jewish. Foundation School	Voluntary Aided, Grammar, single sex	5-10 years, undergraduate degree in Theology and RS and teaching qualification
19	Teacher 98	Just under 90% Muslim	Local Authority	Over 10 years, undergraduate degree in RS and teaching qualification
20	Teacher 101	60% of pupils from Asian heritage, about 30% white and 10% afro-Caribbean	Academy	Over 10 years, undergraduate degree in Theology and teaching qualification

Table 7-1 Interviewees' details

7.2.1. Analysis of interview data

After I had conducted the interviews and completed the transcripts, I started to explore the interviewees' responses (Appendix 16: Sample Interview Transcript - Teacher 98 – Secondary). I found it useful to read through the transcripts a number of times to familiarise myself with the content. Once I was more acquainted with the information I was able to start looking for emerging themes. Firstly I looked for comments associated with my research questions, for example: engagement, aims and the teaching of the syllabus. I knew that interviewees would comment on these aspects since I had planned these questions in my semi-structured interview schedule. Secondly after becoming more familiar with the content of the transcripts, I looked for and colour coded key words such as 'dispositions' and 'problems with the syllabus'. These were words and themes that I saw in several transcript responses and also from my notes made at interview. When completing this cycle of analysis I made notes on other areas that the interviewees had commented on so that I could return and check across the transcripts in relation to these themes. Examples of these themes included: confessional, collective worship and knowledge. I highlighted the various themes in different colours and underlined themes related to my research questions (see Appendix 17: Example of coded interview transcript – Teacher 98 – secondary). After each transcript was highlighted I was more able to combine the different coloured sections from their own transcript, having firstly labelled them with the teacher's details. I compiled documents relating to each theme. I also found it useful to print out these pages and to physically move the individual quotations around so that I could pursue connections and overlaps. Within the initial wider themes I found more finely related concepts. I was able to further subdivide the initial categories and look at more specific comments. For example, one of the first themes

that I identified as a result of my research questions was ‘engagement’. However, in analysing in a more detailed manner I was able to see that three teachers had commented in relation to teacher-pupil relationships and the impact this had on engagement in the classroom. Once these themes were established I collated the different snippets of quotations into labelled poly pockets ready to weave into the discussion. This allowed points of interest to be arranged, connections to be explored and more pertinent quotations to be offered to exemplify a theme or if an individual teacher’s comments were of interest and I was able to document their response without their voice being lost.

In the following three sections I will explore the themes discovered through my analysis. The main headings in this chapter are related to my subsidiary research questions: aims and importance, engagement and meeting the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE. These are also examples of the cross-question exploration that was undertaken during analysis of transcripts. Each section will therefore be prefaced with a reminder of the main questions asked at interview, with the emerging themes that were explored through analysis outlined as subheadings. These subheadings have resulted from the cross-transcript analysis that was undertaken resulting in these themes being seen in a number of transcripts. The final section in this chapter outlines the additional affects of the Birmingham approach, which emerged during my research.

7.3. Aims and Importance

At interview I was able to ask teachers to elaborate on why they had ranked the aims in the manner that they had in their questionnaire. The questionnaire asked teachers to rank the SCAA (1994a and 1994b) aims for RE twice: as personally most important and most important for the syllabus.

Number of Aim	Description of Aim
Aim 1	to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain
Aim 2	to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures
Aim 3	to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues
Aim 4	to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development
Aim 5	to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions

Table 7-2 SCAA Aims of Religious Education

In the case of a few teachers, even though teachers had chosen different aims personally to those for the syllabus, teachers were able to justify how these complemented one another. This teacher selected aim 5 personally, and aim 1 as being most in line with the aims of the syllabus: *‘I think that they are very similar. I think because with knowledge and understanding comes the positive attitude’*, (Teacher 60 - Primary). In this case, one aim was seen as supporting the development of the other.

A few teachers seemed to clarify their thinking at interview, changing their mind from the aims that they had selected when completing the questionnaire. One teacher changed their mind about the aims selected after having more time to reflect and, another teacher stated that after incorrectly ranking when completing her questionnaire, she could actually not decipher any major differences between the aims, and as such would prefer not to comment. Only a few teachers altered their comments at interview and this may well be symptomatic of people generally completing questionnaires quickly. However, when given more time to consider their choices, at an interview for example, they may well respond in a different manner. There may also be another reason at a deeper level as to why teachers’ responses

differed. If the aims for RE are seen as transient and not that critical in the day-to-day practice of delivering RE, and are not a core and central focus as an ‘unchangeable’ pillar in a teacher’s thinking, then they could well change from one day to the next and not impact on their practice.

It is interesting to note, regardless of the aims that teachers had chosen either personally or aims more aligned to the syllabus, teachers responded with the need for RE to promote understanding, tolerance, respect and the importance of living together. In response to the question, ‘why is RE important?’ one teacher commented: *‘And that’s why I think it is important that you start off by what the children understand of understanding different religions’*. (Teacher 29 - Primary). 6 teachers stated that RE is important because it contributed towards tolerance in society: *‘It is about tolerance and respect and appreciation for what other people believe,’* (Teacher 69 - Primary). Another teacher remarked that it is important because it is relevant to pupils’ lives. 12 teachers stated that the importance of RE is because it contributes to knowledge and understanding of other faiths and each other:

Because there is a lot of dialogue in RE. And that actually promotes understanding and promotes people having an open mind. That’s what I feel I do feel with Religious Education. (Teacher 92 - Secondary)

There was not any tension between aims selected as personally important and the responses to the question about the importance for RE. In fourteen responses out of the twenty teachers interviewed, there was a direct relationship between teachers’ answers at interview as to why RE is important and the personal aims that they had selected when answering the questionnaire. This can be exemplified by a secondary teacher selecting aim 5 as important stating at interview:

To develop a positive attitude towards... [...] And it's about learning about other people and being in contact with other people and nothing about why people do the weird and wonderful things they do. (Teacher 94 - Secondary)

Another teacher responded that RE is important because it supported pupils to give reasons for their answers. This teacher had selected aim 1 as most personally important which does not directly relate to her comment; aim 3 might have been more relevant. Five teachers ranked the aims of RE incorrectly during the questionnaire. What some teachers actually answered was ‘what is the importance of the aim?’ In these cases, the responses I got were not ranked 1 to 5, but sometimes responding that all of the aims were of equal prominence.

On the whole teachers did not expound much more than the actual aims statements as to why RE is important. However, two teachers did elaborate further. One teacher referring to aim 5 further commented in reference to the Trojan Horse events:

Yes obviously I think it's important that the children are aware of lots of different religions and the fact that people do things differently in different ways. And we've had debates in class about why they do that. And it's about just understanding and accepting and tolerating. Especially with all the Trojan Horse investigations I'm just making sure that the children are aware that it is okay to believe in something different. (Teacher 14 - Primary)

Another teacher expanding on her choice of aim 4 stated: ‘Also I think with the thread of British values coming in as well I think that's really important. What we try to do as a school is to incorporate as many of the British values as we can’. (Teacher 42 - Primary)

There were a number of questions asked at interview which gave my interviewees the chance to speak about the importance of teaching RE: In your opinion why is it important to

teach RE? What are the challenges in teaching RE? Tell me about the methods you use to teach RE. Tell me about a successful lesson you've taught in RE. What do you think that the dispositions are about? Are there things that you particularly like or dislike about the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? Several themes emerged from analysing these questions: the contribution that RE makes towards living together and acceptance; responses to the Trojan Horse event in terms of RE contributing towards a broad and balanced curriculum and, the dispositions and the loss of the systematic teaching of RE. I will now explore each of these themes in more detail.

7.3.1. Living With Others

One theme that emerged during interviews was that the syllabus supports pupils' understanding of one another in the multi-faith city. This can be seen as exemplified by an experienced secondary teacher commenting on the syllabus:

It reflects Birmingham... that reflects where we are living. And it's about learning about other people and being in contact with other people and noting about why people do the weird and wonderful things they do. And all the positiveness that comes out of that [...] It is different to other agreed syllabuses because it is responding to the city that we are living in. And that is important. (Teacher 94 - Secondary)

This teacher is commenting on how the aims of the agreed syllabus develop pupils' understanding of others, regardless of whether their practices are viewed as being out of the pupils' life experiences. This is developed beyond a 'tolerance of each other', to a more positive deeper understanding and respect. In this manner, through the development of a locally agreed syllabus, the aims of RE are as seen responding to a localised context.

Another secondary school teacher reinforces this perspective, referring to her involvement in the ASC process:

The discussion of the process, as I understand, was very much how do we develop a cohesive society. How do you have the type of communities around Birmingham where we can all be proud of the young people that are contributing to that community. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

Thus within the syllabus is the aim to develop a social and communal aspect that can be fostered through the knowledge gained about other people's beliefs and values. For the young people of Birmingham this can be used practically to understand others in the city where they live.

Several teachers referred to the importance of RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum in educating pupils in the light of local and global events, for example, the Trojan Horse incident in Birmingham and global terrorism: '*Especiallly with all the Trojan Horse investigations. I'm just making sure that the children are aware that it is okay to believe in something different*', (Teacher 14 - Primary). Another primary teacher spoke of the increased importance of RE in the light of the threat of terrorism:

We now live in an international world. These children growing up are going to have dealings in different places potentially in different countries with all kinds of people, and it's really important to be able to live and work alongside each other. And not just tolerate each other, value each other. [...] I think from that point of view and from a general life, with life with terrorism and everything else is happening I think if people just understood one another, understood why things were... [...] And I think that for our children because some of our children are getting those negative messages at home, because they're not always having the balanced argument at home, because they are not always being exposed to things at home, it is so important that we help them to do that. [...] It's broadening their world isn't it? (Teacher 74 - Primary)

Both teachers working in predominantly white schools see the need for the curriculum to teach their pupils about other people and religions in their city, about inclusivity, and the need to educate and broaden pupils' minds in the light of some parental views. Another teacher in a school of a slightly more mixed population spoke in regard of the importance of her pupils being able to understand their own faith and beliefs:

It's just that it's important from a very early age that children have an understanding of their own beliefs and also that they put it in some sort of context within the school community. The younger that you can sort of be exploring other people's similarities and differences it's easier then for the children when they come into contact with people in later life... to accept that people are different to them or similar to them as well. [...] Also I think with the thread of British values coming in as well I think that's really important as well. What we try to do as a school is to incorporate as many of the British values as we can. (Teacher 41 - Primary)

Here is a perspective gaining prominence in regard to the importance of pupils firstly knowing their own beliefs, which can be seen as making them less susceptible to other viewpoints that might be forced or coerced upon them. This teacher also makes direct reference to the fundamental British values agenda (DfE, 2014) which was introduced in line with the focus on SMSC, and to ensure that provision in schools, post Trojan Horse events, is broad and balanced. Another primary school teacher refers to the syllabus responding to such events:

But I think Birmingham has a particular issue. That it has to address. In the current situation it's obviously a lot more pressing. I think they are trying to break down the barriers that exist in society, prevent prejudice and deal with it in a very sensitive way. And I think the only way that they can do that is by the faiths working together and by setting that example. And the dispositions are useful because if they are focusing on the

similarities, much more than the differences, then that's kind of feeding into that into Birmingham's way of thinking. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

This teacher comments retrospectively on how the approach of the syllabus can be seen as responding to the Trojan Horse events.

7.3.2. The role of Learning About

As in the questionnaires, a number of teachers, namely primary, raised concerns about the lesson material produced by SACRE. The concern expressed was about knowledge acquisition. The primary lessons are planned around encountering a different disposition every three weeks. As such, some teachers felt that pupils were not being exposed to the depth of knowledge that a more systematic teaching of faiths would provide. The issue of lack of depth of knowledge can be exemplified by a primary teacher remarking in favour of a more knowledge-based curriculum at a primary level:

I actually think AT2, the learning about different religions traditions is important. For me I feel that maybe for primary schools should be more about learning about it and I think it's when you get into secondary school... (Teacher 29 - Primary)

A secondary school teacher commented on the order of the attainments targets in the 2007 syllabus:

I personally believe you cannot learn from faith until you have learnt about religious traditions.... [...] So I understand that they are the opposite way around for emphasis but it doesn't make sense in my head...(Teacher 101 - Secondary)

The following longer response also echoes these sentiments:

I just think that we are a little bit lost about the learning about side... About talking about what is different between them. Now I think if you said to them, can you tell me what is different between Islam and Christianity. They could probably tell you the obvious... But when it would come to deeper side... I think they would struggle to tell you. Or what the holy book is called. They wouldn't know. They know the Bible. Unless you had a child in the class who reads from the Qur'an they wouldn't know. (Teacher 14 - Primary)

Whilst a secondary teacher comments on her partner's primary experience:

They [the pupils] do a lot of go into the playground and draw rangoli patterns. Let's have a chocolate to put on a desk and not eat it for the lesson, for example to show what Ramadan is. But he says they don't know anything about religion. They don't know anything. They are given all this creativity and space to reflect, but what are they reflecting on? They don't know. (Teacher 97 - Secondary)

Teachers are not denying the importance and the creativity that is brought about by the dispositional approach but, this seems to come at the expense of a more detailed knowledge and understanding of religions. Reflection and space is seen as important but, without the foundation of the understanding of religious material, the benefit can be seen as dubious.

This leads a primary teacher in a mixed population school to state:

For our children they obviously have a strong knowledge of their own faith and beliefs, the majority, the Muslim children but they don't have any knowledge of other religions and that extends to their parents. And then our white parents, an awful lot of them say that they are atheist, and actually again there is quite a lot of misunderstanding of what happens in other religions and what the beliefs are. And so I strongly feel that in a primary school I think our first duty is to teach them about the different religions. (Teacher 29 - Primary)

Although this teacher's pupils come from a background of strong faith and others from a background of no faith, the importance of knowledge and the basis from which to develop is seen as being of utmost importance. Through the teaching of dispositions she feels that there is not a coherence and understanding and as such pupils are not developing a detailed knowledge of faiths. This is echoed by a secondary teacher highlighting the importance of the academic nature of the teaching of religion:

I think that more so than ever, perhaps in the last few years it would feel wrong if our young people didn't leave school with an understanding of religion because of what is happening in their world. And because of that I think it's important that they get that understanding through an academic delivery and not just through their own faith based practice. (Teacher 97 - Secondary)

The importance of knowledge and academic rigour of RE is highlighted here, particularly in the light of the new GCSE specifications.

7.4. Engagement

Several questions at interview prompted responses which will be highlighted in this section: What are the challenges in teaching RE? Tell me about the methods you use to teach RE, Tell me about a successful lesson you've taught in RE, What helps the most with engagement – aims, methods or pedagogy? Are there things that you particularly like or dislike about the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? There were also several statements in relation to the dispositions that I discussed with interviewees.

In this section I will explore the following themes that emerged: the importance of relevance and connection to pupils' lives, the role of relationships, the connection between RE and whole school SMSC and, the relationship between RE and collective worship.

However, firstly it is important to explore teachers' understanding of the terms used in one of the questions at interview, aims, pedagogy and methods, in order to further understand what teachers think impacts on engagement.

7.4.1. Understanding of terminology

When teachers were asked what best supports pupil engagement: aim, pedagogy or method, there were a variety of responses. It is also of interest to note how teachers referred to these terms. It will be helpful to briefly outline what I understand by these terms and then to illustrate what my interviewees thought.

When I refer to the term 'pedagogy' I am referring to a set approach through which RE is delivered, this will denote teaching RE in a certain manner. For the purposes of my research the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus would be an example of a pedagogy. This in turn should convey the aims of the subject, in the case of Birmingham, developing the individual pupil and society. This subsequently impacts on the methods that are used in day-to-day practice: for example the use of visiting speakers or the use of role-play.

Not many of the teachers I interviewed expressed their understanding of these terms. One teacher asked for clarification as to what I meant by 'methods' and then replied: *'I think that's the route to engagement. I really think that's the route for our kids'*, (Teacher 38 - Special). Other teachers did not extensively comment on the meaning of the terms, but stressed the relational aspect between the three: *'But I think the aims and the dispositions that feed into the methods that you choose... So I think it's a mixture of all three'*, (Teacher 60 - Primary) and *'I think that the dispositions are important as a foundation to start with but then its building on it using various methods'*, (Teacher 41 - Primary). Another group of

teachers discussed the terms in a little more detail, in this illustration, referring to long-term engagement: *'Well the way that you teach and the methods that you teach is engagement for that hour. I think that's probably short term. I think it's probably the aims'*, (Teacher 97 - Secondary). Whilst a primary school teacher started to define the terms:

I think the one that leaps to mind is the pedagogy. That to me is the science of teaching. [...] So the science of it is how you do it. How you get it across, how I'm going to tackle this, how I'm going to engage them, how I'm going to explain, how I am going to get them to do the learning, [...] The aims are sort of the why am I doing this, that's your objective if you like, why am I doing this, what's the point of the Religious Education lessons? What's it for? So you'd have that in mind and then and then your pedagogy, then you'd be okay I know I need to engage all the types of learners in this and it could be difficult so then my method is going to be... I'm going to do X, Y and Z. (Teacher 22 - Primary)

The majority of teachers responded with what best supports their pupils' engagement was the daily methods used in the classroom. Although one teacher acknowledged that the dispositional approach compelled the use of certain methods: *'But for me the way that the dispositions links in with the methods because they free up to do things'*, (Teacher 74 - Primary). One secondary teacher responded that the choice of topic significantly contributed to pupil engagement. A number of teachers responded that it was a mixture of all three: aims, pedagogy and methods that supported engagement: *'I think it's all three'*, (Teacher 4 - Special).

Another question gave teachers the opportunity to expand on their survey responses in regard to both the methods used and frequency of their use. When asked why certain methods were used more frequently than others, teachers replied that they needed 'hands on' approaches for their pupils, they needed to keep pupils' attention and to harness creativity. A

few teachers also responded that some methods were used more frequently than others to support their pupils' limited experience. One primary teacher responded that more active methods were used more frequently: *'[...] because they are interested. When children are interested they will learn'*, (Teacher 7 - Primary).

7.4.2. Relevance

Another aspect which contributes to the engagement of pupils is how relevant RE is made to their lives. Teachers commented that pupils are engaged when they can share what they believe, that good RE takes place by bridging the gaps and making connections between the life of the pupil and the life of the religious person, when: *'[...] it was relevant to their lives'*, (Teacher 74 - Primary). Many teachers agreed with the statement: 'Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions'. A primary teacher responded: *'It seems more pertinent. It's more real. They can relate to it'* (Teacher 7 - Primary). Whilst a secondary teacher in a faith school responded: *'Because with dispositions yes, they talk about it, they link up Religious Education to life,'* (Teacher 92 - Secondary). The majority of teachers were in agreement with the statement: 'The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives', with this secondary school teacher's comment encapsulating many of the other responses: *'Well that sums up the purpose of them I think for me'*, (Teacher 94 - Secondary). Whereas another secondary teacher partially agreed with this statement: *'I don't think the dispositions do that necessarily. I think the teaching of RE does'*. She continues with an illustration about the wording and use of the dispositions in lessons:

So like being hopeful and visionary... We will do that and will look at Martin Luther King or whatever... But I'm not sure that the pupil goes away thinking about ooh I'm going to be hopeful and visionary...I think

they go away wondering I wonder what I can do to make a difference...
(Teacher 101 - Secondary)

In this case the language and terminology of the dispositions is seen as being rather superfluous, however, there is a connection with the pupil's life since the conative aspect of the syllabus is evident. The dispositional approach and their relevance for both pupils and teachers was also highlighted:

It links into everything and we need to understand it. And to understand it if there is a way into it that makes sense to you that it is relevant to your life, then it's always going to be more effective when you're teaching it.
(Teacher 74 - Primary)

It's that hook, that way in, that starting point yes. (Teacher 22 - Primary)

I think it is a really useful tool to find that relevance for people who have no faith. [...] It doesn't have to be about learning about. I find learning about religion, I think personally as an RE teacher I find it quite dry. I am not as excited about it. If I'm teaching children I don't see that it offers so much to the deep questioning and the provocative thinking. That as the ethical and the moral side of RE does. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

Interestingly, this teacher makes a connection between both the engagement in the subject and the development of deeper learning when the development of the pupil is paramount. The engagement stems from the content being seen as relevant to the pupil, which consequently leads to the questioning and exploration of more factual content.

7.4.3. Relationships

Relationships were also highlighted as being an important contributory factor towards engagement. A secondary teacher commented:

One of the biggest challenges today is the rather selfish question which can be asked "What is in it for me?" Whilst some pupils find other areas of

the curriculum difficult, Religious Education could well come into a category of its own in this respect because pupils who do not have a faith or any experience of faith may be unable to see the relevance of Religious Education. [...] Whilst the pedagogy of the Agreed Syllabus is important, I discovered that of the most significant factor in attempting to teach quality Religious Education was the personal investment of a teacher in the topic. That is not to say that the teacher had to have a faith position, but exposed children to the spirit of enquiry, doubt, hope and purpose. (Teacher 95 - Secondary)

Here the relationship between the teacher and their subject is viewed as part of the dynamic, as a tool, which enables pupils to engage more in lessons. Whilst another secondary teacher responded:

I think it is about relationships. ... If you haven't, with your pedagogy, found a way in, to hook those kids and get them to see that relevance. Everything else is wasted. It's a mixture of those things. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

This teacher acknowledges that engagement is not straightforward, that there are many contributory factors, pedagogy being one factor and the relationship between teacher and her pupils as another.

7.4.4. RE and SMSC

The relationship between RE and SMSC was another theme that emerged. In responding to 'Why is it important to teach RE?', a primary school teacher stated, '*I think to promote moral, spiritual, social erm... education. To give children a rounded view of the world*', (Teacher 7 - Primary). Another primary school teacher can be seen to elaborate further when referring to how RE supports the wider development of her pupils:

We obviously have different sorts of children like looked after children, different children in school. So there is a big need for that kind of development within things. And if you notice how our RE is within the PSHE... That was new this year. Because you want children to kind of... although they know they are separate lessons and they are highlighted to the children as separate lessons... With the dispositions and everything like that. At the same time we want children to sort of use the same terminology and just feel valued and appreciated when they perhaps don't have such a good start in life. To have aspirations in some of these things. [...] Yes I think for them as individuals and just helping them to grow to their full potential in each of those areas. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

In this school lessons have been grouped together so that pupils can clearly see connections in the subjects that are going to support them through similar aims, in this case RE and PSHE. The context and starting point of the pupils is viewed as being of utmost importance. RE is seen as being in partnership with other subjects to deliver this aim. Although there were more primary than secondary teachers involved in both my questionnaires and interviews, it was no surprise that it was the majority of primary teachers who ranked the SMSC aim higher than other aims in the questionnaire. With the focus on GCSE specifications increasingly placed at Key Stage 3, and with secondary RE teachers only seeing their classes once a week as opposed to primary teachers who teach their pupils for the majority of the curriculum time, primary teachers see a more holistic development of their pupils. This is not to suggest that secondary teachers do not think pupils' overall wider development is important, but this may have less emphasis for them due to the structure of secondary schooling. Secondary teachers may have a tutor group that they see at the start of the day but they are not responsible for the whole of their academic progress or emotional well-being.

This can be seen as substantiated by a secondary specialist commenting on the developmental aspect of the agreed syllabus:

I get what it is trying to do. I feel it then sets itself apart from any other subject. Would we ask a history teacher to develop those things? Or a maths teacher or a science teacher? I wonder if you took out of the agreed syllabus and just gave them to a school. I think they would say we agree with them in terms of PHSE, citizenship... [...] I don't think there's anything as comparable. (Teacher 97 - Secondary)

The teacher is stating that the wider developmental aims asked of an RE teacher in accordance with delivering the agreed syllabus, is not asked of any other subject teacher. Secondly, if the aims of the syllabus were given randomly to a school, it may place them with citizenship or PSHE subjects because of the emphasis on personal development. This teacher then opens up her argument to state that what she is being asked to do should be the responsibility of all teachers, not just RE teachers:

I don't like this assumption that this is what happens only in the RE classroom or that this is only an RE teacher's job. [...] They go beyond that they are looking for religious, human things. And I think they are looking for things that go beyond perhaps the education that you would get in a history classroom or in maths classroom or a science classroom. (Teacher 97 - Secondary)

However, the teacher then questions more specifically whether this is her role as a teacher: 'but is that my job as an RE teacher? Specifically? Or is that my job as a teacher?', (Teacher 97 - Secondary). This is very different to the former quotations from primary teachers wanting to integrate RE so that it can benefit their pupils. For this secondary teacher the academic demands of the subject are paramount. This aspect will also be

discussed further in the next section on Collective Worship and in the section later on in this chapter related to the confessional nature of the syllabus.

7.4.5. Collective Worship

A large number of teachers referred to Collective Worship as part of discussing RE. One primary teacher commented in response as to whether she saw Collective Worship as part of RE with: ‘*Yes. Yes it is a very very key part here. We have an assembly every day*’, (Teacher 14 - Primary). Whereas another primary school teacher saw the status of RE being enhanced in the light of its connection with Collective Worship:

I'm quite lucky in this school because my Head is very supportive and she really is keen to bring it in to assemblies and it's kind of got a very high profile in the school because I work with [NAME OF TEACHER] to do the assemblies we kind of look at how we can develop the dispositions as well. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

The connection between RE and Collective Worship was highlighted by another primary school teacher:

I'm the collective worship co-ordinator as well and everything is sort of connected. It's just so important because it promotes their social, moral well-being. And we as teachers are not just teaching them academic subjects. You know to pass exams you know we are there to, we are just there to promote their whole moral and social well being. (Teacher 7 - Primary)

Whilst another primary school teacher commented on how the connection was dependent on a situation:

But sometimes we will feed the dispositions into collective worship and if I can see there are gaps or there are areas where staff are struggling with a certain thing or there is a child that is been bereaved... We can put things in then... (Teacher 66 - Primary)

Other teachers were prompted to refer to Collective Worship when asked about the methods used to deliver RE. Although as part of Astley *et al.*'s (1997) list a number of methods included Collective Worship, a number of schools when asked about the method 'studying key present day religious figures' responded that they covered that in Collective Worship. When responding to the question as to how RE is taught in school, one primary teacher discussed the reflection diaries used in Collective Worship. In many primary schools the relationship and interconnected nature of RE and Collective Worship was very evident with many RE coordinators also organising the delivery of Collective Worship in their school. This relationship could be seen at one level as one aspect of primary schools being organised on a more holistic level, being, on the whole, smaller in size and able to make more connections. At another level primary school teachers saw themselves as contributing to the holistic development of pupils, rather than in a more formalised secondary setting as teaching of a subject. Whether a primary class teacher was teaching numeracy or delivering Collective Worship, this is seen as another aspect of their role.

In contrast, this is not seen to be the case in many secondary schools. One secondary teacher responded that RE and Collective Worship were treated separately, whilst another secondary teacher stated that they definitely were separate and that otherwise it linked to 'old RE':

To me erm... RE is not being able to list all of the books of the Bible in order and know what Genesis 2.4 says and afterwards saying 'thanks be to God', when reading out of the Bible. It's just not appropriate. (Teacher 97 - Secondary)

Another secondary school teacher corroborated the latter response stating:

I think if you are seeing collective worship as being that lead into some sort of religious experience or response then yes of course you would argue that they are different... I think that if collective worship is seen for what it could be, actually could be part of what we are doing in RE because it's about reflection, and it's just... As long as that reflection doesn't necessarily have to lead somewhere. (Teacher 94 - Secondary)

The latter two secondary teachers' comments could be seen to make reference to the connection between RE and Collective Worship as being encompassed in the term 'Religious Instruction' in the 1944 Education Act (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). Although many would argue that the connection has long been severed, and RE exists within its own right as an academic subject, the dispositional approach may be seen by some to have returned to a more confessional model of RE, and allowing for the connections with Collective Worship to be more pronounced. This issue will also be raised in the next section of this chapter.

There were variances in this primary/secondary divide in the relationship between RE and Collective Worship. When asked about the methods including 'religious worship' one primary school teacher commented:

Okay, so we don't engage in religious worship. [...] I don't think we should ever coerce anybody into doing something that they are not comfortable with... And I don't think it's our place in school to require that of children or particularly to... not to see worship... (Teacher 50 - Primary)

In contrast, one teacher interviewed at a secondary special school spoke of how she valued the connection between RE and Collective Worship since it raised the value of spirituality and allowed her to see their pupils in a different way:

It's making it that spirituality is important. Before I worked here I would never have thought to the children with severe autism were sort of spiritual... But they are spiritual, they show it in a very different way. [NAME OF PUPIL]... Very autistic. He showed such caring towards other children he would start flapping and get very upset if the others were upset. And that's a form of spirituality. As well its developing an understanding of how children who don't err... write, express it... (Teacher 4 - Special)

7.5. Teaching all faiths and none

As a pivotal part of my research in exploring whether the syllabus supports the teaching of all pupils, I specifically asked teachers about the faith of their pupils and engagement. There were two main themes that emerged. Firstly, the population of a teacher's school became prominent. Teachers responded from their own teaching experience and the populations of their schools: mono-faith populated schools and mixed populated schools. Another aspect that became apparent was how teachers thought the dispositions supported the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith through shared language, being able to encounter religious concepts in a more open forum and as a non-religious route into RE. I will now examine each of these themes in turn.

I asked teachers directly whether they had noticed a difference between how pupils of faith and pupils from a background of no faith engage in RE. Some teachers responded that there was a difference. One primary teacher had noted that the pupils of faith in her school were more confident in lessons:

There is definitely, there is definitely... I can tell in any RE lesson the children of faith and, you could say that they are more engaged. [...] They will have a go at the answers they just got more confident at putting their hand up and saying something, even if it's not quite right. They will have a go because they've had a go at thinking about things and reflecting about things. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

Another teacher noted a difference between pupils of different faiths and how they engaged: 'I find that children who are Christian are quite open to sharing their responses. And also children that are Sikh and Hindu... I find children that are from a Muslim background, are a little bit more reluctant,' (Teacher 41 - Primary). Another primary teacher noted:

A lot of our children are Muslim and practicing Muslims. So they are the ones that are really engaged in the lessons. They are the ones that want to share their beliefs and their ideas with you and have a curiosity about other faiths and beliefs. [...] It is much harder to engage the children who say 'I do not believe in God'. That's it. You will find if you're not careful that those are the ones that switch off in lessons. Will just sit there and being passive about it and not really paying attention. (Teacher 29 - Primary)

One must view these statements with an element of caution as there may be a variety of other factors impinging on pupils' responses and engagement as outlined in the previous chapter on engagement. Factors such as the role of a particular teacher, the pupil's character and background, the timing of the lesson, may all contribute to how RE is received. However, it is interesting to note from teachers' comments, the almost innate interest that pupils from a faith background have in regard to RE, how these pupils have already had the chance to rehearse the reflection and discussion process with their own faith experience, and how this is demonstrated in the classroom.

Other teachers were able to comment with reference to different populations in their schools and how RE is received. A primary school teacher responded with reference to the two distinct main populations in her school: firstly to the Muslim population, and secondly to the pupils from a background of no faith:

Well here as I say, the majority of our children are Muslim and are actively taking part in their faith as well. [...] And you see that within the lessons that they respond very well to the spiritual side of it and the ideas of beliefs and people's traditions. And they also have a massive curiosity about it. [...] And to be honest with you it is not the Muslim children that we have problems with. [...] I think a lot of it is fear. When you have a conversation with the parents I often find that they have said to the child do you want to go and the child has said no. And the parent supports that. (Teacher 29 - Primary)

One secondary teacher reflected on the changing population of her school and how this had affected engagement of pupils:

We have found that with more pupils who are Muslims, they are much better at understanding why we study religion even if it is not their religion. We used to be a very white school. That had a lot of pupils for whom religion wasn't important at all. Whereas now we hear much less, 'Why do I have to do this?' 'Why do I have to do this?' Because for these pupils, it's just part of their daily life to be aware of religion. I think the challenge... So that challenge has decreased. (Teacher 101 - Secondary)

Interestingly, teachers in different settings and areas of the city refer to Muslim pupils being more open to exploring aspects of other faiths than their counterparts from a background of no faith. Pupils with faith can see the benefit of learning about faith in general, whether it is their own or another faith. They seem to have an intrinsic understanding that faith is of importance and are engaged because of this factor. Whereas, in regard to pupils from a background of no faith, there is not seen to be the same 'ownership' and interest in these concerns since it is outside their experience.

Another line of responses refers to how the dispositional approach engages pupils from a non-religious perspective, by being almost non-religious in its approach. A primary school teacher, teaching in a white populated school comments of the dispositions:

They don't immediately shout this is an RE syllabus... And again in a secular society I think that's a good thing. Because I think some parents or children can be very switched off if you suddenly started coming at it from a very religion based angle. (Teacher 22 - Primary)

A secondary teacher working in a similarly populated school states that:

Using these dimensions in the agreed syllabus for Religious Education meant that pupils were exposed to the SMSC dimensions of religion without finding themselves inhibited by a lack of personal experience of faith in their own backgrounds. (Teacher 95 - Secondary)

Another secondary teacher responded: *'I think that it is a really useful tool to find that relevance for people who have no faith'*, (Teacher 98 - Secondary). A primary teacher teaching in a school with a majority white population remarks of how the dispositions support the engagement of her pupils:

You know when they come from a family where they've been told all their lives that religion is not something that we want anything to do with. They might switch off a bit. But if you say right today we going to learn about community, or... something like that they are kind of prepared to listen a bit more. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

However, speaking directly of the usage of the dispositions in the classroom, one secondary teacher comments: *'I don't think that the pupils necessarily realise what they are'*, (Teacher 101 - Secondary).

Although I did not ask a question directly about the inclusion of non-religious worldviews, some teachers took the opportunity to comment on this issue at interview. A primary teacher in a predominantly Muslim populated school commented, *'So I think that atheism should be*

taught in RE' [...] 'So things like looking at Humanist funerals and things like that,' (Teacher 29 – Primary). Whilst a secondary teacher referred back to an earlier Birmingham agreed syllabus which included non-religious worldviews, 'And the fact that I know that Birmingham was the first to have things like humanism and marxism as well I think.... The fact that they offered non-religious worldviews. I'm quite proud of the Birmingham agreed syllabus for that' (Teacher 94 – Secondary).

After discussing a scenario at interview involving a pupil who is disengaged with RE and whose parent does not want them to partake in a visit to a place of worship, one primary teacher responded with how she would engage the pupil:

Looking at the dispositions, have a think of, have a think of his own experiences. And try and sort of look at his interests and see if we can sort of pull something out. [...] But would you then say this is Religious Education? Would you actually say to the child this is Religious Education? Maybe you would actually not say that? You would actually say we are learning about and look at the LO [Learning Objective]. This is what we are learning to do children. We are learning to look at beautiful things, we're learning to focus on rules today so not actually say, is that 'Religious Education'? [...] You actually start the first lesson from their own experiences, like it's non-religious based. (Teacher 7 - - Primary)

Another teacher, in a predominately white non-religious populated school, reflects on how the dispositions enable this connection between her pupils and religion to take place:

One of the things that we need to accept nowadays is that a lot of children have no religion, and so we need to make it accessible. [...] And it helps involve children and engage children who do not have a religion. So they can see the relevance to themselves. [...] But if you are learning about appreciating beauty, then that does have a relevance. Because then they can contribute to something that is outside of religion that could have a spiritual side to it. (Teacher 74 - Primary)

The shared values aspect of the dispositional approach is seen to provide the connection that pupils from a background of no faith need in order to see the relevance of RE. Interestingly, a number of teachers stated that a ‘non-religious’ way into RE engages their pupils, whereas being directly faced with ‘religion’ would otherwise be a non-starting point and almost a point of instant disengagement. This furthers the previous discussion in regard to ‘common ground’ in that the dispositions can be interpreted from a non-religious perspective, are able to draw pupils into a common environment or shared experience, then enabling ‘the religious’ to be encountered. The immediacy of being confronted with a religious element that is alien and outside of pupils’ experiences is seen to be ‘softened’ by the dispositional approach, enabling the initial obstacle of disengagement to be overcome.

7.6. Additional affects of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus approach

In this section I will explore the themes that emerged in relation to questions asked at interview about the syllabus and the dispositions: In your opinion why is it important to teach RE? What do you think the dispositions are about? (See Appendix 2: List of Dispositions and Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus). Are there things that you particularly like about the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? What do you dislike about the syllabus or the dispositions? Themes that will be discussed in this section include: how the dispositions act as shared values, the confessional nature of the dispositional approach and, how the approach supports the wider development of character. I will now examine each of these themes in turn, illustrated with quotations from my interviewees.

7.6.1. Teaching Shared Values

The importance of teaching through shared values is one theme that teachers thought that the syllabus was aiming to achieve. As one teacher who was involved in the ASC recalls, *'[...] we were able to find some common agreement among different faith communities in the city, about what they aspire to for their young people'*, (Teacher 98 - Secondary). A primary deputy head teacher refers to the dispositional approach in this manner: *'They are values that you have in your life, they are common. And that is what makes us a family'*. She continues by describing the school's actions to enable the ethos and this approach to flourish and outlines the impact that this has had on pupils:

Over the last three years [Name of school] have really pushed our values and made a Christian ethos such a high priority. It's in everybody's performance management and everything the adults, the children, the lunchtime supervisors... [...] But since the school has over the last few years really pushed the ethos... and it threads through every aspect of school life. The engagement level is it's extremely high in the school. [...] And over the past couple of years there has been issues of what happened in society and the children come in and talk about it and they want to know. And I feel that they're able to do that. And I feel that they are able to have these discussions and ask an adult questions that they might feel uncomfortable about because of the ethos. So I think that really is the key behind everything. (Teacher 60 - Primary)

A secondary teacher refers to the dispositional approach originating from 'common ground' found in religions, that of wanting to develop as human beings:

I felt the way that I approach teaching different religions is finding what is common. And the common ground is we all want to be a better human being. Religions are there to make us better human beings. And no one in their right mind or sense would say we don't want to be a better person. And I feel, that that is a common ground between all religions. (Teacher 92 - Secondary)

Another secondary specialist teaching in a school predominately populated by one faith also comments in this vein when referring to how important the dispositions are:

It's all the things that first and foremost as human beings that we ought to be nurturing and cultivating. [...] So actually I think that looking at it on the shared human experience approach, the dispositions, is actually even more important when you've got collectively as we often have in the classroom, one experience. (Teacher 94 - Secondary)

This teacher continues referring to the importance of the dispositions in the planning process and not necessarily sharing them with pupils:

It's a shared human experience so anybody can look at the dispositions and perhaps all of them... at least most of them because they're dispositions and... We don't teach to them and the kids don't know what the dispositions are... But there is a starting point for planning, to look over for a lesson and think what I'm actually trying to achieve here. And they are really helpful for drawing out those... the bigger questions or what is it about what sort of experience should we start with with the kids. (Teacher 94 - Secondary)

The importance of the relevance of RE through the shared nature of the dispositions is seen as a strength of the approach, regardless of whether the pupils realise what a 'disposition' is, or can name one from the syllabus. A primary school teacher also highlighted this aspect:

So I think it's looking for similarities and it's looking at those aspects. And it's extending people's understanding of those layers in religions. It's not just that one person goes to church, one person goes to mosque... [...] And also the fact that when you have no religion, because it is through the dispositions you've got something, a life experience or a ideas that you can contribute. So it doesn't exclude children. [...] One of the things that we need to accept nowadays is that a lot of children have no religion, and so we need to make it accessible, so you can be this religion, this religion, or no religion. It's just one of those choices. So it just makes it more inclusive. And it helps involve children and engage children who do not have a religion. So they can see the relevance to themselves. [...] But if

you are learning about appreciating beauty, then that does have a relevance. Because then they can contribute to something that is outside of religion that could have a spiritual side to it. (Teacher 74 - Primary)

7.6.2. Confessional in nature

One secondary teacher (Teacher 97 - Secondary) raised a line of argument that was different to other teachers. This secondary specialist refers to RE as being taught through the dispositional approach as religious ‘instruction’, rather than ‘education’. This teacher raises three points of concern: the demand for a response from pupils; the language of the dispositions, being confessional and Abrahamic and; the concern that this type of development is seen as the sole responsibility of the RE teacher. As such, I am referring to this theme as ‘confessional’, although the teacher did not refer to the approach in this manner. Through the following quotations I will explore this teacher’s argument and concerns.

One of the first concerns raised is the requirement for pupil response: that when teaching through the dispositions there should be a response from the pupil as to how they are feeling, thinking or wanting to act as a reaction to the stimulus provided. This teacher states:

What I don't like them saying to somebody is that I didn't feel anything. And then someone saying you must've felt something. But I didn't feel anything. Or when you show them I don't know a really dramatic picture for you today, then a song. And I didn't feel anything. Okay. And I worry sometimes with the dispositions that what we are then saying, if you don't have that kind of reaction to whatever stimulus has been provided, that somehow you are then less than. [...] And if we are expecting them to have a reaction every time.

The expectation of a reaction referred to by the teacher is in effect the ‘conative’ aspect and nature of the dispositions (BCC, 2007, p. 5). What this teacher is querying is whether this should happen every time in response and whether ‘no response’ is acceptable. The conative aspect of the syllabus does invoke reaction and indeed action, and as such this teacher’s concerns may be justified.

The second aspect of the confessional nature raised, is the language of the dispositions. Although other teachers have referred to the language aspect of the dispositions being wordy and difficult for themselves, let alone for their pupils, Teacher 97 (Secondary) is raising a deeper concern about the instructional nature of the language and as such the approach of the dispositions:

And also you know we are going to learn how to be more forgiving today I think that just crossed into religious instruction. We are going to learn about the importance of forgiveness in religion and reflect on what we think about forgiveness, that's okay. We will learn to be more forgiving, that crosses the line. It's semantic I wonder perhaps...Those sorts of things. And allowing reflection on that rather tell me about a time that, you had to forgive somebody or next time somebody does something to you, I want you to forgive them. That's an instruction.

This secondary specialist continues by referring to the Christian origins of the dispositional language:

So for example being merciful and forgiving I think they are very religious toned words. Merciful and forgiving... that's very Christian, very Abrahamic for a start. And if I was going to put them in a more secular term I might put being ‘understanding of the situation of others’ or ‘trying to find resolution in conflict’ perhaps.

Thus there are two relational aspects being raised here: the instructional nature of the language, again with the expectation of a personal response to what is being studied, and secondly, the nature of the religiously termed dispositions. This teacher's comments can be seen in direct contrast with other teachers who have commented on the advantages of the shared aspect of the values and common ground that enables access to religious aspects through the dispositions. Teacher 97 (Secondary) is concerned that because of the religiously toned language there is an expectation and an instruction that needs to be fulfilled and that, in turn, this may alienate pupils. I will pursue this discussion further in the next chapter when I will explore, as Teacher 97 (Secondary) suggests, whether more profane language would be more suited and indeed can convey the nature of the dispositions.

Another aspect of the confessional concerns of Teacher 97 (Secondary) is whether this is the sole responsibility of a teacher of RE. There is a two-fold concern that the instructional aspect is not asked of any other subject, and also whether this development should be a wider educational concern of all teachers. The following quotations from the teacher's interview summarises these concerns:

I don't like this assumption that this is what happens only in the RE classroom or that this is only an RE teacher's job. [...] They go beyond that they are looking for religious, human things. And I think they are looking for things that go beyond perhaps the education that you would get in a history classroom or in maths classroom or a science classroom. [...] I get what it is trying to do. I feel it then sets itself apart from any other subject. Would we ask a history teacher to develop those things? Or a maths teacher or a science teacher? I wonder if you took out of the agreed syllabus and just gave them to a school. I think they would say we agree with them in terms of PHSE, citizenship... [...] I don't think there's anything as comparable. [...] I don't think there is anything on that list of dispositions that I disagree with, and there is nothing that I go oh no... I can't imagine getting a young person to be like to be generous, that's

terrible... but is that my job as an RE teacher? Specifically? Or is that my job as a teacher? [...] I think it's critical reflection.

Here the syllabus' dispositional approach to RE can be seen in contention, that it should not only be a wider educational aim and responsibility, but also calls into question whether it should indeed be an aim of education. This teacher supports the more academic teaching of RE and the critical nature of the subject, and less so the personal development aim which is at the heart of 2007 syllabus' approach.

7.6.3. Supporting the wider development of character

Another facet of teaching through dispositions led teachers to refer to the syllabus as supporting the wider development of pupils. One primary teacher remarked on how important this was since, *'It doesn't always come from the home. They don't understand their responsibilities in life.'* (Teacher 22 - Primary). A secondary teacher in a faith school similarly commented in regard to the development of character:

And when we come across the dispositions it's not like RE, it's more like life studies [...] It develops them as human beings it develops their characters. (Teacher 92 - Secondary)

One secondary deputy head teacher commented on the long-term nature of the approach: *'But I think they have got that opportunities and we won't see what the real benefits are of the RE teaching until these students are well into their adulthood. And it is seeds that we are planting',* (Teacher 98 - Secondary). This same teacher, who was involved with the 2007 ASC process, upholds the syllabus' direction (as one would expect) in affirming the importance of 'learning from' for both pupils and for teachers:

Learning from faith emphasises the development of the child and the skills and the attitudes that the child is developing for them to turn into a decent citizen. For them to take forward beyond the RE lesson and the course that they might be doing and I think that that is so much more valuable to a student than learning about religious traditions for many of whom you know it's not relevant. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

This teacher continues in reference to the conversations as part of the ASC:

It was definitely conversation and a process that was about citizenship. It was about focusing on the child. It was very child centred. It wasn't about this is just a lump of knowledge, a body of knowledge that we want to throw out there and impart. Treating children as empty vessels just to fill up with content. [...] So I believe that the the dispositional approach is about putting the child at the centre and let's not think about what we want children to know. But who we want children to be. And the dispositions help drive that. So it's about what kind of society we want and the individuals we are trying to nurture in the future through using RE as a vehicle and the content happens to be a vehicle. But that is not the end goal. The end goal was always about we want to develop these attributes in our students. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

According to this teacher the links between the development of the child and the development of society are clearly evident, as also stated in the syllabus itself (BCC, 2007, p. 4). The acquisition of knowledge is seen as secondary to the development of the pupil, with cohesion also of paramount importance.

Interestingly, a primary teacher commented about the dispositional approach and the contribution that it makes to a child's awareness of self:

And it makes you think about your choices and 'you're what are my morals?' And I wouldn't necessarily use those words with a child but it's the personal relevance. It's about self-awareness and self-knowledge. And that's important as well. I think it's going off on a tangent, but there is a lot of mental health issues with children that perhaps we didn't used to have because of the world we live in, the pace of life and the technology

we have. I think these dispositions kind of build in a stronger sense of self.
(Teacher 22 - Primary)

According to this teacher the importance of self-understanding is crucial not only to the lessening of mental health issues in society, but also reduces pupils' vulnerability to outside influences if they have a strong sense of who they are and are able to assess and to think more critically. This can also be seen in connection with the syllabus contributing to a broad and balanced curriculum. Similarly, a secondary teacher commented that in teaching through the dispositions the needs of the pupils as citizens of Birmingham were being met: *'It is different to other agreed syllabuses because it is responding to the city that we are living in. And that is important'*, (Teacher 94 - Secondary). Other teachers commented on the syllabus as a guide and even 'nourishment' for their pupils. As one primary school teacher in a majority white population school commented:

It's almost like you are giving them some nourishment. And I think it's rare that a child doesn't appreciate that you are actually trying to give them something special and it isn't necessarily about religion. (Teacher 66 - Primary)

This sentiment is echoed by another teacher stating the importance of the syllabus: *'Yes I think for them as individuals and just helping them grow to their full potential in each of those areas'*, (Teacher 43 - Primary). Another primary teacher reinforces this when stating: *'We want... we want our kids when they leave [SCHOOL NAME] to be balanced in their thoughts'*, (Teacher 92 - Secondary). As identified by a range of teachers in a variety of different schools, personal and character development is both recognised and endorsed.

The next chapter will draw from these initial points of discussion and return to my original research questions in the light of the findings from both my questionnaires and interviews.

8. DISCUSSION

8.1. Introduction

As the two previous chapters have shown there are a number of themes that have emerged from the findings of my questionnaire data and interview transcripts. As previously stated, the questionnaires were carried out for descriptive purposes providing information about ‘people characteristics’ and the relationship between those characteristics (Robson, 2011). Using interviews to complement this allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of my research questions through ‘sequential mixed methods’ (Creswell, 2009, p. 14). In this manner, my larger scale results led me to ascertain a more detailed understanding from the interviews carried out.

In this chapter I will return to my research questions set out in Chapter 1. I will provide a response to each of them in the light of my questionnaire and interview findings, and the literature review that I have undertaken. I will also recommend changes to the agreed syllabus in the light of my research. This chapter will be set out in five sections: three addressing each of my subsidiary research questions, a final section looking at my overall research question and one examining the issues arising from my research.

Firstly, I will examine **Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers’ understandings of the aims of RE?** My research revealed that teachers’ personal, most important aims for the subject were connected with values and the moral development of pupils. Teachers also stated that the development of character was an important aspect of RE. I will consider these viewpoints and examine how they are connected to the original vision of the ASC and the development of dispositions.

Secondly, I will address **Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE?** As previously acknowledged, the conditions necessary for successful engagement in the classroom must not be underestimated in their complexity and interrelated nature. In this section I will explore the significance of relevance and the importance that the 'content' taught is transferable and can be used in different 'everyday' contexts.

Thirdly, I will explore **Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?** In the light of an increasing number of adults turning their backs on organised religion, what impact does this have on their children in RE lessons? I will explore what my research reveals about whether the 2007 syllabus supports the teaching of RE with particular emphasis on teachers' responses as to whether the faith of their pupils makes a difference.

I will then draw the discussions to a culmination and address my overall research question.

Lastly, I will then move onto address the issues arising from my research. One of which is the connection between Collective Worship and RE. I will also discuss two main concerns raised by teachers in regard to the dispositional approach: the confessional nature of the syllabus and teaching religions systematically. During this section I will make recommendations as to how the syllabus could be reviewed in order to respond to the findings of my research.

8.2. Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE?

As discussed in Chapter 6, teachers selected in highest numbers the most important personal aim for RE as aim 4: 'to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development' and aim 5: 'to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions'; both of which show a clear preference for values. This is of significance since these aims are also commensurate with the aims of the syllabus. In this section I will discuss this alignment in more detail. I will also discuss the continuity demonstrated in my research findings, whereas the questionnaire data revealed the alignment between teachers' aims and those of the syllabus, this was also manifested at interview, where in response to being asked 'what is important in RE?' teachers gave values orientated responses.

In my questionnaires teachers were asked about aims twice: personally and in accordance with the syllabus. Whilst some teachers selected knowledge driven aims as being personally most important, aims 4 and 5 were selected by a higher number of teachers as personally important. Aims 4 and 5 were also selected by teachers as being most akin to the aims of the syllabus. When asked informally which aims were best suited to the syllabus' intentions, the drafting secretary Felderhof (2017) concurred with this choice of aims. In terms of aim 4: 'to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development', the syllabus is outright in stating that RE supports the overarching aims of the curriculum as set out in statute to promote pupils' SMSC development, including mental and physical dimensions (BCC, 2007, p. 3). The relationship between the development of pupils and society is also emphasised as being paramount: 'humans are social creatures identities are formed through relationships with

others' (Felderhof, 2007/8). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the three dimensions of RE as taught in this approach also contribute to this development. Felderhof (2014) maintains that in viewing pupils as agents, responding to beliefs that require action, the 'cultivation of dispositions, a tendency to act in particular ways' (p. 16) will be realised. This takes place when pupils not only develop their knowledge about different faiths (cognitive development) and are altered by the faith content (affective development) but also to bring about a change in response to what the pupil knows and what they have been affected by, resulting in an act of will, to respond as a consequence (conative development), (BCC, 2007, p. 5).

In relation to aim 5: 'to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions', Felderhof (2005c) maintains that 'RE should give students access to the depth of religious life together with the cultivation of agreed moral values and cultural creativity', (p. 6). The syllabus (BCC, 2007) states that '[p]upils should be offered a holistic view of religious traditions, their beliefs, their expressions and their practical actions', through a range of different encounters and as such 'pupils will have learnt about the key areas of religious life: religious practices, beliefs, sacred writings, figures, institutions, cultural expressions, events, actions, ethics and experience', (p. 6). In this manner, in order to address the needs of pupils and society, the 2007 syllabus uses the vehicle of religious content to cultivate the development of certain characteristics or virtues. This therefore becomes more practical in application through the formation of attitudes and the understanding of others. This can be seen as being echoed by a secondary teacher, involved in the ASC, stating at interview:

So I believe that the dispositional approach is about putting the child at the centre and let's not think about what we want children to know. But who we want children to be. And the dispositions help drive that. So it's about what kind of society we want and the individuals we are trying to nurture in the future through using RE as a vehicle and the content happens to be a vehicle. But that is not the end goal. The end goal was always about we want to develop these attributes in our students. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

The aims as selected by teachers, whether as personally important or as significant for the syllabus, were also echoed in the qualitative work that I carried out. Regardless of the aims that teachers selected as personally being important, three interrelated themes emerged from my interviews: tolerance, acceptance and living together. Clarke (2018) in a recent address to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) refers to the importance of these aspects in supporting community cohesion and praises the work of individual SACREs in contributing to this work. In terms of my research, irrespective of pupils' faith background, teachers viewed these aspects as important for their pupils. In learning about any given religious tradition, pupils would have an understanding about the adherents and their practices and as such be more understanding of when they encounter people of faith in their day-to-day lives.

Many teachers talked about the benefits of RE in developing tolerance. Although as Hella and Wright (2009) rightly caution, this must not remain underdetermined and cannot as they state, include tolerance of racism or homophobia. The theme 'acceptance' can be seen to move further to an understanding of what another person does and the reasons for this; even though it may not be part of your experience, you recognise and acknowledge it. The two former themes can be seen to be complemented by the third, living together. As part of living together one does not have to like how one another behaves, or completely understand

their motives for doing it. However, with living together is the requirement of compromise, an element of sharing and mutual understanding to accept one another even although there may be difference. This is what teachers stated they wanted for their pupils regardless of their age, background or faith. Far from ‘competing imperatives’ (Conroy, 2011), these themes are unified and coherent in the pursuit of one aim to support the development of pupils in society. Although as Woodward (2012) outlines, it would be facile to pretend that all differences were overcome by an agenda of shared values and concepts.

The themes from my research also show a pattern with the aims that the majority of teachers selected as being personally important for RE. As part of the SMSC aim (aim 4): cultural and social development would contribute towards a pupil’s understanding of tolerance, acceptance and living together. Whilst aim 5: ‘to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions’ would provide opportunities for pupils to develop a practical understanding (transfer) thus important for sustained learning. These themes are also significant aims in the 2007 syllabus. SMSC is referenced in the syllabus (BCC, 2007, p. 3) as being central to the development of pupils’ characters and the cultivation of the dispositions. Likewise, the dispositions act as a shared common language accessible enough to enable pupils to understand what it means in their lives (for example participating and willing to lead) but can also be understood in religious terms. As such the dispositions act as a common language or bridge between pupils’ lives and those of religious believers. Such an understanding is essential towards living in a diverse society and developing an acceptance of living together. These can be seen as central to the syllabus, and to the aspirations that the

majority of Birmingham teachers want for their pupils, as my questionnaires and interview findings demonstrate.

My research also highlighted teachers (the majority of whom were primary teachers) perceived a relationship between SMSC, RE, and the school's ethos. This view is echoed in the 'RE for REal' report (Dinham and Shaw, 2015, p. 12): specialist teachers emphasised the academic purpose of the subject and non-specialists emphasised personal and societal benefits. The CORE Report (2017) also concurs with this view stating 'many primary teachers, including subject leaders, were finding it difficult to separate RE from the more general whole-school promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development', (p. 49). There may be many reasons for why this is so, including the prominence of fundamental British values within the current education agenda, as a reminder that the whole of the curriculum is working towards promoting values and the SMSC agenda (HM Government, 2018). As non-specialists, the majority of primary teachers may have selected aims that both gave the subject meaning for them, as some of my interviewees stated, and relevance as to why they were teaching RE. In this manner, the more relatable aspects of the subject, such as contributing to character development are prioritised over less tangible factual aspects. Nevertheless, there are also important reasons as to why teachers may see the connections between RE and the wider curriculum. If a teacher perceives the needs of their pupils as paramount, then the personal development of pupils is seen as the most significant educational aim. This results in the relationship between wider aspects of education, SMSC and ethos becoming even more important; however, as Eade (2012) points out, the distinctive contributions of RE must not be lost. Similarly, another reason as to why these aims were chosen by primary teachers responding to my questionnaire is that,

as class teachers, they are responsible for teaching their pupils every curriculum subject. Primary teachers are with their pupils for the majority of every school day and as such may see themselves as being more responsible for developing their character and values more so than secondary school teachers, teaching a larger number of pupils throughout any given school week. As such, although teachers were asked to rank the aims of RE, they may have seen how these aims related to the curriculum as a whole and their role as a teacher rather than one subject.

In response to the question: **Do the aims of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE?** One of the most significant findings of my research demonstrates that the personal aims of the majority of my participants align closely with the aims of the syllabus. The aims chosen by teachers as important for the syllabus also show a relationship with the syllabus' aims. Similarly, teachers' responses in relation to why RE is of importance echoed the same theme of values and personal development. Thus for Birmingham teachers, the 2007 syllabus does address the aims of RE.

8.3. Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE?

One of the underlying questions of my research is to discover what enables the successful engagement of pupils and whether the 2007 syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE. As acknowledged in Chapter 4, there can be many varied and interrelated factors that enable this to take place. In this section I will link existing literature and my findings, resulting in examining the importance of the relevance for pupils as being key to their engagement and how the 2007 enables this to take place.

Affirming my literature review (Wallace and Poulson, 2003) participants stated that there are many factors contributing to pupil engagement. Respondents to my questionnaire raised a number of aspects including: relevance, connection to pupils' lives and, a pupil's religious background. The majority of teachers also stated that the daily methods used in the classroom had more impact on engagement than aims or pedagogy, although some teachers acknowledged engagement could be a combined result of these three factors. Interviewees corroborated these factors but also added the role of relationships as being key. In questionnaires and at interview teachers also referred to the dispositions as supporting the engagement of pupils:

The content is introduced in such a way that the children can hook their own experience onto the concepts so rather than being abstract they have some understanding of what they are learning about. (Teacher 40 - Primary).

One teacher reflected on how important the dispositions are for pupils to see the relevance of RE:

Yes because they cannot argue with the relevance of lessons if the dispositions can be seen as having value to all. It provides a more neutral way into the lesson content for pupils as you can establish how we all feel about the dispositions e.g. belonging before using a religion as an example to help understand this. (Teacher 98 - Secondary).

Whilst another teacher commented on how the pedagogy of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007 affects the interaction that her pupils have with the religious material being taught:

Yes. It is now more discussion; video and story/role play based than before. Lessons are more practical. Children are more directly involved in lessons rather than just being taught facts. (Teacher 74 - Primary).

Overall the factor of relevance for pupils stood out as the main factor impinging on engagement in lessons and beyond.

8.3.1. Relevance

One of the main factors stated by teachers as being pivotal to the engagement of their pupils (and indeed for themselves) was that the religious content was relevant to their lives. If pupils could see ‘what was in it for them’ they would have a reason for engaging. The research of Parsons and Taylor (2011) echoes this importance, contending that relevance to life is key. Pritchard (2009) writes similarly, calling for learning to be ‘contextualised’ and therefore made relevant, whilst Dowling (2010) refers to this type of learning as ‘real learning’. Peterson *et al.* (2014) also advocate connection and relevance to pupils’ interests as key themes associated with the provision of good SMSC. Relevance for pupils in this manner can mean a variety of elements: from understanding the world in which they live, supporting their quest for meaning, being able to apply the knowledge in a range of situations, through to supporting how this knowledge can be used both in and beyond the classroom. According to Ofsted (2007; 2013) subject reports for RE, learning is described as good and outstanding when: ‘[...] pupils are engaged with challenging tasks and demonstrate the capacity to explore the meaning and significance of religious belief and practice’, (p. 9) and by making sure the pupils ‘can see the relevance and importance of the enquiry and how it relates to their own concerns’, (p. 23). Whilst any pedagogy seeks to make RE relevant to pupils, consideration should be paid to Maybury and Teece’s caution,

‘to enrich the experience of the learner not to reduce religion to the experience of the learner’ (2005, p. 189; Teece, 2012). The shared values of the dispositions, as I have previously advocated, are human values and as such are extensive enough to allow this enrichment to take place. They are also relevant enough to allow the pupil access to them without reducing the religious material to the experience of the pupil. For example, a pupil can see the relevance of understanding how they ‘participate and lead’ in clubs or school activities before learning about how religious people participate and lead as part of worship or in their daily lives. In this manner the disposition opens up the experience of participation from the experience of the pupil making a connection with the life of the religious believer. It does not reduce the experience of the believer to the experience of the pupil but allows pupils to learn about and from religion ensuring pupils receive educative value from their RE.

Different agreed syllabuses prepare pupils for life through a variety of diverse approaches depending on their aims and rationales of how the religious content is to be used in relation to pupils’ lives. This is part of the autonomy of local determination. Agreed syllabuses have therefore focused on a variety of different concerns: from developing certain aspects of knowledge, to honing religious literacy skills, to developing pupils’ critical awareness. All of these concerns are valid and are justified pedagogies in interpreting the aims of RE and making religious content relevant to their pupils’ localised context. In terms of pupil engagement, as Maybury and Teece (2005) advocate, ‘there must be something of value to the learner – of educational, as well as spiritual value’ (p. 185). This is achieved in the myriad of agreed syllabuses in distinct ways. For example, the recently adopted Staffordshire syllabus (2016) contains extensive references to topics and skills needed in

many GCSE specifications: beliefs, teachings and sources; practices and ways of life; expressing meaning, identity, diversity and belonging; meaning, purpose and truth; and values and commitments. In this manner the Staffordshire syllabus (2016) is preparing its pupils for life by equipping them with relevant skills for life in general, and in particular, in preparation for examinations. Whilst the Staffordshire syllabus (2016) focuses on knowledge and skills in preparation for GCSE, the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus centres on the personal development of pupils. The subtle difference between the two approaches is that Birmingham directly aims to support the personal development of pupils through the cultivation of dispositions whilst learning about religions, while Staffordshire supports the development of pupils through knowledge and skills. Through the teaching of both syllabuses RE is made relevant to pupils and their everyday concerns beyond the classroom: how to get on with people, understanding similarities and differences and, what this means for themselves (Bennett, 2015, p. 25).

Learning what is relevant is therefore contextualised and pupils can see its purpose. This takes place in the dispositional approach through the use of values rather than the use of abstract religious concepts, beliefs or rituals, which may well be alien to some pupils and therefore irrelevant. Through the dispositions pupils see how the information from religion can be useful to them, since the dispositions expressed by faiths are seen as being of value and shared. The learning is not 'complete' once engagement has taken place; the engagement allows pupils to access learning about religions and learning from. (See Chapter 4 where my definition of engagement included this development by referring to 'absorption' and 'attentiveness' to learning). In this manner the pedagogical strategy of the dispositions act as a bridge which pupils cross to access the knowledge and religious content. The

dispositions act as a tool to enable the pupils to engage with the religious material; learning about. In this manner the knowledge is not seen as irrelevant but applicable in different situations. The syllabus' strategy of the dispositions not only enables a 'way in' for pupils to engage with the abstract knowledge of 'learning about', but the focus on 'learning from' enables pupils to think at a deeper level rather than more surface knowledge. When recounting knowledge one is not engaged at a deep level. It is when one is questioning and reflecting on one's own actions and thoughts where deeper learning is encountered (Mezirow, 1997). The syllabus is clear that the religious traditions are being used in an instrumental manner in order to promote a particular development of pupils. The importance of 'learning from' can be seen to be paramount within the notion of relevance: the knowledge and 'learning about' is the vehicle through which pupils will 'learn from' and are able to apply knowledge. If the focus were on 'learning about', knowledge becomes static and more difficult to relate in other situations. With the emphasis on 'learning from', firstly there is an expectation that the knowledge needs to be understood and, secondly, that this needs to be applied by the pupil in order to personally gain from it. However, this emphasis on 'learning from' is contrary to the view expressed by Lawton (2018) viewing 'learning from' as 'obsolete' and advocating a more academic study of religion as a social phenomena. Challenging this perspective Hella and Wright (2009; Chater 2012) refer to the importance of seeing the connectivity of the two attainment targets, without engaging with truth claims, informed judgements cannot be made, and a deep understanding of religion can only be made when pupils are able to relate this to their own beliefs. Teece (2010) reiterates this importance with practical classroom examples. The importance of the relationship also needs to be acknowledged during assessment in RE (Blaylock, 2012). This relationship, in

turn, can be seen to lead to a more active level of engagement, a key element of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997).

In reference to my research, these contributions can be seen to echo many sentiments expressed by teachers recounted at interview: pupils must understand what it is they are learning about and how this affects them. As reported in Chapter 6: 75% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed with the statement: ‘The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives’, (Kay, 2005) this goes beyond mere engagement so that pupils fully receive educative value from their RE. This coincides with many questionnaire responses and interview comments stating that the dispositions act as a ‘hook’, as a connection with the everyday life of a pupil and the everyday life experience of a person of faith. This concept is further verified by recent research culminating in ‘Big Ideas’ concerning the importance of relevance as being key to engagement: ‘[i]f young people are to engage with RE, they have to see that it has some relevance to the world in which young people are growing up today’ (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 13).

Closely associated with the concept of relevance is the notion of ‘transfer’: ‘a ‘relevant’ idea is one that young people can apply to a wide range of situations in the contemporary world in order to make sense of them’, (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 13). Being able to transfer what is learnt in a lesson to the wider world means that the knowledge is useful and can be applied to day-to-day situations, rather than it being perceived as abstract and therefore not useful in a young person’s life. ‘Big Ideas’ acknowledges the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005) who explore the meaning of ‘understanding’ as being a practical exercise and not just a mental act. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) offer the following definition of transfer: ‘[t]he

ability to use knowledge and fruitfully in a new or different context from that in which it was initially learned', (p. 352). Once the initial relevance is realised, the knowledge learned can be applied because it is used by pupils frequently in different situations and, as such, is seen as useful.

The pedagogical strategy of the dispositions enables the connection between the religious and the ordinary to be bridged. In doing so 'the religious' is seen as being ordinary in the life of the person of faith, thus allowing the pupil 'access' and enabling the distance between the two to be bridged. In my questionnaire the statement: 'The dispositions help pupils to understand RE through shared attitudes' was agreed and strongly agreed by 74% of teachers and also reinforces this point. In answer to the question, Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE? I have shown the importance of relevance to pupils' lives as a crucial aspect of engagement. My research indicates that there is clear evidence that teachers perceive the dispositional approach enables this to take place. Firstly, through the strategy of the dispositions, religious content and knowledge is seen as being relevant because of the shared values and vocabulary that has made the content less foreign and unconnected. Secondly, through the emphasis of learning from, pupils are enabled to think about the religious material in relation to their lives and context.

In the heart of a multicultural city like Birmingham, after the Trojan Horse events and with the on-going context of national and global terrorism, it is even more important to have pedagogical strategies which enable pupils from a background of faith and no faith to find relevance and a connection into having the opportunity to learn about, and from, each other in the classroom (Grimmitt, 2010a). However, even more importantly beyond that, so that

all pupils have the opportunity to fully engage outside of the classroom, taking their understanding practically into their day-to-day lives (Dinham and Shaw, 2015). This context also shows the importance of such a strategy beyond Birmingham as it is not the only city facing such concerns. As such I recommend the strategy of the dispositions as crucial to supporting pupils' engagement both within and wider than the city of Birmingham.

8.4. Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?

In this section I will explore whether the 2007 syllabus meets the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE. As previously stated and most pertinent to my research is the importance of faith and the impact that teachers think it has on the pupils in their classrooms. Firstly, I will seat this question as a valid concern in the current climate of changing belief. Next, I will discuss my findings in regard to teachers' views as to how pupils from backgrounds of faith and no faith respond to RE, in order to answer whether the 2007 syllabus meets this challenge.

As outlined more extensively in Chapter 1, current religious life in Britain was very different at the time of the 1944 Education Act passing into statute. Clarke and Woodhead (2015) refer to the decrease in people identifying themselves as Christian (from 71.7% in 2001 to 59.3% in 2011) and an increase in those reporting to have no religion (from 14.8% in 2001 to 25.1% in 2011). Davie (1994) also documents the growing number of people who want to believe but do not want to be involved in religious practice. With an increasing number of families reporting no religious affiliation, there is a need to address how the children from these families are enabled to interact and engage in RE (Clarke and Woodhead, 2018). Many of the teachers answering my questionnaire and at interview stated

that the dispositional approach offered ‘a hook’, ‘a way in’ to the teaching of religions not only for their pupils from a non-religious background but also for pupils of faith.

8.4.1. Faith does make a difference

Many teachers at interview referred to a difference between how pupils of faith and none engaged in RE. Further to this teachers noticed a difference with how pupils from different faith backgrounds engaged in lessons, one teacher noticing how pupils from Sikh, Hindu and Christian families were more ready to engage than the pupils from a Muslim background who were reluctant to contribute. Whilst other teachers responded with how engaged and curious Muslim pupils were to learn about the faiths of others. Although my research has not focused on how pupils of faith respond to their own faiths being presented in the classroom (Moulin, 2011; Nesbitt, 1998), in Chapter 7 I outlined teachers’ responses commenting on how pupils of faith were engaged and ready to share their experiences and to learn about those of others. It is almost as if pupils from a background of faith already have a shared understanding of the importance of faith, whether that be their own or someone else’s, and are more willing to engage as a result. They understand the dialogue and the language of ritual and beliefs and as such, are more disposed to learn about other traditions in relation to their own. Indeed, Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) refer to pupils of faith as ‘more likely to encounter virtue language in their daily interactions’ (p. 30). Notwithstanding the language of virtues supporting pupils of faith, the language of the dispositions is seen as a common language that can be accessed by pupils from a background of faith and none alike. For pupils from a background of no faith the dispositions act as a conduit through which the alien religious language of ‘festivals’ and ‘rites of passage’ is made relevant through everyday values: sharing, honesty, caring and

accountability. To demonstrate this further, Chapter 7 examined teachers' comments at interview regarding the dispositions enabling pupils from a background of no faith to engage, whereas using previous approaches less engagement was evident.

Rudge's (1998) study 'I am a nothing' documents the response of a pupil from a background of no faith being asked about their religious background. If this difference is so prominent, as my research also revealed, it further prompts the need for pedagogies and strategies to be devised to support the increasing number of pupils from a background of no faith.

8.4.2. Shared values and common ground

One of the strong themes emerging from my research is that the shared nature of the dispositions, the common ground that teachers stated, gave them 'a way in', 'a hook' through which they were able to start to explore religious content. Teachers commented on the importance of discussing the similarities of religious traditions as expressed through the dispositions that they centre on human experience. These responses were seen as exemplified in the response of a secondary teacher commenting:

Using these dimensions in the agreed syllabus for Religious Education meant that pupils were exposed to the SMSC dimensions of religion without finding themselves inhibited by a lack of personal experience of faith in their own backgrounds. (Teacher 95 - Secondary)

The immediacy of being confronted with a religious element that is alien and outside of pupils' experiences is 'softened' by the dispositional approach, enabling the initial obstacle of disengagement to be overcome. As already discussed in the section on relevance, the dispositions act as a neutral starting point for the discussion to begin before a religious aspect is introduced. If a pupil is confronted by a 'direct aspect of faith' such as

‘ceremonies’ which is not known to them and not even part of their own experience, never having attended one, a reaction could be, ‘This has got nothing to do with me, people are doing strange and different things’. Whereas, if the ceremony is first encountered through a neutral or shared theme such as ‘participating and willing to lead’ or ‘expressing joy’, any pupil can identify with this theme and think how it relates to them. The lesson can then progress to looking at an aspect of a ceremony knowing that some common understanding has first been encountered and understood. Although teachers acknowledged that pupils from a background of no faith can be harder to engage, they also corroborated my claim that the shared values aspect of the dispositions supported their pupils’ engagement. The dispositions act as a universal bridge through which pupils can understand a concept and the relevance for their lives, before being able to understand what that same concept means in a religious manner, and to people of faith. Since this then becomes relevant for pupils, through transfer, the learning becomes more meaningful and can be transferred into many aspects of a pupil’s life; it becomes more applicable in ‘the everyday’.

However, whereas other current agreed syllabuses refer to non-religious world-views, the 2007 Birmingham syllabus does not (Felderhof, 2012). The Woolf Institute’s report ‘Living with Difference’ (2015, p. 34) refers to the number of agreed syllabuses delivering inadequate content: ‘failing to reflect the reality of religion and belief’ reporting that syllabuses also fail to include non-religious world-views. Whilst Barnes asks for caution to be paid in the light of traditional readings of the law and the High Court ruling in November 2015, where the DfE was found to have made an error of law, Barnes (2016) argues against the inclusion of secular world-views and states that this policy also ‘poses the danger of superficial teaching and learning and pupil confusion’, (p. 18). Whereas Hampshire (2009)

expresses concern regarding the 2007 syllabus' decision to disregard non-religious world-views cautioning in the light of Birmingham's view that a pupil should have the ability to study their own faith (BCC, 2007, p. 7), '[o]ne wonders what that means for a pupil who came from a background where there was no religious tradition in relation to a syllabus which precludes the exploration of non-religious life views', (p. 20).

In answer to the question posed, Does the 2007 syllabus support the teaching of RE? Birmingham teachers on the whole would agree that the dispositional approach supports the engagement of their pupils whether they are from a background of faith and none. However, the ASC needs to be mindful that the current syllabus is overlooking the growing population of pupils from a background of no faith in currently not incorporating non-religious world-views. Although I did not specifically ask teachers in my questionnaire or at interview about the inclusion of non-religious worldviews, as outlined in Chapter 6 (section 6.6.2) and Chapter 7 (section 7.5) some teachers were in favour of their inclusion. In the light of this data and my literature review I recommend that the syllabus should integrate non-religious world-views, not only to be reflective of society, but also in offering the study of a pupils' own faith background, pupils from a background of no faith are no longer alienated.

Following the discussion and explorations that have taken place, I am now in a position to examine my overall research question.

8.5. To what extent does the pedagogical approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE facilitate the engagement of pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from and about religious traditions?

8.5.1. Engagement

My literature review revealed that among other aspects, relevance to the learner is one of the key factors contributing to engagement (Parsons and Taylor, 2011). If learning is relevant then the learner is connected to the learning and as such is interested and engaged. Recent research in RE (Wintersgill, 2017) confirmed this stating that relevance is crucial to engagement.

My research also revealed that one of the main aspects of the syllabus to facilitate engagement is the dispositions themselves. Teachers referred to the dispositions supporting the school to develop as a family, acting as common ground, shared human experience, and enabling themselves and their pupils to see the relevance of RE. As my research with teachers confirmed, the dispositions act as a ‘hook’ in order to enable pupils to engage with something shared and common and then to go further into the religious aspect. This supports pupils as they are not alienated by the initial unknown and seemingly irrelevant material from religions. In overcoming the initial barrier of learning about an aspect of religion that is not relevant, the dispositions act as a bridge, a shared forum, through which pupils are then introduced to religious material and can ‘learn about’ (O’Grady, 2008). This allows pupils to gain ‘access’ to the religious content. In Chapter 4 I explored a definition of engagement that included absorption and attentiveness to learning, thus presenting relevant information to pupils is not the end result. The data from my questionnaires supports this: ‘The dispositions help pupils to understand RE through shared attitudes’ was agreed and strongly agreed by 74% of teachers and 75% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed with the

statement: ‘The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives’. Responses at interview support this perspective:

I felt the way that I approach teaching different religions is finding what is common. And the common ground is we all want to be a better human being. Religions are there to make us better human beings. And no one in their right mind or sense would say we don't want to be a better person. And I feel, that that is a common ground between all religions. (Teacher 92 - Secondary)

Far from showing a diverse and disjointed picture of RE in Birmingham, resonant of Conroy’s (2011 and 2013) ‘competing imperatives’, my research revealed that the vast majority of teachers showed a unified understanding of the aims of RE, selecting aim 4 (‘to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development’) and aim 5 (‘to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of diverse religions’) as being the most important to them personally and integral to the syllabus. These in turn are complemented by three areas to which RE contributes and why it is of importance, namely, tolerance, acceptance and living together. These three concepts can be seen as practical aspects of RE supporting living in the modern world that are aided by engagement in the subject. As pupils’ engagement is increased due to learning through the dispositions, transfer enables pupils to continue to use the information beyond the classroom in their day-to-day lives; learning about religions and learning from religion.

My research has also confirmed that the 2007 syllabus is very different from other approaches to teaching RE: the focus on character and pupils’ development, teaching through dispositions whilst being less focused on the importance of knowledge alone. My

research lends support to the dispositional approach in demonstrating that the pedagogical strategies of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus do facilitate engagement of pupils. As Baumfield (2017) acknowledges, although not directly of the syllabus: '[m]otivating reluctant students to engage in learning, is one of the biggest challenges we affect as teachers, and pedagogy is the means by which we develop a better understanding of how to negotiate complex and dynamic classroom interaction', (p. 51). Without engagement, the educative process of RE cannot take place. Although participants in my research acknowledged that engagement is not straightforward, a teacher's relationship with their pupils was also thought to be a key contributory factor. This was viewed as part of the dynamic, as a tool, which enables pupils to engage. Sahajpal (2018, p. 121) concurs, seeing pupils and teachers as 'partners in discovery'.

As well as supporting pupils to see the relevance of RE the dispositional approach has also enabled teachers, especially non-specialists, to have a route into the teaching of religions. Teachers commented that they too understood the relevance and the reason for teaching RE because of this approach. When asked about returning to the previous way of teaching, before the introduction of the 2007 syllabus, a primary teacher responded:

I think it would fill people with fear. [...] The depth of knowledge that you need to know, people don't have the time to look and read about it.
(Teacher 74 - Primary)

One can see from this response that the dispositional approach also supports the non-specialist teacher in, firstly, having a route into teaching RE; they know what they are addressing through shared values. Secondly, it supports them in order to focus on the specific religious material that they will be teaching. In doing so, it gives teachers the

confidence to teach RE. In the light of APPG (2014) and CORE (2018) reports amongst others, outlining the decline of specialist teachers and the need to support an increasing number of non-specialists, my research demonstrates that the dispositional approach goes a long way to support the understanding of teachers.

8.5.2. Learning from and about religious traditions

The concept of relevance is important since it connects with both of the syllabus' attainment targets: learning from faith and learning about religious traditions. The syllabus gives prominence to learning from faith in comparison to learning about religious traditions, emphasising pupils' development through the vehicle of the religious material (BCC, 2007, p. 5). Since an emphasis is placed upon the relevance of the religious content, learning about is more easily comprehended through the shared values of the dispositions. As such, learning from becomes more accessible since the material has already been made relevant to the life of the pupil. In placing more significance on how pupils respond to the knowledge that they have gained, the application of the knowledge is implied (O'Grady, 2008). 'Learning from' implies that pupils will be able to derive something of personal gain from the content of the religious material taught through the dispositions. As one secondary teacher reflects:

So like being hopeful and visionary... We will do that and will look at Martin Luther King or whatever... But I'm not sure that the pupil goes away thinking about ooh I'm going to be hopeful and visionary...I think they go away wondering I wonder what I can do to make a difference...
(Teacher 101 - Secondary)

In this case, even though the actual wording of the disposition is not acted on, the sentiments behind the disposition and the syllabus' call for conative action is evoked. In this manner the material becomes more relevant since pupils are called to act on it as part of their lives

beyond the classroom. Whilst being able to apply knowledge, pupils are using the information within and beyond classroom learning; it becomes 'transferable' and therefore relevant to different situations. Atfield (1996) warns against this type of RE, arguing that it is not obvious what will be deliberately intended as a result of this type of 'learning from', since the 'by-product of contact with faiths is so unpredictable' (p. 80). Although Atfield's caution is still valid, it was not made directly in reference to the Birmingham syllabus. Furthermore, Atfield (1996) states that what could result from this interaction is 'a belief here, a skill there, a virtue from this religion, a mental power nurtured by another. Is such an effect one an educator can approve?' (p. 81). In responding to Atfield's question, the answer from my research would certainly be a positive one. Overwhelmingly, Birmingham teachers are observing the results of 'learning from' and can see how the syllabus supports the engagement of their pupils, allowing pupils to learn about religions whilst enabling personal development to take place and preparing pupils to live in a diverse, modern city. Although the dispositions originated from a range of faiths, they have been coherently organised and revisited in a spiral curriculum, that reinforces the skills and beliefs that are explored. As this secondary teacher expresses:

I think it is a really useful tool to find that relevance for people who have no faith. [...] It doesn't have to be about learning about. I find learning about religion I think personally as an RE teacher I find it quite dry. I am not as excited about it. If I'm teaching children I don't see that it offers so much to the deep questioning and the provocative thinking. (Teacher 98 - Secondary)

However, in placing the importance of learning from faith, there also needs to be access to 'learning about religious traditions', otherwise there would be nothing to learn from thus

both are enabled as a result of engagement. My research also supports the claim that the 2007 syllabus enables pupils to learn about religions, as one primary teacher commented:

So it [the syllabus] just makes it more inclusive. And it helps involve children and engage children who do not have a religion. So they can see the relevance to themselves. And I think for some children, they become disengaged if they can't see how it's relevant to them. So if you're learning about another religion, I don't have a religion, this doesn't have any relevance for me. But if you are learning about 'appreciating beauty', then that does have relevance. (Teacher 74 - Primary)

The syllabus does not specify which religious material that needs to be covered at each Key Stage; questions to prompt and support teachers in deciding this are provided in the non-statutory materials, whilst religious traditions have related their faith content in line with the 24 dispositions. As such the 'learning about' is shaped by the dispositions and not presented in a more traditional and systematic way. Thus in the 2007 syllabus, RE is not taught through topics such as 'festivals' or 'ethics', nor by a certain religious tradition being studied in a particular key stage. The spiral nature of the dispositional pedagogy stipulates that each value is encountered every two years, with new religious content at each phase. In this manner the religious content is shaped to be relevant for pupils' ages and aptitudes, allowing a greater understanding and engagement at each stage. This aligns with the previous discussion on the importance of the dispositions as the vehicle through which pupils can access the religious material.

8.5.3. Supporting the teaching of RE

My research revealed another factor that can be seen to inhibit pupil engagement is the faith background of the pupil. Teachers referred to pupils from a background of faith being more engaged in lessons. Although pupils from a background of faith are seen to be 'inherently'

interested in RE, the dispositional approach was seen to benefit pupils from a background of faith and none, alike.

In Chapter 6 and 7 I outlined teachers' responses in regard to the perspective that pupils of faith are engaged in RE and ready to share their experiences and to learn about those of others. Only 15% of teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed in response to the statement: 'The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith'. One primary teacher's comments can be seen to encapsulate this perspective, when noting that the pupils of faith in her school were more confident in lessons:

I can tell in any RE lesson the children of faith and, you could say that they are more engaged. [...] They will have a go at the answers, they are more confident at putting their hand up and saying something even if it's not quite right. They will have a go because they've had a go at thinking about things and reflecting about things. (Teacher 43 - Primary)

It is almost as if pupils from a background of faith already have a shared understanding of the importance of faith and are more willing to engage as a result. They understand the dialogue and the language of ritual and beliefs and as such are more disposed to learn about other traditions in relation to their own. Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016) can be seen to reiterate this view, referring to pupils of faith as 'more likely to encounter virtue language in their daily interactions' (p. 30). Thus for pupils of faith when learning about religious traditions and encountering religious concepts, language, terminology and aspects, they are not seen as irrelevant, it is already part of these pupils' everyday experience. There is no need to form a bridge in order enable pupils to gain access. However, what the dispositions continue to do in this circumstance is to enable the religious material to be encountered through values. Pupils of faith will be able to relate to these since it will be the language of

values from their own tradition, as shared by the other faiths in the syllabus. It will be encountered in a different 'format'. In terms of the other attainment target, learning from faith, again pupils of faith are already versed in reflecting and responding in this manner, the dispositions continue to enable this to take place.

Depending on teachers' school populations and experiences other responses referred to how the dispositions support the engagement of pupils from a non-religious perspective: '*They don't immediately shout this is an RE syllabus... And again in a secular society I think that's a good thing.*' (Teacher 22 - Primary). Similarly, only 14% of teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed in response to the statement, 'The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith'. This perspective supports Thanissaro's (2012) research on pupil attitudes towards RE, that there is more negativity towards RE from pupils from a background of no faith to that of pupils from faith backgrounds. Teachers commented at length in both questionnaire responses and at interview as to how the dispositional approach enables pupils from backgrounds of no faith to engage in RE.

Echoing the comments already made in the previous section on engagement, the dispositions act as common ground enabling pupils from a background of no faith to be able to encounter the religious aspects firstly through a concept, a value that is familiar to them. Once this initial 'hurdle' has been overcome the religious material (learning about) can be encountered. According to my research, Birmingham teachers confirmed this perspective. The following teacher's response demonstrates this viewpoint:

One of the things that we need to accept nowadays is that a lot of children have no religion, and so we need to make it accessible. [...] And it helps involve children and engage children who do not have a religion. So they can see the relevance to themselves. [...] But if you are learning about

appreciating beauty, then that does have a relevance. Because then they can contribute to something that is outside of religion that could have a spiritual side to it. (Teacher 74 - Primary)

In enabling pupils from a background of no faith to be able to access religious content through the strategy of the dispositions, they are then able to continue and examine what that content means to them. In learning from faith, pupils from a background of no faith may discover that there are indeed common values that they share with people of faith, but also that there are clear differences. What is significant is that they were able to join in with the process; this engagement is enabled through the dispositional approach. Far from leaving the RE classroom viewing themselves as ‘a nothing’ (Rudge, 1998), a pupil from a background of no faith is seen to be enfranchised into being part of the discussion, learning and developing.

Although originally conceived by the religious traditions in Birmingham, I contend that the dispositions are much wider than a Christian centric and, indeed a religious perspective. My research has demonstrated that the vast majority of teachers see the dispositional approach as a ‘non-religious hook’ and way in to teaching about religions. They have not seen it as religious in its approach, and have welcomed it as a means by which they have been able to understand the reasons for teaching RE and being able to support the understanding of their pupils in this manner. What I have demonstrated throughout the discussion is that although religious in conception, the majority of the dispositions are shared human values (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 231) that can contribute to the wider pursuit of the development of pupils’ character.

As human values the majority of the dispositions act as common ground to be shared with religious concepts. As such, they act as a conduit for the pupils from a background of no faith to engage with the religious, something which otherwise could be seen as alien and not contextualised (Pritchard, 2009). If the importance of RE, as demonstrated in my research, is to enable pupils to develop tolerance, acceptance and living together, there needs to be a practical element in the learning so that transfer into everyday life is possible; if not the knowledge remains redundant. If however, the knowledge is transferred and seen as useful, thereby supporting pupils to live their lives, then the affective and conative elements of the dispositional approach can have a longer lasting effect.

Such a discussion has much bearing for the continued inclusion of all of the dispositions in the current syllabus. As demonstrated through the previous discussion, replacement language does not convey the same sentiments and may only serve to weaken the nature of the concept as White's relaxed model demonstrates. Therefore there may be a case to address the number of dispositions as taught in the current syllabus, maintaining the universal values and leaving aside the implicitly religious dispositions.

The second element of the dispositional approach seen as being objectionable is the demand for a reaction from pupils. Teacher 97 (Secondary) gives an example of conducting a stilling exercise as part of a series of lessons on Buddhism. What she centres on is the reaction from pupils when they did not feel anything and how that corresponds with expectation in the classroom.

The imperative of 'an act to will' (Felderhof, 2014, p. 16) required by the syllabus was raised by one teacher as a concern. The dispositional approach does go further than many

other approaches and current pedagogies in asking pupils to act in response. However, this is different to other pedagogies where the focus is on the acquisition of knowledge and skills (with the exception of 'Living Difference', 2004) and not on the development of pupils' characters. With the right to withdrawal from RE as the only way of exempting a pupil from lessons, the dispositional approach could be seen as imposing the need to respond on pupils rather than a more 'straightforward' acquisition of knowledge. The syllabus remains unapologetic in its approach in the development of both pupils and society (BCC, 2007, p. 4). In addition to this, within the 'learning from faith' aspect, RE is seen as developing cognitive, affective and conative dimensions (BCC, 2007, p. 5) and, the expectation that pupils will be affected and the hope that 'their behaviours' will be changed as a result. What is being objected to is the command that the pupils will feel something, when there should be allowance for when nothing is felt. In terms of pupil engagement, pupils' feeling 'less than' as a result of their RE lesson would only serve to further disenfranchise pupils resulting in what Rudge (1998) examined as, "I am a nothing". The affective and conative reactions to what is being studied should be desirable but not seen as an imperative.

Although the positive aspects of relevance and the development of pupils can be seen to outweigh these anxieties, nonetheless the realistic concerns about the confessional nature of the Birmingham approach still remain and need to be addressed. In order to address these concerns I recommend the ASC maintain the majority of the dispositions referred to as 'universal human values', for example: 'Caring for others, animals and the environment', 'Expressing joy' and 'Participating and willing to lead', but remove reference to those dispositions considered not to be universal and which are implicitly religious. These dispositions would include: 'Being merciful and forgiving' and 'Being silent and attentive

to, and cultivating a sense for the sacred and Transcendence'. These dispositions act as a barrier for the rest to be termed and act as universalising concepts, as such they are problematic to the contention that I have argued for throughout this thesis. In this manner, all of the dispositions would then be universal shared human values and the approach would somewhat distance itself from confessional claims levied against it.

With the duty to promote fundamental British values and other models of character development operating in schools (Whittaker, 2017) there is a perceived need to develop pupils in this manner. In the light of educational and worldwide concerns there is now a need to respond in an educational manner to address these matters. As discussed previously in Chapters 1 and 2, the national resettlement proposed (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015; 2018) may go some way to support the broader development of pupils' character and morality in this manner. What is being offered as part of the resettlement are two suggestions in regard to renaming 'Religious Education': 'Religious and Moral Education' (2015) and 'Religion, Beliefs and Values' (2018, p. 19), both of which follow the direction of the Scottish Government's RME (2010), which enables:

Children and young people to explore the world's major religions and views which are independent of religious belief and to consider the challenges posed by these beliefs and values.

Religious and moral education is a process where children and young people engage in a search for meaning, value and purpose in life. This involves both the exploration of beliefs and values and the study of how such beliefs and values are expressed. (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 1).

If the English resettlement follows the principles and practice of the Scottish model it will go some way to reinforcing an approach centred on dispositions, supporting pupils' moral

development without a return to confessional RE. As Barnes (2015) acknowledges, '[t]he aims of religious education have always extended beyond that of facilitating and understanding of religion to contributing to the social and moral aims of education' (p. 204). Barnes (2015; 2014) furthers that the 2007 syllabus 'provides one interesting, stimulating and educationally and philosophically sophisticated way of doing this', (p. 204) and acknowledges 'its attempt to revive moral education' (p. 56).

My research supports the view that the 2007 syllabus contributes towards the engagement of pupils in RE. However, in nurturing the dispositions of pupils through RE, it must be acknowledged that this fruition may not be completed during the pupils' time at school; it will continue into their adult life. These sentiments were expressed clearly by a secondary school deputy head teacher, speaking of the dispositional approach,

[...] we won't see what the real benefits of the RE teaching until these students are well into their adulthood. And it is seeds that we are planting.

(Teacher 98 - Secondary)

8.6. Other issues arising from my research

In this section I will address the three issues that incidentally arose out of my research. In using a mixed methods approach: questionnaires leading to the use of interviews, it is widely acknowledged that as part of this process one needs to allow the unexpected to happen. When one is reporting on the 'texture and weave of everyday life' one needs to 'celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them.' (Mason, 2002, p. 1).

A number of teachers in their questionnaires and at interview referred to the connection between RE and Collective Worship. This issue relates to my research questions in terms of the aims of RE and the dispositional approach being based on values. I have already acknowledged the origins of this relationship in Chapter 2 in regard to RE encompassing both Collective Worship and the subject of Religious Instruction. The second main theme to emerge is that the dispositional approach assumes a more confessional quality and understanding of RE. Finally, another area of concern is with the emphasis on the development of dispositions as the approach negates the systematic teaching of religions. This concern can also be seen to connect with my first research question as at its core it links to the aims of RE, in this case whether RE is about increasing pupils' knowledge or developing pupils personally. I will now examine each of these issues in turn.

8.6.1. Relationship between RE and Collective Worship

With the duty to impart fundamental British values (DfE, 2014), and the prominence of the dispositions within the syllabus, it was likely that some teachers would express opinions about the relationship between RE and Collective Worship. Another reason for this, as previously explained in Chapters 5 and 6, was the use of the methods outlined in Astley *et al.*'s study (1997) which included a number referring to Collective Worship. It must therefore be acknowledged that teachers may not have referred to Collective Worship to such a degree had these methods not been presented in the first place. However, in deciding to use Astley *et al.*'s methods comprehensively, I have taken the opportunity to explore what teachers think about this connection. It must also be acknowledged that this interconnectivity is not a recent phenomenon. If one were to turn to Statute and the legal requirements for RE and Collective Worship following the 1944 Education Act, 'RE'

encompassed both Religious Instruction and Collective Worship and at the time of the Act both were closely affiliated with religious practice (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). The induction of pupils into the Christian faith and the development of Christian moral values were seen as synonymous within the aim of RE (Hand, 2004). In Chapter 2 I discussed this issue in more detail in the section ‘Confessional roots’.

The remarks made by teachers at interview can be seen to be remnants of these confessional origins. However, Astley *et al.* (1997) conclude in the light of their research: ‘[t]he majority of religious educators and educationalists today seem either to ignore the phenomenon of school worship or to deny that it has any positive contribution to offer to the task of RE’, (p. 182). Contrary to this, the comments made by my interviewees (majority being primary teachers) contradict Astley *et al.*’s research (participants from secondary schools only): seeing a connection between RE and Collective Worship. This could lead teachers to seemingly conflate a school’s duty to provide RE and Collective Worship with the more recent duty to promote fundamental British values, with the wider responsibility of nurturing the SMSC development of pupils (CORE, 2017, p. 49). This assimilation could also increase given the plans outlined in ‘Integrated Communities Strategy Green paper’ (HM Government, 2018), for SMSC and fundamental British values to hold more significance during Ofsted inspections. Another reason for teachers perceiving a close relationship with RE and Collective Worship could be seen in relation to the approach of teaching through the dispositions in RE being more akin to personal and confessional aspects of Collective Worship. Indeed, Hull refers to the term ‘RE’ as being preferred in 1988 at the time of the introduction of the ERA (1989) since it ‘described a deeper and richer process of human

development' (p. 3). This can be seen as being akin to the aims of the dispositional approach.

At interview a number of teachers referred to Collective Worship and RE as if on a continuum, some stating that Collective Worship was part of RE and others, when asked about methods used in RE, responding that they did 'that' in Collective Worship. On closer analysis, primary teachers responded in this manner whilst secondary teachers referred to Collective Worship and RE as distinct areas. This has led to the blurring of the remit between RE and Collective Worship and raises further concerns as to whether this contributes to the present debate in regard to the confused aims of RE and the impact that this has on pupils from a background of no faith.

There could be seen to be many reasons for this association, other than the historical aspect. This could stem from the integrated nature and ethos of primary school culture where the class teacher will more often than not take part in the 'assembly rota' and conduct acts of Collective Worship with their own class. More likely than not, the same teacher will teach an RE lesson with their class each week. This can be seen in contrast to practice in secondary schools where Collective Worship is not seen as the remit of the specialist RE teacher.

Conversely, some primary school teachers stated in their questionnaire that they were not allowed to use the methods associated with Collective Worship. Six teachers selected three methods: 'engaging in religious worship at assemblies', 'seeing religious worship at assemblies' and 'seeing religious worship at places of worship', that they were not allowed to use or 'never' use in RE. This seems to suggest that for these teachers Collective Worship

is seen as separate to RE. Interestingly, even though the majority of secondary teachers stated that RE and Collective Worship were seen as distinct, secondary teachers did not state that they were ‘not allowed’ to use methods associated with Collective Worship however selected ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ categories in higher numbers. When discussing methods Felderhof, (2017) drafting secretary for the 2007 syllabus, refers to Collective Worship as a method which could be used to achieve the aims of the syllabus, thus closely affiliating RE with the practice of Collective Worship. My research can support the view that the dispositional approach can be seen to facilitate a closeness between RE and Collective Worship and contribute towards the blurring of this distinction in primary schools. I will now address the issue of whether this relationship is productive.

If the relationship between RE and Collective Worship is seen as being positive in connecting the two, and each being mutually supportive of each other, in raising the profile of both practices in school, there may well be value in extolling the development of this model. However, this does depend on how each school’s leadership team regards RE and Collective Worship independently, as to whether a dual approach is seen as being beneficial. Regardless of the work on a local level to offer solutions to this concern, Clarke and Woodhead’s (2015; 2018) call for a national resettlement of RE and Collective Worship could make local resolutions redundant. The resettlement calls for the end of the confessional nature of Collective Worship, replacing the current practice with a more reflective model. This too could serve to continue to blur the relationship between Collective Worship ‘reflection’ and the dispositional emphasis in RE on ‘learning from faith’. However, the relationship between RE and Collective Worship could be seen to support the engagement of pupils. If pupils at primary level encounter the dispositions in both RE and

Collective Worship this may contribute towards raising the profile of RE, more familiar links could be made and teachers could be seen to respond to the needs of their children in a more cohesive manner as one of my interviewees inferred.

Contrary to the latter perspective, the engagement of pupils could also be seen to be compromised by this relationship. If RE is seen as more confessional and instructive, and as such having a closer relationship with Collective Worship, pupils from a background of no faith may be further alienated in RE because of this position. Hull (1995) made a subtle observation that can be seen to substantiate this point: '[i]n the classroom one speaks of God, in collective worship the claim is that one speaks to God' (p. 22). Although acknowledging the difference between the subject and the observance, Hull (1995) continues stating that Collective Worship 'often sprang out of work done in the classroom, particularly in primary schools' (p. 23); here there is a blurring of the boundaries between the two. The use of dispositions in Collective Worship serves only to aide this affiliation.

Whereas, parents can withdraw their children from both RE and Collective Worship, (The CORE Report, 2018 calls this practice into question) and RE enables the study of non-religious world-views (although the 2007 syllabus presently does not), Circular 1/94, (DfE, 1994) whilst recognising that some pupils may not 'identify' with an act of Collective Worship, does not reference disbelief in God. Although many primary teachers outlined the positive nature of the relationship between RE and Collective Worship, I wish to argue that the dispositions should only be accounted and monitored through their use in RE, although as values, the dispositions will ultimately be used in Collective Worship. As Collective Worship is rarely spontaneous in the true sense of the word 'worship', the two serve very

different aspects of the school ethos and life. RE is subject to a different level of scrutiny in terms of guidance, planning and assessment all of which do not apply to Collective Worship. The dispositions are subject to the statutory remit of RE as stipulated in the 2007 syllabus, and as such should be accounted for within this duty. In this respect my perspective differs from that of Felderhof, in seeing Collective Worship as ‘a method’ which can be used as part of RE.

8.6.2. Confessional Roots

Connected with the discussion on Collective Worship is a concern regarding the confessional nature of dispositional approach, as raised by one interviewee alluding to the unease about the dispositional approach at a fundamental level. Barnes (2016) is also apprehensive suggesting that some teachers may ask whether ‘the Syllabus is implicitly confessional?’ (p. 16). At the heart of this concern are two main issues: the confessional aspect and the implied demand for a response from pupils.

The first aspect of concern is the religious nature of the dispositions. Barnes (2016) raises a similar anxiety in his evaluation of the syllabus: the contention in regard to the connection between dispositions and values. Barnes (2016) questions whether dispositions and virtues are synonymous and ‘whether the language of dispositions or virtues is more accessible and attractive to educators’, (p. 8). Teacher 97 (Secondary) also raises the unease with confessionalism. This teacher refers to one of the dispositions as an example:

[a]nd also you know we are going to learn how to be more forgiving today? I think that, just crossed into religious instruction. We are going to learn about the importance of forgiveness in religion, and reflect on what we think about forgiveness, that's okay. We will learn to be more forgiving, that crosses the line.

[m]erciful and forgiving... that's very Christian, very Abrahamic for a start. And if I was going to put them in a more secular term I might put being understanding of the situation of others. Or trying to find resolution in conflict perhaps'.

This suggestion to change the wording of the dispositions, however, alters the meaning. 'Resolution in conflict' does not equate to 'forgiveness'. 'Forgiveness' is the act of pardoning the person who is seeking forgiveness. In conative terms it evokes the need for action on behalf of the person forgiving, and an action of repentance from the person in the wrong. This results in the reconciliation of the relationship, resuming as before. Whereas, 'resolution in conflict' is seeking to end a conflict, the mutual resolving of animosity. In this process there is no act on behalf of one party to pardon the other, but the pursuit of resolving an issue in order to find a way forward. The process for the individuals involved is very different. The person forgiving undergoes a change in terms of their attitude and feelings towards the person who has wronged them, whereas conflict resolution need not involve this transformation. While the difference in meaning is subtle, if the phrasing of the dispositions were to be updated or changed, there will need to be much consideration given to the replacement of the associated terms and concepts.

At the heart of the confessional concerns is the premise that the dispositional approach is religious and is actively imposing a religious framework on pupils. In the light of the previous dialogue between White and Barnes (see Chapter 3) it is clear that the dispositional approach is inherently religious in its conception and attempting to 'dilute' individual dispositions' meanings will not overcome this concern. Neither does the approach 'fit' with Copley's (2008) view of what RE teachers essentially are: 'secular educators concerned with the educational value of studying religion and religions' (p. 122). Atfield's (1996) concern

that some religious virtues are more controversial than others, states forgiveness should also be acknowledged.

8.6.3. Teaching Religions systematically

Another theme to emerge from my research is that some teachers want a more systematic approach to teaching faiths. As part of this discussion I will also examine whether the dispositional approach negates a more systematic teaching of religions.

On closer analysis there was a dichotomous response from teachers. The majority of secondary teachers expressed concern in regard to the lack of knowledge gained through the dispositional approach and consequently a deficient foundation in preparation for GCSE, while the majority of primary teachers referred to the syllabus' approach opening up the relevance of why teach RE for themselves and their pupils. Primary teachers also commented on being given more confidence to teach RE with an approach that suits an integrated primary ethos and curriculum. Although a few primary school teachers had started to teach in a more systematic manner. There can be seen to be two main overarching reasons for this change: that the knowledge of any particular faith had been lost, resulting in lack of understanding of religions, and, that although the majority of teachers favour the dispositional approach, a few feel safer with teaching knowledge and understanding of 'facts' rather than developing 'learning from faith'.

Firstly, teachers could be responding to a need, seeing a lack of knowledge and understanding of particular faith traditions amongst their pupils. Barnes (2016) furthers this view that the syllabus may be seen to hold that, 'the study of religion is of little value in itself' (p. 10). Indeed as stated before, the 2007 syllabus makes no apology for the religious

material being used instrumentally for the development of pupils. In response to this charge, Felderhof concedes that a more systematic view of a religious tradition will not engage with the way of life presented in religion, since facts do not enable this to take place. In order for this to happen RE needs to take young people ‘to the heart of the matter’ (Felderhof, 2014, p. 25). O’Grady (2008) makes a similar remark in regard to his action research ‘pupils are not so much asked to learn content, but content is placed at their service’ (p. 364). Likewise, it could be argued that many other pedagogical approaches use RE as a vehicle for the development of other aspects: literacy (Jackson: 1997; 2000; 2004; 2008; 2015; Dinham, 2015), spirituality (Phillips, 2016) and experience (Hay, 2000; Hay and Nye, 2006) or knowledge. However, as Teece (2015) relates Grimmitt’s instrumental conviction ‘[w]hat is important for the learner is not the knowledge of religion per se, but the way in which a religious believer perceives the world and how these insights can inform how the learner sees the world’ (p. 63). Therefore it is not surprising that in private correspondence with Teece (2008), Grimmitt makes the following comment in regard to the 2007 syllabus: ‘the first recent syllabus to go back along the road I set out prior to 1988 and to use the religions to address personal, moral and spiritual development! I’m pleased about that!’ (p. 11).

With the focus being on the character development, Barnes (2016) furthers that this may take teachers out of their comfort zone, away from their expertise of teaching the ‘study of religion’, resulting in ‘their expertise [being] demoted’ (p. 11). Indeed, as my research demonstrated, these are the sentiments expressed by some secondary specialist teachers. Some secondary teachers thought that in teaching the 2007 syllabus a systematic knowledge of religions was lost resulting in an impact on preparing pupils for GCSE. A recent revision in the GCSE specifications is more directed to knowledge acquisition. Consequently, some

teachers expressed concern as to whether the 2007 syllabus would adequately prepare pupils for examinations at Key Stage 4. Whilst also recognising that teachers acknowledged that the teaching of GCSE specifications increasingly started in Year 9 of Key Stage 3, with the syllabus only being taught in Years 7 and 8.

In response to a question about weaknesses of the syllabus in my questionnaire, some teachers responded: *‘Does not allow for in depth study of a religion. Does not prepare students for GCSE’*. (Teacher 83 – Secondary) and *‘I think that Key Stage 3 has to provide the basis for Key Stage 4 and so may need to be rethought when the new GCSE is published.’* (Teacher 101 – Secondary). At interview similar responses were given. In response to a question about the planning of RE, Teacher 97 (Secondary) responded, *‘If I’m honest I look at the GCSE and A level syllabuses and go by what my A level students need and that’s what I’m going to start with in Year 7. I’m probably more guided by that’*. This is echoed by another secondary teacher stating *‘So even though we are trying to follow the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007 in Key Stage 3, how we approach Key Stage 3 is directed by what we are aiming to get by the end of Key Stage 4’* (Teacher 98 – Secondary). Given such comments the suitability and relevance of the syllabus for the teaching of RE in secondary schools should be examined.

Although it must also be documented that the aims for RE as selected by secondary teachers in the highest numbers were not exclusively concerned with knowledge acquisition (see section 6.3) whilst other secondary teachers expressed the importance of the dispositional approach in the development of their pupils. However, what some secondary teachers have expressed is a concern regarding the loss of the systematic teaching of religious knowledge

and the depth of teaching, not the loss of knowledge of religions per se. The 2007 syllabus requires pupils to 'learn about' religions in order to 'learn from', even though the emphasis of the dispositions is focused on learning from these values. Although this knowledge may not be presented in a systematic manner, the knowledge is outlined and mapped out in the key questions at each Key Stage. In this manner the syllabus has educative value in both enabling the learning from and learning about religions although the content of religions may not be presented in a systematic order ready to follow through into GCSE. Indeed a long-term aim of Marius Felderhof as drafting secretary of the syllabus was for Birmingham to produce its own specification that would follow through with the teaching of dispositions at a GCSE level. However this is a long way from realisation and some teachers' concerns are present.

Conversely for the majority of primary teachers, teaching through the dispositions has given non-specialists the confidence and unlocked the relevance for teaching RE. However, for some primary teachers, parting from the rest of a knowledge-based curriculum may be seen as a step too far. These non-specialist teachers actually feel more comfortable delivering a more straightforward 'teaching of religions approach'. The lack of subject expertise and the impact that this is having on the subject is raised in the REC (2012a), APPG (2014) and CORE (2018) reports. Even though these reports comment on a lack of knowledge and understanding of the primary non-specialist, teachers may be opting for the more straightforward knowledge based approach, distinct from a perceived more complicated approach where the emphasis is on learning from faith. Chater and Erricker (2013b) decry this form of RE as 'baneful', 'lacking in integrity' and 'improvising learning'. In terms of my research, there were not any commonalities in the teachers critiquing the dispositional

approach in favour of a more systematic teaching of religions. Nevertheless, it has also been noted that the majority of teachers supported the dispositional approach.

In teaching in a more systematic manner, teachers have assessed how their pupils are progressing and have responded and planned accordingly. This is resonant of Brine (2015) calling for the need to ‘prioritise straightforward pupil acquisition of subject knowledge and understanding’ in the light of too much ‘personal response; not enough learning about!’, (p. 2). Similarly, Kueh (2018) writes of the importance of knowledge in unlocking a ‘greater understanding of the world’ (p. 67). This is also resonant of Ofsted (2013) reporting the need to ‘rigorously investigate and evaluate religion and belief’ (p. 15). However, my research demonstrated that of the methods selected by teachers: ‘studying religions separately’ was chosen in proportionally similar numbers by primary and secondary teachers ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ and ‘very frequently’. Whereas, ‘studying religions through a thematic approach’ was selected ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ by primary teachers in similar numbers and ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ and ‘very frequently’ by secondary teachers in similar numbers. Although this could be viewed as an inconsistency, that teachers are stating they need a certain approach, yet are not seen to be implementing it in practice, it could also be seen as verification that teachers are responding to their pupils’ needs and are addressing a perceived lack of understanding.

These findings raise the question as to whether the dispositional approach does indeed negate a more systematic teaching of faiths, as some teachers are suggesting. Through the teaching of the dispositions it is made clear that the religious traditions in the syllabus are to be used as vehicles through which the dispositions are taught. The whole notion of the

syllabus inverts the traditional model of teaching religions. If this were then to be 'subverted' and the dispositions 'mapped' into a more traditional approach of teaching religions in a more systematic way, the focus of the syllabus is lost to a certain extent. I therefore conclude that it is not feasible to teach the dispositions in a more systematic manner. Barnes (2016) calls for balance between the need for pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of religion (the study of religion), and the syllabus' aim to develop pupils' personally. Together with addressing the lack of a critical dimension in many of the dispositions, Barnes (2016, p. 9) also suggests the possible introduction of a third attainment target 'reflecting on faith and religious traditions', through which this component could be addressed. As previously discussed, the 2017-19 ASC is discussing this addition in order to address the absence of critical awareness. I recommend that this could also be achieved within the existing 'learning about religious traditions' target, in both understanding the positive aspects but also being made critically aware of religion. Although this aspect was not a dominant theme in my research findings, with the majority of participants being non-specialist teachers, this element is relational to the concern about how systematic knowledge of religions is presented, to which both primary and secondary teachers referred. Secondly, the recommendation that I offer to the ASC is that the 'more traditional knowledge' of the religious traditions needs to be mapped out as an accompanying document to the schemes of work. In this manner, teachers who are requesting a more knowledge focused approach will be able to see exactly where the content of the religions appears. Hopefully this will go some way to addressing the concerns of secondary teachers in outlining the content and knowledge so that teachers can firstly, see the religious knowledge and secondly, can prepare pupils their for future examinations.

An overall conclusion to my research must now be reached. This will be presented in the final chapter.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1. Introduction

The localised position in RE has been the cause of much discussion for a number of years (REC, 2013; APPG, 2014 and 2016; CORE, 2018; Ofsted 2007, 2010; 2013; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015; 2018). However, little research has been conducted on the distinctive approach in Birmingham. This study has examined teachers' views in regard to the extent to which the pedagogical approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus facilitates the engagement of pupils, to learn both from and about religious traditions.

I have used a mixed method approach to firstly gain quantitative data about teachers' views, and also to select teachers for interview. At interview I was able to ascertain further rich and detailed information about teachers' understanding of the syllabus and their day-to-day practice. My research aim was to examine:

- 1) Do the aims of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus align with teachers' understandings of the aims of RE;
- 2) Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus support pupils' engagement in RE;
- 3) Does the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus meet the particular challenge of engaging pupils of no faith in RE?

One of the noteworthy findings of my research demonstrates that the personal aims of the majority of my participants align closely with the aims of the syllabus. Teachers' responses in relation to why RE is of importance echoed the same themes of values and personal development. Although participants in my research taught in a variety of different schools in

Birmingham, with diverse pupil populations, the majority shared the view that pupils from a background of no faith were harder to engage than pupils of faith. Whilst agreeing that this was the case, Birmingham teachers overwhelmingly commented in favour of the dispositional approach acting as a ‘hook’, making RE relevant, and thus supporting the engagement of their pupils in order to teach RE.

My research has demonstrated that one of the most significant factors to support engagement is relevance of the content to pupils’ lives. My research in Birmingham also indicates that teachers think that the dispositional approach enables their pupils to engage; by being relevant through the shared values approach with the emphasis on the pupils’ own development.

My research lends support to the idea that the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus is one effective way of engaging pupils with RE. Furthermore, once engaged, my research lends support to the idea that the syllabus is fulfilling its aims of developing both pupils and society (BCC, 2007, p. 4). In section 8.5.3 I outlined how the syllabus supports the teaching of RE once pupils are engaged. In teaching through dispositions, religious content is seen as having more relevance to pupils’ lives (Sections 7.4.2 and 8.3.1). Teacher 98 referred to a deeper level of learning taking place in response to this relevance. When knowledge is seen to have more relevance, I outlined how this can become more transferable. Teachers substantiated this perspective referring to how knowledge can then be applied in day-to-day situations, thus further supporting pupils to draw on this knowledge to support social cohesion. The syllabus’ emphasis on Learning From (Section 7.4.2) also supports this development in enabling pupils to think about the religious material in relation to their own

lives and also contributes towards the syllabus' aim of developing pupils in a conative manner (BCC, 2007, p. 5). This in turn connects with the syllabus supporting the wider development of character (Section 7.6.3). I examined teachers' responses to the dispositional approach as being more like 'life studies', 'nourishment', developing pupils as being similar to planting seeds and supporting their growth. Teachers commented that the approach supports pupils in their every day lives in developing an understanding of one another (Section 7.3.1 Living with Others). Thus although engagement is of paramount importance in order to initially engage pupils, my research supports the view that once this is achieved, the dispositional approach then initiates the development of pupils in a number of different ways.

Nevertheless, my research has also discovered certain aspects of the dispositional approach that could be improved upon.

9.2. Recommendations for the dispositional approach

I now have the opportunity to present the recommendations specifically in relation to the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Although timely with the ASC currently underway, my proposals go further in acting as recommendations for any values-led, dispositional approach to RE.

Whilst I am able to make the former endorsement, it is not without reflection that certain aspects of the dispositional approach, as revealed by my research, need refinement and further consideration. In recommending the approach as supporting the engagement of pupils of all faiths and none, it seems imperative that such an approach, drawing on the common values of religious beliefs, also takes account of non-religious world-views and the

growing number of pupils from a background of no faith (Woodhead, 2016b; 2017). As such I recommend that a dispositional approach as conceived by the faith groups of Birmingham, integrates non-religious world-views so that it is not only reflective of society, but also offers pupils from any background the opportunity to study their own beliefs.

An unintentional finding of my research revealed many teachers, the majority from a primary background, perceived there to be an overlap with RE and Collective Worship. Some teachers responded at interview in regard to aspects of RE, ‘we do that in Collective Worship’. However, this response fails to do justice to how RE should be taught. Although the dispositional approach has enabled a closer connection between RE and Collective Worship to be established, and indeed it would be difficult to conduct an act of Collective Worship without reference to disposition type values, RE is subject to a different level of scrutiny in terms of guidance, planning and assessment; this does not apply to Collective Worship. Having discussed in more depth the purposes and intricacies of both aspects of school life in Chapter 8, I contend that the contribution of the dispositions should only be monitored within RE, irrespective of their usage in Collective Worship.

One of the strong aspects revealed in my research was that teachers see the dispositions as universal values, making the religious content relevant to their pupils of faith and none alike. As discussed in Chapter 8, I contend that the majority of the dispositions are universal values and contain shared aspects, for example: ‘Caring for others, animals and the environment’, ‘Expressing joy’ and ‘Participating and willing to lead’. However, I do maintain that a few dispositions are implicitly religious: a values-led syllabus should reconsider the inclusion of these aspects in order for the approach to be fully universal. In

order to address this concern I recommend that the dispositions: ‘being merciful and forgiving’ and ‘being silent and attentive to, and cultivating a sense for the sacred and Transcendence’ are not used in this approach. These implicitly religious dispositions act as a barrier for the rest to be termed and act as universalising concepts. As such they are problematic to the contention that I have argued for throughout this thesis. The remaining dispositions would then be universal shared human values, and the approach would somewhat distance itself from confessional claims levied against it, whilst still being able to be the vehicle to teach RE. I contend that the majority of the dispositions act as shared human values enabling pupils to access RE through shared aspects or themes that are also shared with religious traditions. However, it must be acknowledged that this concept has been contested. Can there be such experiences that are shared widely by humanity because they are typical human beings ‘by virtue of their common human bond?’ (Read *et al.*, 1992, p. 19). If so, how are these experiences identified? As previously discussed (p. 264) Maybury and Teece (2005) caution as to how these experiences are prevented from being reduced to the experience of the pupil instead of opening up experiences in religion. Another overriding criticism pertains to the concept being used within a human development model of RE. Opponents of this approach, as Rudge (2000) highlights, view RE’s aim as the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, not through questions exploring how pupils can learn what it means to be human through experiencing religious material (Rudge, 2000, p. 104).

As my research demonstrated a small number of teachers were concerned about a loss of ‘traditional systematic’ knowledge teaching through the dispositional pedagogy. In Chapter 8 I asserted that it would not be possible to teach the dispositions in a more systematic,

traditional knowledge based manner. This would defeat the purpose of and impede the engagement offered by the approach. What I do think is possible in order to allay the fear of teachers, is to recommend that the ‘more traditional knowledge’ of the religious traditions is mapped out as an accompanying document to the schemes of work. In this manner, teachers who are requesting a more knowledge focused approach will be able to see exactly where the content of the religions is taught.

9.3. Constraints of my study and recommendations for further research

There have been many decisions that had to be reached in order to complete this study. I will now reflect on these choices.

As outlined in Chapter 1 I needed to take into account my role as a researcher. As RE Adviser for Birmingham SACRE, and supporting teachers implementing the syllabus, I was able to access teachers more readily than other researchers. On account of this I have had to be mindful throughout this process, firstly, taking into account whether teachers were as open as they wanted to be knowing my dual role as adviser and researcher. Secondly, I needed to be aware of my own positioning and prejudices as a researcher. In my role as an adviser I ensure that the syllabus is implemented correctly. As a researcher I needed to maintain a critical stance in regard to my study. As a result of being mindful of these factors, I hope that the research and findings are a true reflection of Birmingham teachers’ views in regard to the syllabus that they teach.

The time constraints of the study and ethical considerations meant that I needed to make a decision whether to focus on the views of teachers or pupils. I decided to work with teachers and gain their views of their pupils. I therefore suggest that further research could be carried

out involving pupils and the dispositional approach. Jennings' (2014) work on the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus as a pilot study, canvassed the opinions of pupils on RE and values. Further research following on from my study could take into account the previous work of Jennings and follow up responses from my research involving teachers by surveying pupils in their schools. In this manner, teacher and pupil views in similar school settings would be able to be analysed (Kay, 1996).

My study could also have taken different directions and could have encompassed the following areas, however time and resources prohibited following these lines of research:

Firstly, my findings also point to recommendations in regard to national policies and how these are translated into day-to-day classroom practice. My research confirmed the findings of many national reports on RE (REC, 2013; APPG, 2014; 2016; CORE, 2018; Ofsted 2007, 2010; 2013) namely the rise of non-specialists in both primary and secondary schools, and the need to support these professionals in the teaching of RE. In the light of RE being taught by the majority of time-constrained non-specialists, there is also a need to discover whether any given policy is practicable. Taking into account the growing number of non-specialist teachers, it would be of interest to gain more insight into their understanding on a variety of different levels: the relationship between RE and Collective Worship; the connections and overlap perceived between RE, Collective Worship, SMSC, fundamental British values; and whether this connection is considered mutually supportive. My research revealed Birmingham teachers' aims for RE were overwhelmingly connected with values and SMSC, thus further research could be carried out to ascertain whether Conroy's (2011) 'competing imperatives' is nationally applicable.

Whilst Astley *et al.*'s (1997) research revealed a direct correlation of certain methods achieving the SCAA (1994a; 1994b; 1994c) aims; the SCAA aims were not linked with the aims of the locally agreed syllabuses used by Astley *et al.*'s participants. Using the methods in Astley *et al.*'s study I asked teachers to rate their frequency of use. I undertook analysis to see if there was any relationship with the aims that teachers had selected both personally and for the syllabus in regard to the methods they used. In order to take this work forward more direct research could be carried out to make more direct connections with the aims teachers think are demonstrated in the dispositional approach, which methods they perceive accomplish this aim, and how often they use these methods.

In the light of teachers' concerns about the acquisition of knowledge in teaching through dispositions, it may be of interest to conduct research into the knowledge base of pupils. This could be carried out in recognition of the knowledge that will be needed in preparation for GCSE, addressing some secondary teachers' concerns. This could also then be compared with similar data from another LA that uses a different syllabus and pedagogy.

Finally, with the growth in the number of pupils from non-religious backgrounds (Woodhead, 2016b; 2017), there is a need to see how other pedagogies and approaches are responding to this population in order to make the subject relevant and to support engagement. My literature review has already outlined the richness and diversity of current research and work in the field of RE (Chapters 1 and 2), however, in the light of recommendations to establish a national entitlement for RE (CORE, 2018; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015; 2018) my research shows the innovation of a local response, addressing local need, and the strength of the faith communities involved in devising it. However, my

research is not yet comparative, and there is a need to understand how these aspects are addressed in other local authorities. Conversely, with the CORE (2018) final report's recommendations for a national body to produce non-statutory programmes of study and the removal of the current legal requirement of LAs to produce an agreed syllabus, the local determination of RE once more remains uncertain.

In the heart of a multicultural city such as Birmingham, it is important to have a pedagogical strategy that enables pupils from backgrounds of faith and no faith to find relevance in what they learn. Overall, my research has demonstrated that a local approach, distinctive in its perspective, shows the importance of the content taught having a relevance to pupils' lives. In doing so I hope that this study contributes towards showing the significance of innovative local approaches to teaching RE (Clarke, 2018). Furthermore, my research has revealed that the majority of teachers thought that an approach based on shared values is supporting pupils from backgrounds of faith and no faith to engage with the complexities and intricacies of life; enabling them to develop understanding, acceptance and support living together.

10. APPENDICES

10.1. Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus

1. Entitlement/Legal requirement p. 3

In statute RE is part of the basic curriculum. RE should take the form of: in the main Christian and take into account the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

2. Contribution to the school curriculum p. 3

RE supports the overarching aims of the school curriculum and contributes towards SMSC.

3. The specific aims of RE p. 4

Two attainment targets:

Learning from Faith with cognitive, affective and conative dimensions.

Learning about Religious Traditions developing pupils' knowledge, affections, dispositions, skills and relationships.

The aims of RE: developing the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and society.

4. Factors used to identify and select Religious Traditions to be studied p. 7

Factors for Primary schools include:

- the family background of the children in the classroom
- the historical and cultural roots of Birmingham and Britain in the traditions of Christianity

- the need to broaden and deepen spiritual and moral dimensions

In addition Secondary school factors include:

- the study of Christian traditions
- a pupil should be able to study his or her own tradition
- the curriculum should take into account the range and complementarity of religious traditions
- cross curricular links
- pupil's interest and choice

5. Programmes of study for each Key Stage p. 8

Pupil development at each Key Stage is outlined.

Links are made to non-statutory lesson material.

The 24 dispositions are listed p. 11:

Being Imaginative and Explorative

Appreciating Beauty

Expressing Joy

Being Thankful

Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment

Sharing and Being Generous

Being Regardful of Suffering

Being Merciful and Forgiving

Being Fair and Just

Living by Rules

Being Accountable and Living with Integrity

Being Temperate, Exercising Self-discipline and Cultivating Serene Contentment

Being Modest and Listening to others

Cultivating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging

Creating Unity and Harmony

Participating and Willing to Lead

Remembering Roots

Being Loyal and Steadfast

Being Hopeful and Visionary

Being Courageous and Confident

Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge

Being Open, Honest and Truthful

Being Reflective and Self-Critical

Being Silent and Attentive to, and Cultivating a sense for, the Sacred and Transcendence

6. Overviews of Religious Traditions p. 29

Each religious tradition is outlined followed by a table of religious content, links to areas of study and relevant dispositions.

7. Pupils with Learning Difficulties p. 58

Reference made to statute and links to non-statutory exemplar materials.

8. Standards and Assessment p. 58

Reference made to statute and links to non-statutory exemplar materials.

10.2. Appendix 2: List of Dispositions

Being Imaginative and Explorative

Appreciating Beauty

Expressing Joy

Being Thankful

Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment

Sharing and Being Generous

Being Regardful of Suffering

Being Merciful and Forgiving

Being Fair and Just

Living by Rules

Being Accountable and Living with Integrity

Being Temperate, Exercising Self-discipline and Cultivating Serene Contentment

Being Modest and Listening to others

Cultivating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging

Creating Unity and Harmony

Participating and Willing to Lead

Remembering Roots

Being Loyal and Steadfast

Being Hopeful and Visionary

Being Courageous and Confident

Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge

Being Open, Honest and Truthful

Being Reflective and Self-Critical

Being Silent and Attentive to, and Cultivating a sense for, the Sacred and Transcendence

10.3. Appendix 3: Training and support materials for schools

The locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus, which when adopted by the LA must be followed by maintained schools without a designated denomination. Once the syllabus has been agreed and adopted by the LA, the LA has the responsibility to ensure that schools are firstly, aware of the new curriculum requirement and then secondly, trained in order to deliver it (Section 391 [1][a], Education Act 1996). For Birmingham teachers, the introduction of the agreed syllabus meant that they were going to have to teach in a different way. From following the 1995 syllabus' areas of study encompassing 'marking special times, places and events' and studying systematic aspects of certain faiths: 'the five pillars' or 'initiation', the faith content was now being reshaped through the dispositions, with a focus on the development of their pupils. Religious aspects such as 'special times' and the five pillars would be taught through the dispositions. (See Appendix 1: Summary of 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus).

During the spring term in 2008 the LA convened a series of training sessions for schools. The first of these were for senior leaders in schools and introduced the syllabus in the context of national initiatives at the time, the Every Child Matters agenda and the duty for schools to promote community cohesion (Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007; Every Child Matters, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2003). During the next phase of training, separate sessions for both primary and secondary RE co-ordinators took place. As one primary teacher commented of colleagues in her school before the introduction of the 2007 syllabus: '[t]hey were finding that a lot of children haven't got a faith themselves so they don't really understand what it means', and after the introduction of the syllabus: '[i]t's

more practical and it's got to be latched onto the children's life; it can't just be an abstract thing' (Claire Finkel, in Felderhof and Whitehouse, 2010, p. 212).

The ASC thought it important to support teachers in this transition. For primary teachers (majority non-specialists) week-by-week lesson plans were devised. Whilst secondary specialists were given exemplars illustrating how commonly taught aspects could be covered through the dispositions. These were made freely available on the ASC website (www.birmingham-asc.org.uk). The lessons have since been revised and SACRE has redesigned a more commercially viable website (www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk). The ASC also provided guidance for teachers wanting to develop their own resources (BCC, 2007, p. 7). In addition, twenty-four films were produced demonstrating the faith traditions of Birmingham living out their lives in accordance with the dispositions. Kay (2011) praises both the funding of, and the quality and range of pedagogical materials provided.

10.4. Appendix 4: Pilot Survey

Primary/Special Questionnaire

Section 1: Respondent details

1. Please state how long you have been a specialist coordinator of Religious Education?

less than 1 year	<input type="radio"/>
1-2 years	<input type="radio"/>
3-4 years	<input type="radio"/>
5-10 years	<input type="radio"/>
over 10 years	<input type="radio"/>

2. Would you describe yourself as having a religious affiliation?

Yes	<input type="radio"/>
No	<input type="radio"/>

3. How would you describe your religious affiliation (or non-religious worldview)?

Atheism	<input type="radio"/>
Baha'i	<input type="radio"/>
Buddhism	<input type="radio"/>
Christianity	<input type="radio"/>

Hinduism	<input type="radio"/>
Humanism	<input type="radio"/>
Islam	<input type="radio"/>
Jainism	<input type="radio"/>
Judaism	<input type="radio"/>
Rastafari	<input type="radio"/>
Sikhism	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="radio"/>
None	<input type="radio"/>

4. How important is your religious position (or non-religious worldview) in your life?

Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Quite unimportant	Very unimportant
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. What type of school do you teach in? (tick all applicable)

Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What is the name of your school? (This will be used for the purposes of gaining demographic information about the population served by the school. No school or participants will be named in the research).

Section 2 : Religious Education

You will be asked to rank the following statements twice (question 7 and 11). The first time:

7. Which of the following general aims of RE do you personally consider to be most important? Please rank the statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

A	to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain;	<input type="radio"/>
B	to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures;	<input type="radio"/>
C	to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgments about religious and moral issues;	<input type="radio"/>
D	to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development;	<input type="radio"/>
E	to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions.	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please list below anything that you think has been missed from the list above in regard to being general aims within Religious Education:

9. This question is about how familiar you are with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please indicate your responses with a tick in the appropriate box for each of the following:

	Very familiar	Quite familiar	Neither familiar nor unfamiliar	Quite unfamiliar	Very unfamiliar
The Birmingham approach teaching through dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The syllabus itself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schemes of work (from the Faith Makes a Difference website)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RE in Birmingham website (www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



10. Here are the statements again. This time in your opinion which of the following general aims of RE do you think are given the most importance in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE? Please rank the statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

A	to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain;	<input type="radio"/>
B	to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures;	<input type="radio"/>
C	to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgments about religious and moral issues;	<input type="radio"/>
D	to enhance their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development;	<input type="radio"/>
E	to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions.	<input type="radio"/>

11. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

SECTION 3: Your Practice

12. The table below lists a number of teaching methods. Please tick the appropriate boxes to demonstrate how often you use each method when teaching.

	Not allowed to use	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very frequently
discussing challenges to religious belief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
role-playing religious activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religions through a thematic approach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying the different religions separately	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religious ‘rites of passage’	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religious festivals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

studying key religious figures from the past	●	●	●	●	●	●
studying key present day religious figures	●	●	●	●	●	●
studying sacred scriptures	●	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious stories, myths and legends	●	●	●	●	●	●
studying significant events in the history of religious traditions	●	●	●	●	●	●
exploring what it means to belong to a religious community	●	●	●	●	●	●
exploring religious language	●	●	●	●	●	●
exploring the limited nature of human knowledge	●	●	●	●	●	●
exploring religious expression in literature, drama and art	●	●	●	●	●	●
exploring ultimate questions	●	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious artefacts	●	●	●	●	●	●
observing film clips of religious activities	●	●	●	●	●	●

visiting places of worship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
visits by members of faith communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
engaging in religious worship at assemblies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
seeing religious worship at assemblies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
seeing religious worship at places of worship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
evaluating the moral values of religions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
evaluating the truth of religious beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
evaluating religious practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
comparing different religions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. The table below contains a number of statements. Please respond from your experience of teaching RE in your current school. Please indicate your response to the statements with a tick in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pupils engage in RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All pupils regardless of faith do well in RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils comment how much they enjoy RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RE is not valued by parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RE makes a significant contribution to SMSC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers value RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus teaches through a number of qualities or attitudes, which the nine faith groups of the city have agreed. These are called dispositions; for example, sharing and being generous or participating and willing to lead. The table below contains a number of statements about the dispositions and the

Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please indicate your response to the statements with a tick in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I prefer to teach religions separately, not through themes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions are important in teaching RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions hide the differences between faiths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change the teaching of RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change pupils' attitudes towards RE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

RE makes more sense teaching through the dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions help pupils to understand RE through shared attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about RE and/or the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

SECTION 4: Please only answer questions in Section 4 if you have experience of teaching Religious Education under a different Agreed Syllabus (including any previous Birmingham syllabuses) to the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE (2007):

16. Has the Birmingham approach influenced the way you think about RE?

If so please state why. If not, please state why not.

17. Have the methods that you use to teach RE changed with the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

18. Do you think that pupils with no faith background respond better to the teaching of RE through the dispositions?

19. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about RE and/or the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus

10.5. Appendix 5: Questionnaire Design

This section will discuss the detail of the questions chosen for my questionnaire. I will also refer to more detailed comments made on reflection after the pilot study was carried out. As such it is an extension of the questionnaire design section that appears in Chapter 5: Research Design.

Section 1: Respondent Details

In ‘Section 1: Respondent details’ all questions are closed. The information needed does not need to offer a long list of alternatives, the questions are factual and require quick responses by ticking against the relevant box for example, question 1, ‘Please state how long you have been teaching RE: Options include: less than 1 year, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-10 years and over 10 years. This was to ascertain (as well as the final question in section 4) whether the teacher was teaching before the introduction of the current agreed syllabus and whether comments are made as a result of this factor. The number of years a teacher has taught may have bearing on a range of other questions. In the pilot, one teacher queried whether this question should read ‘How long have you been a teacher of RE and or humanities’, given that many teachers in secondary school settings will teach in a Humanities Faculty. This was a valid comment and the final secondary questionnaire has been amended accordingly. Since the primary questionnaire was asked of coordinators, another comment referred to this question being amended to ‘How long have you been a specialist coordinator in RE?’. This too was taken to be a valid comment and the questionnaire amended.

As I asked two questionnaires, the numbering of questions will sometimes differ. The secondary questionnaire is different to the ‘primary and special’ questionnaire in that it asked specialist teachers if they have an undergraduate qualification in RE, whether they

have a post graduate qualification in RE and the name of their degree. The other questions remain the same for both questionnaires. The rest of the numbering for the questions in this questionnaire design applies to the Primary/Special questionnaire, all the same questions are asked in the secondary questionnaire but are 'three numbers' out of sequence due to the specialist questions already discussed. The corresponding questions will be shown in brackets throughout the rest of this section.

Question 2 of the secondary questionnaire asked teachers if religion was part of their undergraduate qualification. This will add to the information gained in terms of knowing the number of secondary teachers trained as 'specialists' and just how much knowledge they have of faiths and religion before they start teaching. Question 3 asked about the name of the teacher's degree would also add to this information.

Question 4 of the secondary questionnaire asked, 'Do you have a teaching qualification in RE?'. This again will serve to build a more detailed view of the teacher's qualifications in the subject area.

Question 2 of the primary and special questionnaire (question 5 of the secondary questionnaire) asked if the teacher has a religious affiliation. I decided not to ask whether the teacher has 'belief' as being too loaded a statement and affiliation then links into how strong the affiliation is in terms of people demonstrating this in their day-to-day lives. Using the term 'affiliation' was thought to be more open. This question was useful to explore any connections with the answers to others questions such as how the teacher responds and teaches RE on a professional level. Question 3 (6) follows on from this and asked for the teacher to tick against a list of faiths and perspectives provided. The faiths listed are those

from the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus with the additions of: atheism, humanism and 'other'. These are added as additional responses since they do not appear in the syllabus as 'religious traditions'. The Agreed Syllabus Conference decided that atheism and humanism can be used as a critique of religion but not as a 'religious tradition' per se. These terms are used since they appear on the Census (2011) as recognisable affiliations. Analysis revealed how teachers of different faiths respond to proceeding questions about the teaching of RE and the syllabus.

Question 4 (7) asked teachers to rate how important the affiliation is in their life by ranking against very important, quite important, neither important nor unimportant, quite unimportant and very unimportant. This information was important at a later stage when other data revealed a relationship between particular characteristics of the syllabus and a teacher's religious affiliation. For example, when analysed with the results of other questions; it may be revealed that teachers of particular faiths hold a particular understanding about the aim of RE or the aim of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus approach. This could be different to that of teachers with no religious affiliation. The extent of the importance of a belief in a teacher's life will be of interest to explore with other responses.

Question 5 (8) asked which type of school the participants teach in: primary, secondary or special. This question is asked to ascertain the type of school and also to link to following questions about the experience of RE in that school. For example, if 'Primary School' is selected this could be linked with another question in the context of the teacher being responsible for the group of children all the time as class teacher, knowing the children in a

different way in contrast with a secondary school teacher, who may be teaching 400 pupils a week. The response will be different again for a special school teacher and depending on the needs of their pupils, some questions on the questionnaire will not have relevance, for example a teacher in a school where the children have profound learning difficulties may not be able to answer a question since certain teaching methods listed may not be appropriate.

Question 6 (9) follows on from this asked for the name of the school. Certain demographic data can be ascertained in regard to this information, for example the number of pupils of different faiths in a particular school. The answers to this question were examined with other responses, for example, methods suited to teaching pupils, responses from pupils to a dispositional-based approach. Further information in terms of the background of pupils could be examined with responses to other questions, Pupil Premium information would indicate a certain level of economic background of families attending the school, this in turn may impact on general perspectives of education and RE in particular. Information regarding the community which is served by the school, for example, could also provide interesting information in combination with other responses, such as: a community; one-faith majority; or a faith school.

Section 2: RE

‘Section 2: RE’. In question 7 (10) participants are asked to select from a range of five statements, ranking them: 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest. The question is prefaced with the statement that teachers will be asked to rank the aims twice, so that there is no confusion when they see the statements for a second time. Question 7 (10) asks the teacher to consider which of the following are personally important general aims of RE. The

aims listed originate from the SCAA Model Syllabuses for RE (1994a; 1994b; 1994c) and in particular are used as a basis for a survey of RE teachers by Astley *et al.* (1997) concerning aims and methods in RE. In answer to question 7 (9) teachers are not being asked to select one aim from a list that they consider to be the aim of RE. Teachers are asked to rank the statements in order of importance and will be asked to do so again in accordance with different criteria in question 10 (13).

Question 8 (11) follows on from this and asked teachers whether anything has been missed from the list of aims. It is important to show that I am open to other aims that teachers may have thought of, even though I have stated my reason for using the five statements, this will show that I value my participants' responses if they were to contribute something completely different. It shows that although I had a rationale for the asking the questions that I did, I welcomed different contributions as part of the research process.

Questions 9 (12) asked about familiarity of the participant with the agreed syllabus, 9 (12) 'How familiar are you with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please indicate your responses with a tick in the appropriate box for each of the following'. These questions precede the question in regard to the aims being asked for the second time, in view of the agreed syllabus. Many other questions asked can be compared to participant responses to these questions. Question 9 (12) responses are captured in the mode of a Likert scale ranging from 'very familiar' to 'neither familiar nor unfamiliar' to 'very unfamiliar'. If a teacher selects 'quite familiar' and answered further on in the questionnaire indicate that they are not or have a misunderstanding about the syllabus, answers can be explored in this manner. There is a certain degree of pressure asking teachers outright are they familiar with

something that they should be familiar with in order to teach a certain aspect of their role. There is a certain amount of loss of integrity if the teacher were to state that they are ‘quite unfamiliar’ or ‘very unfamiliar’ with guidelines that they should be using. Having stated this, I did expect that there would be a range of answers to this question containing the full range of the scale. I have asked teachers to be part of the pilot because they know about the syllabus and the Birmingham approach. One teacher did respond that the question should be spilt into different components of the Birmingham approach, for example, the syllabus, the rubric of the Birmingham approach and the schemes of work. This seems a more detailed and logical division and changes will be made in the light of this comment. The question now distinguishes between the Birmingham approach, the syllabus, schemes of work and resources, such as films.

Question 10 (13) takes the same list of aims and now asked the teacher which of the following general aims are given the most importance in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, thus refining the question to understand what the teacher thinks is the approach of the syllabus. The reasons for asking this question in regard to the aims is to see how far teachers have understood the syllabus and aims. As stated before, these five statements or aims have been prevalent in RE for quite some time. They have been interpreted in a manner of ways in agreed syllabuses. This question asked whether teachers have understood the approach of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus and how it has interpreted these aims. The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus has been forthright, open and unapologetic about its approach being different to ‘other syllabuses’, it will be of interest to explore whether teachers understand the intentions of the syllabus. Comparisons will be made in regard to the responses in question 7 (10). I expected there to be a range of answers that teachers will not rank the

statements that I considered to be most suited due to the majority of non-specialist teachers delivering the subject.

Question 11 (14) asked participants for further clarification of their understanding of the Birmingham approach. After ranking the statements, in the previous question, teachers are asked in this question to further express their understanding of the Birmingham approach, by being given an open response to freely express their views. The question asked for the teacher's opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. There are no statements or options from academic or professional critiques of the syllabus to steer a participant's response. The response to this question must come from the teacher's own experience in the classroom delivering the syllabus.

Question 12 (15) lists a number of teaching methods for example: studying religious festivals, observing film clips of religious activities and studying religions through a thematic approach. The question asked the teacher, through the mode of a Likert scale, to mark how frequently they use each method. I knew there would be a variety of answers for this question but it has been devised to check the range of teaching methods being used by teachers. The scale asked teachers to rank against: never, seldom, often or very frequently. The list of 27 teaching methods is taken from Astley *et al.* (1997). Although Astley *et al.*'s list is quite extensive in listing 27 methods, I felt that it was important to use it in its entirety. In the pilot two teachers ticked 'never' against the methods, 'visiting places of worship' and 'visits by members of faith communities'. They added that this was not because they did not want to use these methods rather that 'school policy' did not allow them. For the main study I added a column with the choice 'not allowed to use' in response

to recognising this issue that some teachers may face. Thus certain methods would be used by teachers if they were not prevented from using them by their school.

Question 13 (16) and 14 (17) contain a number of statements about RE and Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, for example whether dispositions are important in the teaching of RE, whether pupils with no religious background are engaged because of the dispositions. Participants are asked to rank the statements in a Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. I decided to separate the statements in question 13 (16), with more general questions from the teachers' experience of teaching RE in their current school, to question 14 (17) containing questions more focused on the dispositions. This is so that there is a clear distinction and the questions will not get mixed up. Question 13 (16) asks questions about pupil engagement in RE and parental value in the subject. Question 14 (17) outlines the dispositional approach and focuses on statements about the dispositions. For example, 'Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions' and 'The dispositions do not change the teaching of Religious Education'. The responses to previous questions will be used in conjunction with responses to this question, for example, the name of the school and subsequent demographic data that is obtained, responses to the aims of RE questions. Similarly, question 14 (17) asked questions about the dispositions, increasing engagement of pupils with a background of no faith, RE makes more sense teaching through the dispositions. These statements are so key and at the heart of my research. Responses in the 'neither agree/disagree' category would indicate that the participant either does not understand the syllabus in order to comprehend the question or does not know the impact on their pupils. Neither would support my research purposes. Responses at the extreme ends of the spectrum: 'strongly disagree' or 'strongly agree' will

be more significant and of interest either way (depending on the phrasing of questions) to my research.

Question 15 (19) is the final question of the questionnaire for all teachers. Question 15 (19), gives the teacher an opportunity to comment on anything about RE and or the syllabus that they have previously not had the chance to do. The teacher may wish to comment on something that they find important, that I have not asked. Questions such as Question 15 (19) asked participants for their viewpoint, give the chance for the participant to say what they like, an opportunity to disagree or to voice an alternative perspective in relation to the stance adopted for the whole questionnaire and research. One secondary teacher commented that it may be useful to have the opportunity to state more and be able to give reasons for answers, for example it may be the case that at Key Stage 3 the syllabus is only taught in Year 7 and 8 due to a Short Course GCSE being taught in Year 9. This may have an impact on some of the responses. This would be useful but would completely alter the line of questioning from a Likert scale to being something less summative and more complicated for the participant to answer. In the main secondary questionnaire question 18 was added. Question 18 asks, ‘Does school practice impact on your delivery of RE (for example starting GCSEs early in Year 9 – Key Stage 3 is covered in two years)’. This could be of great import to my research in that this example alone could impact on the delivery of the agreed syllabus and therefore could impinge on its effectiveness and limit the coverage of the dispositions if condensed to a two-year period.

Section 4 only applies to teachers who have taught RE according a different agreed syllabus to the 2007 syllabus. There are four questions in this section. Question 16 (20) asked

whether the Birmingham approach has influenced the way in which the teacher thinks about RE. The opportunity for responding, 'If not, please state why not' is also given so that both perspectives are captured. This question returns the participant to the earlier question about aims of RE, has the teacher's approach changed because of this? This could include how a teacher prepares for RE lessons, to if the teacher is thinking in a different manner because of the dispositions. The approach may have changed a teacher's perspective in regard to the wider role of RE, and as a non-specialist whether the teacher sees the importance of teaching RE.

Teachers' opinions may have changed positively or negatively in the light of the syllabus. Teachers may have seen the results or the impact of the approach that might lead them to respond in a certain manner. Since this is an open question, a wider variety of responses are anticipated. A few teachers in the pilot with the experience of teaching the previous agreed syllabus in Birmingham did not answer this question. This may require further clarification such as, 'Please answer questions in Section 4 if you have experience of teaching Religious Education under a different Agreed Syllabus to Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE (2007) **including the previous Agreed Syllabus in Birmingham**'. The main study was amended in this manner.

Question 17 (21) asked whether the methods teachers use to teach RE have changed as a result. This can be examined with the responses to question 12 (15) asking teachers to verify on a Likert scale the types of methods used and the frequency of using them to deliver RE. Question 17 (21) now puts this in the perspective of the Birmingham approach and methods used to teach it and whether these methods are different to those used to teach the previous

agreed syllabus or other agreed syllabuses the teacher may have experience of teaching. This question can again be aligned with Astley *et al.*'s aims and methods to deliver RE.

Question 18 (22) asked the teacher how pupils of a no faith background respond to the teaching of RE through the introduction of the dispositions. This is asking teachers to compare the engagement of pupils with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus to other syllabuses. This is the root of my research question. Rather than pupils of no faith disengaging from the study of RE since learning about 'Sikhs' or 'festivals' is seen to be alien to them, I wanted to explore if through the strategy of the dispositions, pupils can reflect on what that means to them (for example, participating and willing to lead) and then engage with a faith tradition more readily because it is personally relevant. This question could be usefully combined with the background information on the type of school, population of where the teacher is working.

Question 19 (23) as the final question of the questionnaire asked teachers to comment on anything they feel they have been unable to comment on so far as part of the questionnaire. It was important to ask this question again in this final section for the teachers answering in conjunction with experience of teaching a different syllabus.

10.6. Appendix 6: Pilot Interview Schedule

Schedule for a semi-structured interview with a subject leader

1. Outline how RE is delivered in your school

(Planning Preparation and Assessment [PPA], Specialist, non-Specialists, mixed)

2. What is your school/class population? Approx. percentage of formal religion, no formal religion, nonreligious worldview.
3. Is RE taught thematically or as a discrete subject?
4. In your opinion is it important to teach RE? Give reasons for your answer
5. In your opinion what does outstanding RE look like?
6. What does engagement in RE look like?
7. What is your (teachers in your school) attitude towards the teaching RE?
8. What do you think (teachers in your school think) about the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus approach towards teaching RE?
9. What does pupil conversation reveal about RE?
10. What has parental feedback revealed about RE?
11. How do you feel about teaching through the dispositions? In your opinion what are benefits of teaching in this way? Do you have any concerns in teaching in this way?
12. Has the Birmingham syllabus of 2007 had an impact on pupil attitude/behaviour towards RE?
13. Do you think teaching through the dispositions helps pupils to engage with religious traditions?

14. Has the teaching of RE through dispositions:

engaged pupils of faith?

engaged pupils with no faith?

Is there a difference?

15. How do pupils with no religious affiliation engage in RE? Do they learn about RE?

From RE?

To ask at interview if the teacher was teaching the before the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

16. What was the response from teachers when the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus was introduced in your school?

17. Was this reaction positive or negative in the light of RE that was being taught before the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

18. Has the teaching of RE changed in your school due to the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? If so how? (teacher confidence? different activities? approach to teaching?)

19. Is there a difference in teacher attitude towards teaching RE?

20. Is there a difference in pupil attitude towards RE?

10.7. Appendix 7: Revised pilot Interview Schedule

1. How is Religious Education taught in your school?

Who teaches Religious Education:

PPA, Specialist, non-Specialist, mixed

Thematically or as a discrete subject?

2. In your opinion why is it important to teach Religious Education?

Link back to questionnaire and aims of Religious Education

3. What are the opportunities in teaching Religious Education?

Good things, positives, cross-curricular, contribution to SMSC? Visits?

4. What are the challenges in teaching Religious Education?

Assessment, engagement, resources, confidence, knowledge

5. Tell me about the methods you use to teach Religious Education...

Visits, creative, drama

Have these changed since the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

6. Tell me about a successful lesson you've taught in Religious Education

What do you think successful means? Methods used, engagement,

7. I've got a number of scenarios and for each I'd like you to say how you would engage this pupil in Religious Education...

(Not educational concern, concerns how to engage with religions)

Billy's background is non-religious. His Mum refuses to let him take part in the visit to the Mosque because it's not educational. Billy is not interested in Religious Education. How do you engage Billy in Religious Education?

Sarah wants to be a doctor. Her family place high value on education and want her to do well. Her parents see Religious Education as a waste of time. How do you engage Sarah in Religious Education?

Abdul is from a Muslim background. His family are practicing Muslims and Abdul goes to Madrasah most evenings after school. Abdul's family place a high significance on the importance of their own faith but do not see the benefit or need for Abdul to learn about other religions, since he has his own. How do you engage Abdul in Religious Education?

Sunita is a Hindu. Her family are keen for her to learn about other religious traditions so that she is prepared for life in modern Britain. How do you engage Sunita in Learning From Religious Education?

Do you have pupils like this in your classroom – Do you deal with them differently? How do you engage pupils? What motivates pupils in Religious Education?

One type of lack of engagement harder to deal with than another?

8. There are two attainment targets in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, Learning About Religious Traditions and Learning From faith. Tell me what you think about them? How do you teach them?
9. How do you feel about teaching through the dispositions in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?
10. Are some dispositions easier to teach than others?

What's working when you are teaching the dispositions?

11. Are some harder? What doesn't work?
12. What do you think about the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

Has the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus influenced the way you think about Religious Education?

From previous Birmingham Syllabus? Other AS? Relevance?

13. Do you have anything else to add?

10.8. Appendix 8: Interview Design

This section will discuss the detail of the questions chosen for my interview schedule. I will also refer to more detailed comments made on reflection after the pilot interviews were carried out. As such it is an extensive version of the interview design section that appears in Chapter 5: Research Design.

Background

The first few questions aimed to gain background information and to settle the teacher into the interview process. Question 1 asked for the teacher to outline how RE is delivered in their school. This was to get an overview of the structure of RE which can sometimes pertain to the importance of the subject in a school. In primary and most special schools, class teachers may teach the subject or the lesson may be used as cover for when the class teacher is completing their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. If the class teacher is teaching the subject, this could be viewed in a positive light, as in the teacher being able to draw other curriculum areas into RE to make it relevant to the pupils' context in learning with other subjects. The teacher may not be a subject specialist and this may raise other concerns in the teaching of the subject, such as understanding the aims of the RE and/or subject knowledge. If RE is covered through PPA cover, this can sometimes be carried out by higher level teaching assistants (HTLAs) which again could lead to concerns with the teaching of the subject by non qualified teachers, however, without the relationship of the classroom teacher with their class, certain aspects of RE may be problematic, when taught by someone less familiar. This was an interesting question to ask as a context setting exercise. The position in secondary schools is a mixed picture. Some schools had a specialist or team of specialist teachers to teach RE. In ascertaining this at the start of the interview

other subtleties of teaching RE will not have to be explained. Other schools have a Humanities Faculty where teachers might have to deliver Geography, History and RE in Key Stage 3 and specialise at Key Stage 4. Finally, some secondary schools have a specialist leading the subject but with a team of various teachers teaching RE. It is therefore important to ascertain how the subject is being taught in the various school settings. Question 2 asked the teacher, is it important to teach RE? and asked teachers to justify their answer. In this manner the teacher is asked to reflect on the importance of the subject before references to specific pedagogies and syllabuses are introduced. Question 3 asked what are the challenges in teaching Religious Education? Teachers responded to their local situation and had the chance to respond in terms of national challenges facing the subject. As outlined in a number of reports and commentaries that have been produced over recent years (REC, 2012; APPG, 2016; CORE, 2018). This further allowed an understanding of both their knowledge and understanding of RE and the context and status of RE in their school.

Teaching

The next questions asked about teaching and the practice of RE. Question 4 asked teachers about the methods they use to teach RE. This allowed interviewees to expand on the responses given in the questionnaire and to discuss the reasons for using certain methods. At the interview I had copies of the teacher's questionnaire responses so that they did not have to try to remember how they replied, but it was also be of interest to explore whether teachers give the same answers to their questionnaire responses. Question 5 asked the teacher to comment on a successful lesson that they have taught. In asking this question I wanted to find out the teacher's understanding of what constitutes 'successful' without reference to the Ofsted guidance and criteria. It allowed teachers to expand on the methods

referenced in the previous question. This question also introduced the concept of engagement to the discussion. This is key to my research question and allowed teachers to respond in a more open manner before I asked further questions about the dispositional approach and engagement.

The 2007 Syllabus

The following questions are about the syllabus. Question 6 refers to the two attainment targets: Learning From Faith and Learning About Religious Traditions, and asked teachers to comment on what they think of them. The emphasis on learning from faith is key to the dispositional approach in developing pupils through the religious traditions. This question enabled this discussion with teachers to take place and to see how they have viewed the attainment targets, or in some cases if teachers are aware of them. Question 7 asked teachers to comment on what they think the dispositions are about. I wanted to ascertain whether teachers understood the approach and the reasons for using the strategy of the dispositions. Further questions were posited after this initial understanding is gained to ask whether teachers think that the approach works and what they think about teaching in this manner. The benefit of a semi-structured interview were of use in this case, since I did have to expound on the dispositional approach as different to other agreed syllabuses or the previous Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. This depended on the length of time the teacher had been teaching (as to whether they were teaching in Birmingham before 2007) or whether they were aware of different pedagogies or approaches for teaching RE, as may be the case for some non-specialist teachers. Question 8 asked teachers about what most supports engagement; aims of the subject, a particular pedagogy or the day-to-day methods, and if one of these aspects has more gravitas. In essence this question is asking teachers to reflect

on their understanding and practice about what supports their pupils engagement in RE. Having asked these questions separately before in the questionnaire, at interview I had the opportunity to explore these aspects together and see what teachers think about what best supports pupil engagement.

In the pilot I asked questions about pupil conversation and what this revealed about RE. However, as it became apparent, that many schools would not have spoken with pupils before and after the introduction of the syllabus. It is therefore highly unlikely that this question could be used to contrast between what pupils thought before the introduction of the syllabus, to what they thought afterwards. Similarly, another question referred to parental feedback. Again it is doubtful that schools had asked for parental comments about RE before the introduction of the syllabus, but parents may well have commented about the syllabus in an informal manner after its introduction. As such I decided to adapt these questions to find out about types of pupils and their experiences of RE, also including a range of parental perspectives on the subject in a series of case studies. Question 9 presents these case studies on pupil engagement in RE (Appendix 12: Semi-structured Interview Schedule). The question asked in response to each 'pupil' how the interviewee would engage that pupil. The case studies include a pupil disaffected with RE (Billy), a career minded pupil not seeing the benefit of RE (Sunita), a religious pupil whose family does not see the reason for learning about other faiths (Abdul) and a pupil for which learning from faith needs to be made apparent (Sarah). In this manner I referred to the case studies but also asked teachers about these pupil characteristics in their schools and about parental reaction to RE.

10.9. Appendix 9: Primary and Special Religious Education Survey



Information for questionnaire participants

My research

To what extent does the approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn from faith and about religious traditions? An exploration of teachers' perceptions.

The focus of my research to gain teachers' perceptions as to whether the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus does enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from faith and about religious traditions. I have already conducted pilot work in this area. I now need to deepen the research to gain an understanding of teacher responses.

I am undertaking this PhD through the School of Education at the University of Birmingham; my supervisors are Professor Michael Hand and Dr. Sarah Hall.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research by completing this questionnaire. Participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process. As a participant you will be contributing to

the development of research into a relatively new approach which has not been subject to research in this manner. Your answers will be treated in a confidential manner and will be reported anonymously in the findings of the research.

The questionnaire has been sent to all schools and academies in Birmingham following the 2007 Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

The study is being personally funded.

You will be asked a series of questions during the questionnaire. The process is anticipated to take 30-35 minutes.

If there are any questions or comments that you wish to raise prior to completing the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

Your data will be recorded anonymously. Neither individuals nor institutions will be identified by name in any publication or thesis arising from this research. Data will be coded and names or revealing details of participants will not be recorded in the thesis. Original data such as copies of questionnaires will be stored securely. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to the data.

Results of the study

The data will be used in my research and thesis. You will be provided with a summary sheet at the end of the study thanking you for your involvement and providing an overview of key findings of the research.

Contact details:

Simone Whitehouse Religious Education Adviser with Birmingham schools and

SACRE Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Supervisors:

Professor M. Hand: [REDACTED]

Dr. S. Hall: [REDACTED]

1

Consent

In continuing with this survey you are agreeing to:

Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with Religious Education and the extent to which the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus enables pupils of faith or no faith to engage with RE by the Department of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project.

The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit processes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your

information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Statement of understanding/consent

I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons (up until March 2016). If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.

I understand that my personal data will be processed for the details above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

Respondent details

(Please note, BOS survey questions must be placed inside sections to work correctly)

1. Please state how long you have been a specialist coordinator of Religious Education?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 – 2 years
- ☐ 3 – 4 years
- ☐ 5 – 10 years
- ☐ Over 10 years

2. Would you describe yourself as having a religious affiliation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. How would you describe your religion affiliation or non-religious worldview?

- ☐ Atheism
- ☐ Baha'i
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Christianity

- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Humanism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Jainism
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Rastafari
- ☐ Sikhism
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

4. How important is your religious position or non-religious worldview in your life?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Quite important

- ☐ Neither important nor unimportant
- ☐ Quite important
- ☐ Very important

5. What type of school do you teach in?

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Special

6. What is the name of your school? This will be used for the purposes of gaining demographic information about the population served by the school. No school or participants will be named in the research.

The Importance of Teaching Religious Education

7. You will be asked to rank the following statements twice, question 7 and 11.

The first time: Which of the following general aims of Religious Education do you personally consider to be the most important? Please rank the

statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5
to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please list anything that you think has been missed from the list in question 7 in regard to being general and within Religious Education.

9. This question is about how familiar you are with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please check the appropriate boxes with your response for each of the following:

	Very Familiar	Quite Familiar	Neither Familiar nor Unfamiliar	Quite Unfamiliar	Very Familiar
The Birmingham approach of teaching through dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The syllabus itself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schemes of work (from the Faith Makes a Difference website)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education in Birmingham website (www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resources - Faith Makes a Difference dvds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Here are the statements again. This time in your opinion which of the following general aims of Religious Education do you think are of most importance in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2007? Please rank

the statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5
to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? I would appreciate a detailed answer to this question.

Your Teaching

12. The table lists a number of teaching methods. Please check the appropriate boxes to demonstrate how often you use each method when teaching.

	Not allowed to use	Never	Often	Sometimes	Very Frequently
discussing challenges to religious belief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
role-playing religious activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religions through a thematic approach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying the different religions separately	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religious 'rites of passage'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religious festivals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying key religious figures from the past	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying key present day religious figures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying sacred scriptures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religious stories, myths and legends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

studying significant events in the history of religious traditions	●	●	●	●	●
exploring what it means to belong to a religious community	●	●	●	●	●
exploring religious language	●	●	●	●	●
exploring the limited nature of human knowledge	●	●	●	●	●
exploring religious expression in literature, drama and art	●	●	●	●	●
exploring ultimate questions	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious artefacts	●	●	●	●	●
observing film clips of religious activities	●	●	●	●	●
visiting places of worship	●	●	●	●	●
visits by members of faith communities	●	●	●	●	●
engaging in religious worship at assemblies	●	●	●	●	●
seeing religious worship at assemblies	●	●	●	●	●
seeing religious worship at places of worship	●	●	●	●	●
evaluating the moral values of religions	●	●	●	●	●
evaluating the truth of religious beliefs	●	●	●	●	●

evaluating religious practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
comparing different religions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. The table contains a number of statements. Please respond from your experience of teaching Religious Education in your current school. Please check the appropriate box with your response.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Pupils engage in Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All pupils regardless of faith do well in Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils comment how much they enjoy Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education is not valued by parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education makes a significant contribution to pupils' Spiritual, Moral,	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social and Cultural development					
Teachers value Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus teaches through a number of qualities or attitudes, which the nine faith groups of the city have agreed. These are called dispositions; for example, sharing and being generous or participating and willing to lead. The table contains a number of statements about the dispositions and the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please indicate your response to the statements by checking the appropriate box

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I prefer to teach religions separately, not through themes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions are important in teaching Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions hide the differences between faiths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change the teaching of Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change pupils' attitudes towards Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions help pupils to understand Religious Education through shared attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about Religious Education and/or the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

Please only answer questions in this section if you have had experience of teaching Religious Education under a different syllabus or scheme to the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. This should include any previous Birmingham syllabus.

16. Have you taught any other syllabuses or schemes other than the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

- ☐ Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 1995
- ☐ Church of England Diocesan scheme (for example the Manchester diocesan syllabus)
- ☐ Roman Catholic Syllabus
- ☐ Other Local Authority Syllabus (for example Solihull)
- ☐ Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education
- ☐ LCP (publisher) files for Religious Education
- ☐ Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

17. Has the 2007 Birmingham approach changed the way you think about Religious Education? If so, please state why. If not, please state why not.

18. Have the methods that you use to teach Religious Education changed with the introduction of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007? If so, please state why. If not please state why not.

19. Do you think that pupils with no faith background respond better to the teaching of Religious Education through the dispositions? If so, please state why. If not please state why not.

20. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the differences between the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus and other syllabuses you have used?

21. Would you be willing to be approached as a follow up to this survey? If yes please leave your name and preferred email contact. Many thanks.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Final Page

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses have now been submitted.

10.10. Appendix 10: Secondary Religious Education Survey



Information to questionnaire participants

My research

To what extent does the approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn from faith and about religious traditions? An exploration of teachers' perceptions.

The focus of my research is to gain teachers' perceptions as to whether the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus does enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from faith and about religious traditions. I have already conducted pilot work in this area. I now need to deepen the research to gain an understanding of teacher responses.

I am undertaking this PhD through the School of Education at the University of Birmingham; my supervisors are Professor Michael Hand and Dr. Sarah Hall.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research by completing this questionnaire. Participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process. As a participant you will be contributing to the development of research into a relatively new approach which has not been subject to research in this manner. Your answers will be

treated in a confidential manner and will be reported anonymously in the findings of the research.

The questionnaire has been sent to all schools and academies in Birmingham following the 2007 Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

The study is being personally funded.

You will be asked a series of questions during the questionnaire. The process is anticipated to take 30-35 minutes.

If there are any questions or comments that you wish to raise prior to completing the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

Your data will be recorded anonymously. Neither individuals nor institutions will be identified by name in any publication or thesis arising from this research. Data will be coded and names or revealing details of participants will not be recorded in the thesis. Original data such as copies of questionnaires will be stored securely. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to the data.

Results of the study

The data will be used in my research and thesis. You will be provided with a summary sheet at the end of the study thanking you for your involvement and providing an overview of key findings of the research.

Contact details:

Simone Whitehouse Religious Education Adviser with Birmingham schools
and SACRE Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Supervisors:

Professor M. Hand: [REDACTED] Dr. S. Hall: [REDACTED]

Consent

In continuing with this survey you are agreeing to:

Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with Religious Education and the extent to which the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus enables pupils of faith or no faith to engage with RE by the Department of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project.

The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit processes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be

processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Statement of understanding/consent

I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons (up until March 2016). If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.

I understand that my personal data will be processed for the details above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study

Respondent details

(Please note, BOS survey questions must be placed inside sections to work correctly)

1. Please state how long you have been a teacher of Religious Education and/or Humanities?

less than 1 year	<input type="radio"/>
1-2 years	<input type="radio"/>
3-4 years	<input type="radio"/>
5-10 years	<input type="radio"/>
over 10 years	<input type="radio"/>

2. Was Religious Education part of your undergraduate qualification?

<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No

3. What was the name of your degree?

4. Do you have a teaching qualification in Religious Education?

<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No

5. Would you describe yourself as having a religious affiliation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. How would you describe your religious affiliation or non-religious worldview?

- ☐ Atheism
- ☐ Baha'i
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Humanism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Jainism
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Rastafari
- ☐ Sikhism
- ☐ None

☐ Other (please state)

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

7. How important is your religious position or non-religious worldview in your life?

Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Quite unimportant	Very unimportant
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. What type of school do you teach in?

Primary	<input type="radio"/>
Secondary	<input type="radio"/>
Special	<input type="radio"/>

9. What is the name of your school? This will be used for the purposes of gaining demographic information about the population served by the school. No school or participants will be named in the research.

The Importance of Teaching Religious Education

You will be asked to rank the following statements twice, question 10 and 13.

10. The first time: Which of the following general aims of Religious Education do you personally consider to be the most important? Please rank the statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5
to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop a positive attitude towards other people,	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions

11. Please list anything that you think has been missed from the list in question 10 in regard to being general aims within Religious Education.

12. This question is about how familiar you are with the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please check the appropriate boxes with your response for each of the following:

	Very Familiar	Quite Familiar	Neither Familiar nor Unfamiliar	Quite Unfamiliar	Very Unfamiliar
The Birmingham approach of teaching through dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The syllabus itself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Schemes of work (from the Faith Makes a Difference website)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education in Birmingham website (www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resources - Faith Makes a Difference dvds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Here are the statements again. This time in your opinion which of the importance in the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education? Please rank the statements in the order of importance you would give each, numbering your chosen statements from 1-5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5
to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions

14. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? I would appreciate a detailed answer to this question.

Your Teaching

15. The table lists a number of teaching methods. Please check the appropriate boxes to demonstrate how often you use each method when teaching.

	Not allowed to use	Never	Often	Sometimes	Very Frequently
discussing challenges to religious belief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
role-playing religious activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying religions through a thematic approach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
studying the different	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

religions separately					
studying religious 'rites of passage'	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious festivals	●	●	●	●	●
studying key religious figures from the past	●	●	●	●	●
studying key present day religious figures	●	●	●	●	●
studying sacred scriptures	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious stories, myths and legends	●	●	●	●	●
studying significant events in the history of religious traditions	●	●	●	●	●
exploring what it means to belong to a religious community	●	●	●	●	●
exploring religious language	●	●	●	●	●
exploring the limited nature of human knowledge	●	●	●	●	●

exploring religious expression in literature, drama and art	●	●	●	●	●
exploring ultimate questions	●	●	●	●	●
studying religious artefacts	●	●	●	●	●
observing film clips of religious activities	●	●	●	●	●
visiting places of worship	●	●	●	●	●
visits by members of faith communities	●	●	●	●	●
engaging in religious worship at assemblies	●	●	●	●	●
seeing religious worship at assemblies	●	●	●	●	●
seeing religious worship at places of worship	●	●	●	●	●
evaluating the moral values of religions	●	●	●	●	●
evaluating the truth of religious beliefs	●	●	●	●	●

evaluating religious practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
comparing different religions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. The table contains a number of statements. Please respond from your experience of teaching Religious Education in your current school. Please check the appropriate box with your response.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Pupils engage in Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All pupils regardless of faith do well in Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils comment how much they enjoy Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education is not valued by parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Religious Education makes a significant contribution to pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers value Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus teaches through a number of qualities or attitudes, which the nine faith groups of the city have agreed. These are called dispositions; for example, sharing and being generous or participating and willing to lead. The table contains a number of statements about the dispositions and the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Please indicate your response to the statements by checking the appropriate box.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I prefer to teach religions separately, not through themes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions are important in teaching Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils of faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions increase the engagement of pupils from a background of no faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions hide the differences between faiths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change the teaching of Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions do not change pupils' attitudes towards Religious Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Education makes more sense teaching through the dispositions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions help pupils to understand Religious Education through shared attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The dispositions enable pupils to make links between people of faith and their own lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Does school practice impact on your delivery of Religious Education? If so, please give an example. For example starting GCSEs early in Year 9 - Key Stage 3 is covered in two years.

19. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about Religious Education and/or the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007?

Teaching other syllabuses in Religious Education

Please only answer questions in this section if you have had experience of teaching Religious Education under a different syllabus or scheme to the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. This should include any previous Birmingham syllabus.

20. Have you taught any other syllabuses or schemes other than the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

- ☐ Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 1995
- ☐ Church of England Diocesan scheme (for example the Manchester diocesan syllabus)
- ☐ Roman Catholic Syllabus

- ☐ Other Local Authority Syllabus (for example Solihull)
- ☐ Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education
- ☐ LCP (publisher) files for Religious Education
- ☐ Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

21. Has the 2007 Birmingham approach changed the way you think about Religious Education? If so, please state why. If not, please state why not.

22. Have the methods that you use to teach Religious Education changed with the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus? If so, please state why. If not please state why not.

23. Do you think that pupils with no faith background respond better to the teaching of Religious Education through the dispositions? If so, please state why. If not please state why not.

24. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about the differences between the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus and other syllabuses you have used?

25. Would you be willing to be approached as a follow up to this survey? If yes please leave your name and preferred email contact. Many thanks.

☐

Yes

☐

No

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses have now been submitted.

10.11. Appendix 11: Questionnaire letter of consent

Information for questionnaire participants

Title of the proposed study

To what extent does the approach of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn from faith and about religious traditions. An exploration of teachers' views.

Description of the proposed study

The focus of my research to gain teachers' perceptions as to whether the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus does enable pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from faith and about religious traditions. I have already conducted pilot work and questionnaires in this area. I now need to deepen the research to gain an understanding of teacher responses.

I am undertaking this PhD through the School of Education at the University of Birmingham; my supervisors are Professor Michael Hand and Dr. Sarah Hall.

Invitation to participate and explanation of what participation entails

I would like to invite you to participate in this research by being completing this questionnaire. Participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process. There will be no consequences from withdrawing from the process. As a participant you will be contributing to the development of research within the field of RE of a relatively new approach which has not been subject to research in this manner. You may find some of the questions intrusive in terms of asking your opinions or

about the manner in which you teach. Your answers will be treated in a confidential manner and will be reported anonymously in the findings of the research.

The questionnaire has been sent to all schools and academies in Birmingham following the 2007 Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

You will be asked a series of questions during the questionnaire. The process is anticipated to take 30-35 minutes.

If there are any questions or comments that you wish to raise prior to completing the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me.

Reward/reimbursements/expenses

You will not receive any compensation financial or otherwise for taking part in this research.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

Your data will be recorded anonymously. Neither individuals nor institutions will be identified by name in any publication or thesis arising from this research. Data will be coded and names or revealing details of participants will not be recorded in the thesis. Original data such as copies of questionnaires will be stored securely. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to the data.

Results of the study

The data will be used in my research and thesis. You will be provided with a summary sheet at the end of the study. Thanking you for your involvement and providing an overview of key findings of the research.

Funding of the study

The study is being personally funded.

Contact details:

Simone Whitehouse

Religious Education Adviser with Birmingham schools and SACRE

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Supervisors:

Professor M. Hand:

[REDACTED]

Dr. S. Hall:

[REDACTED]

Consent

In continuing with this survey you are agreeing to:

Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with Religious Education and the extent to which the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus enables pupils of faith or no faith to engage with RE by the Department of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit processes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Statement of understanding/consent

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons (up until March 2016). If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the details above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

10.12. Appendix 12: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Provide:

Dispositions

List of aims

Participants' survey results

Scenarios

List of Astley's methods

Check language of the teacher during interview...

How is Religious Education taught in your school?

Who teaches Religious Education?:

PPA, Specialist, non Specialists, mixed

Thematically or systematically in RE

As a discrete subject or taught in cross-curricular way?

In your opinion why is it important to teach Religious Education?

Link back to questionnaire and aims of Religious Education,

Why do we need Religious Education?

In your survey response you stated the most important aim for you personally was ... and for BAS ...Can you explain why?

You stated aim ... was not important to you ...why?

What are the opportunities and positive contributions made through teaching Religious Education? Why teach RE?

How does Religious Education help pupils to develop personally?

What are the challenges in teaching Religious Education?

Assessment, engagement, resources, confidence, knowledge, resources Why is this? What do you do to overcome this?

Is this with all pupils or certain ones? Why? What do you do to overcome this?

Do you think the aims of RE/pedagogy/methods support this the best?

Tell me about the methods you use to teach Religious Education...

Visits, creative, drama

Have these changed since the introduction of the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

Do you think that there is a relationship between the aims you think are important and the methods that you use?

For example, if you think RE is about knowledge of faiths you might use 'more studying key events in history'... If you think RE is about experience then you might use more interactive methods' role play', 'meeting people of faith'...

Is it the aim or the pedagogy that direct you to use certain methods? Why and how do you think that this is helpful?

Does it help with engagement of pupils?

What impact does this have on pupils?

Have you thought about how this directs you in your teaching of RE? If not what do you think about it now?

Tell me about a successful lesson you've taught in Religious Education...

What do you think successful means? Methods used, engagement,

What is the impact on pupils?

Who doesn't engage?

Do you think that there is a difference between pupils of faith and no faith when teaching RE? Is one more difficult to engage than another? Why? If not - why not?

Do you think that BAS supports this and makes RE more relevant with dispositions that are shared human values? Or are methods more important?

There are two attainment targets in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Learning From Faith and Learning About Religious Traditions. Tell me what you think of them?

How do you teach them?

Focus on one more than another?

Equal to teach?

What do pupils get from Learning From Faith?

Is this different for pupils of faith and none?

What do you think the dispositions are about?

What is the Birmingham approach trying to achieve with the dispositions? (rather than teaching Year 4 or Year 8 Islam...) Why do you think that it was adopted?

What is thinking behind this? What does the approach want to achieve for pupils, teaching Religious Education in this way?

Are some dispositions easier or harder to teach than others?

What's working when you are teaching the dispositions? What doesn't work? Some harder to plan lessons for? Compared to other Agreed Syllabuses you might have taught? For primary to other subjects taught?

What helps the most with engagement – Aims/methods/pedagogy?

Which comes first? Do you think about this when planning/teaching a lesson?

How much do you think that teaching from shared values impacts on engagement of pupils with faith/no faith?

Question XX of the survey asks about whether you think RE makes more sense teaching through the dispositions... Why do you think this/ not think this?- Is this matched by your aim and the methods that you use? (Astley there is a clear link between Aim/Pedagogy and the methods that teachers in his study used)

I've got a number of scenarios. For each I'd like you to say how you would engage this pupil in Religious Education...

(Not educational concern, concerns how to engage with religions)

Billy's background is non-religious. His Mum refuses to let him take part in the visit to the Mosque because it's not educational. Billy is not interested in Religious Education. How do you engage Billy in Religious Education?

Speak with mum? Why disenfranchised?

Sunita wants to be a doctor. Her family places a high value on education and wants her to do well. As a Hindu, Sunita's own faith is important, but Religious Education is not seen as furthering her career. How do you engage Sunita in Religious Education?

Transferable skills? Wider understanding? Not just career – more to life

Abdul is from a Muslim background. His family are practicing Muslims and Abdul goes to Madrasah most evenings after school. Abdul's family place a high significance on the importance of their own faith but do not see the benefit or need for Abdul to learn about other religions, since he has his own. How do you engage Abdul in Religious Education?

Purpose of Religious Education? Learning about others as well as yourself in relation

Sarah is interested in information about different Religious Traditions (Learning About Religious Traditions) although her family ascribe to no particular faith. Her family sees Religious Education as important in terms of learning why people in society practice certain rituals and wear certain clothing but they see no relevance to Sarah's own life and beliefs. How do you engage Sarah in *learning from faith*? How do you enable Sarah to see the personal relevance of RE?

Do you see a difference in pupils of faith and none for how they engage in RE?

What have you noticed? When is it different? How have you supported this? What strategies have you used? Which one is more difficult to engage?

Have you thought about how pupils of faith and none react in RE?

If not thought about this before – why? – is it because you don't know pupils' faith or not?

Is it because you don't see it as a difference?

With shared human values as starting point does this help?

Do you think that there is a difference between pupils of faith and no faith when teaching RE? Is one more difficult to engage than another?

10. Are there things that you particularly like or dislike about the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus?

Has the Birmingham approach influenced the way you think about Religious Education?

From previous Birmingham syllabus? Other AS? Relevance?

Ask anything else in particular to this teacher's survey

11. Do you have anything else to add?

Aims

Aim 1 ‘to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal religions represented in Great Britain’

Aim 2 ‘to develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures’

Aim 3 ‘to develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgments about religious and moral issues’

Aim 4 ‘to enhance spiritual, moral, cultural and social development’

Aim 5 ‘to develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions’.

Dispositions

Being Imaginative and Explorative

Appreciating Beauty

Expressing Joy

Being Thankful

Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment

Sharing and Being Generous

Being Regardful of Suffering

Being Merciful and Forgiving

Being Fair and Just

Living by Rules

Being Accountable and Living with Integrity

Being Temperate, Exercising Self-discipline and Cultivating Serene Contentment

Being Modest and Listening to others

Cultivating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging

Creating Unity and Harmony

Participating and Willing to Lead

Remembering Roots

Being Loyal and Steadfast

Being Hopeful and Visionary

Being Courageous and Confident

Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge

Being Open, Honest and Truthful

Being Reflective and Self-Critical

Being Silent and Attentive to, and Cultivating a sense for, the Sacred and Transcendence

Methods

1 discussing challenges to religious belief
2 role-playing religious activities
3 studying religions through a thematic approach
4 studying the different religions separately
5 studying religious 'rites of passage'
6 studying religious festivals
7 studying key religious figures from the past
8 studying key present day religious figures
9 studying sacred scriptures
10 studying religious stories, myths and legends
11 studying significant events in the history of religious traditions
12 exploring what it means to belong to a religious community
13 exploring religious language
14 exploring the limited nature of human knowledge
15 exploring religious expression in literature, drama and art
16 exploring ultimate questions
17 studying religious artefacts
18 observing film clips of religious activities
19 visiting places of worship
20 visits by members of faith communities
21 engaging in religious worship at assemblies
22 seeing religious worship at assemblies
23 seeing religious worship at places of worship
24 evaluating the moral values of religions
25 evaluating the truth of religious beliefs
26 evaluating religious practices
27 comparing different religions

Scenarios

Billy's background is non-religious. His Mum refuses to let him take part in the visit to the Mosque because it's not educational. Billy is not interested in Religious Education. How do you engage Billy in Religious Education?

Sunita wants to be a doctor. Her family places a high value on education and wants her to do well. As a Hindu, Sunita's own faith is important, but Religious Education is not seen as furthering her career. How do you engage Sunita in Religious Education?

Abdul is from a Muslim background. His family are practicing Muslims and Abdul goes to Madrasah most evenings after school. Abdul's family place a high significance on the importance of their own faith but do not see the benefit or need for Abdul to learn about other religions, since he has his own. How do you engage Abdul in Religious Education?

Sarah is interested in information about different Religious Traditions (Learning About Religious Traditions) although her family ascribe to no particular faith. Her family sees Religious Education as important in terms of learning why people in society practice certain rituals and wear certain clothing but they see no relevance to Sarah's own life and beliefs. How do you engage Sarah in *learning from faith*? How do you enable Sarah to see the personal relevance of RE?

10.13. Appendix 13: Letter to head teacher of interviewee requesting participation

Dear Head teacher,

This letter is to ask for your and your school's help with a research project I am conducting as part of my PhD, on teacher perceptions of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. I am undertaking this PhD through the School of Education at the University of Birmingham; my supervisors are Professor Michael Hand and Dr. Sarah Hall.

As previously a co-ordinator of Religious Education in two Birmingham schools and now Religious Education Adviser with Birmingham SACRE, I have decided to contribute to research in this area with passion and interest.

The focus of my research to gain teachers' perceptions as to whether the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus has enabled pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from faith and about religious traditions. I have already conducted pilot work and questionnaires in this area. I now need to deepen the research to gain an understanding of teacher responses.

A member of your staff has agreed to take part in an interview for my research. It would greatly support my research if a time could be agreed which is mutually beneficial to all and with least disruption to the running of the school day.

Participants can be assured that ethical guidelines will be observed and that their full confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Neither your school nor teacher will be named in the thesis resulting from this research.

I would be more than happy to talk to you or your staff about this project in more detail and can be contacted on the details below.

Yours sincerely and with many thanks for your support,

Simone Whitehouse

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10.14. Appendix 14: Information letter for interviewees

Participation form for conducting interviews

Dear XXXX,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. This interview and your responses will support the basis of my research I am conducting as part of my PhD, on teacher perceptions of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. I am undertaking this PhD through the School of Education at the University of Birmingham; my supervisors are Professor Michael Hand and Dr. Sarah Hall.

As previously a head of Religious Education in two Birmingham schools and now Religious Education Adviser with Birmingham SACRE, I have decided to contribute to research in this area with passion and interest.

The focus of my research to gain teachers' perceptions as to whether the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus has enabled pupils of all faiths and none to learn both from faith and about religious traditions. I have already conducted pilot work and questionnaires in this area. I now need to deepen the research to gain an understanding of teacher responses.

You should note that all responses obtained would be reported anonymously. Neither individuals nor institutions will be identified by name in any publication or thesis arising from this research. Moreover, the data will be held securely and will not be disclosed to any third party without the express consent of all relevant individuals.

Please could you respond as soon as possible with the best times in the week when the interview could take place? My research day is a Friday but it may be possible to meet with you at another time too.

I would be more than happy to talk to you about this project in more detail and can be contacted on the details below.

Yours sincerely and with many thanks for your support,

Simone Whitehouse

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10.15. **Appendix 15: Interviewee letter of consent**

Research Interview consent form

Participant:

Purpose of the interview

This questionnaire is part of my research for the award of PhD at the University of Birmingham.

Confidentiality

The research will be conducted according to BERA (British Educational Research Association) and the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research. The data from the questionnaire will be available to the researcher and her supervisors. Data from the interview may be included as part of the final thesis, but no individual or institution will be named and any identifying characteristics will be removed.

The interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcribing.

Please sign below to show that you understand the conditions of the interview and agree for your data to be used in this manner outlined.

Signed:

10.16. Appendix 16: Sample interview transcript Teacher 98 (Secondary)

SW: So I'm with [REDACTED] and at [REDACTED] and it's the 21st July.

SW: Could you just tell me about the population of the school in terms of number pupils that you have and different faith mixes and things?

XX: Ok so it's. We got around 1300 students in the school. Age group 11-18. It's a mixed gender. So boys and girls. And we have majority of students are from an Islamic faith. Just under 90%. And an increasing proportion of students, around 10% are of Christian faith. Tends to be more Pentecostal background at the moment and that is increasing. So the trend over the last few years has been an increase in the amount of Christians, due to the fact that we have become more of a school of choice for the Romanian community settling in the local area. We have a very small number of Sikh children and children of no religious background in school and a couple of other religions.

SW: How is RE taught in the school? Is it specialists? Is it non specialists?

XX: We're very lucky in school. We have a team of specialists. It's generally taught by all RE specialists. Occasionally if there are issues with the timetable it might be taught by another member of the humanities faculty. Err... but then they've got, they are part of the same team. It's generally taught by specialists.

SW: And that's Key Stage 3 as well?

XX: Key Stage 3 and 4 and 5.

SW: Ok.

XX: All students in the school from Year 7-11 do RE. It's compulsory. For everybody through to the end of GCSE. And we offer it as an option at Key Stage 5.

SW: Err... In here there's a list of aims. And I asked you in your questionnaire, I've got your answers, to select which aim was important for you. And you said for yourself it was aim 5 ermm... and you said for the syllabus it was aim 1. Can you talk a little bit about why you choose that one for yourself and why the one for the syllabus is different?

XX: The reason I choose 5 is because having taught RE for twenty years it can make a contribution towards students' attitudes towards other members of the community. I think certainly my approach to teaching RE has been with an emphasis of trying to develop respect for difference but also an understanding of the diverse communities that we live amongst. So I think that is reflected in my own personal interest in religion and RE. The reason why specifications and courses focus on one is because it's easier to measure knowledge and understanding, those are things that can be examined easily through written work at GCSE.

SW: Do you think the syllabus is about that?

XX: I think the Birmingham agreed syllabus has clearly made a shift between you know, from the previous syllabus we had, knowing about religion and learning from faith. So I appreciate that 'the from' is now the key part of what we're trying to achieve but it's still has a hook into different content as well so.

SW: So that still stands in terms of being number one?

SW: What are the challenges to teaching RE? Are there any any problems out there that you think the RE community sort of faces? Are there any particular for your school?

XX: The biggest challenge that we've had of late has been the Ebacc. Because I'm aware that for many schools that were teaching RE as part of Key Stage 4 curriculum and even part of Key Stage 3 in some respects they have changed their curriculum and dropped RE because it doesn't add as much weight to the progress measures that, well they perceive it doesn't. For me personally and in some of the schools I've worked in I've been fortunate that RE has been valued by the head teachers and therefore it has maintained a position on the curriculum and we've not had to fight for a place to be there. I think the head teachers I've worked with have understood the value RE has, not just in terms of the development of the students and their outlook on life, but they also recognise that the students I teach and we have in our schools, it's one of the subjects they do best in. So you know it has contributed to their grades. I think the other challenge to RE is the academisation because schools not having to follow the national curriculum, very quickly people forget that RE is not part of the national curriculum officially and ditch RE when they are throwing other things out of the window. I think that is one of the ongoing threats that schools who feel that they've got that freedom to devise their own curriculum might not prioritise Religious Education and if they do it's not easy to regulate what approach they take and to dictate their approach to RE and what they see its purpose other than just another GCSE.

SW: I asked in the questionnaire, it's pages four, five and six, there was a list of 27 methods that Astley has used in his study. I might use it for some comparison. It's in terms of ones that you use regularly and ones that that you don't use. Ones that you said to use regularly are thematic approaches, looking at religions separately, evaluation of morals, evaluation of religious practices. Can you say anything more about methods that you use quite a lot and perhaps and a little bit as to why you use them?

XX: I think often the methods that I said we use, or driven in some respects by the way we approach the GCSE curriculum, so even though we are trying to follow the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007 in Key Stage 3, how we approach Key Stage 3 is directed by what we are aiming to get to by the end of Key Stage 4. And even more so now that I'm teaching Key Stage 5, where we are trying to get them by the end of Key Stage 5. So I think that why the units for the GCSEs we have chosen to do are, the content is not about a religious perspective at a time, it tends to be thematic. We will look at issues of life and death, and look at it from my point of different religions. But the starting point is the theme, the issue, rather than the religion. We do look at the religious perspective, on other things but it tends to be that approach that I take.

SW: That makes sense. OK. And in terms of the methods you don't use very often we've got; role-play, studying scripture, religious language, artefacts and visits. Do you want to say why you use those rarely, why you don't use them?

XX: I think personally, I am a member of a leadership team, so for me teaching is a commitment, I do that and I enjoy it but I have lots of other priorities. And I don't have a classroom, so using artefacts and things that, there are logistical challenges to trying to do things that might need a lot of resources in a lesson. And in terms of visits, we do have a regular visit day which is for one year group as part of an enrichment programme where the whole year group get to go to visit three or four places of worship. Different groups will go to different centres. But again it is the logistics of trying to balance the priorities of my leadership role in school and trying to make my teaching interesting enough for students, I think also having visitors coming to school it's just having the time to organise that. And having the connections, to they're people that you can rely on. If I'm trying to get to visitors

into school and I've got to year 10 classes, will they come into both, than one. So it is having the availability to come into both classes and days that fit into our timetable. It's just to do with logistics really. I would say. The drama and role-play again having a space and a regular space to teach in would mean I could be a bit more flexible about how I approach it. But often with my classes I will teach one group in three different rooms over the timetable so it's not an excuse if I desperately wanted to, I could find a way to do role-play and other things but I just haven't pushed myself to explore it a bit more.

SW: I think you are busy enough! No this is about what makes a good lesson basically. It might be one that you have taught yourself or one that you have observed or generally what do you think makes a good RE lesson? Could you just tell me what would be the main components in a good lesson?

XX: I think one of the most important components of a good RE lesson is trying to promote original thinking and independent thinking of students. We are not there to indoctrinate children. I think we are there to challenge children's thinking and misconceptions they may have. So I'd like to see if I went to see an RE lesson and it was an all outstanding lesson I would want to see really effective questioning techniques from the teacher which don't just accept shallow answers from students but really probe and provoke students to looking at things from different angles. I would like to see teachers helping students to understand when you're looking at moral and ethical issues it is never just black and white. There is that really messy grey area in the middle and getting kids to explore that in a lot more detail you know. If you are doing something like abortion, it's not just yes we all for it or against it, it is why is it such a controversial issue. Otherwise we would all be in agreeing we thought the view is on it. So I would like to see that and I would like to see that every single lesson you

need to see pupils taking some responsibility for their own learning. There needs to be evidence that students are making progress, but I think that there is pressure that you've got to have kids writing things down. But in a lesson yesterday where most of the lesson was discussion based and actually I think you've got to have the confidence to trust that that is evidence of learning. If students are able to express their views and challenge and respond to other views then that is evidence of progress and we shouldn't dismiss that kind of evidence just because it's not something that can be checked in a book. All put on the form somewhere. So I'd like to see that. Students having positive learning relationships with each other. So their interactions are supporting their learning they are not just being social. Students who are focused. The material has to be engaging and has to be relevant. I think that is a really important thing about RE. I have been fortunate that the school I work in students value religion. Because it is a key part of their identity. I have also taught in a school where students are not religious and not appreciate the relevance of RE. And I think it is important for teachers to find a connection. And I think the syllabus in Birmingham because the focus is on different dispositions, I think it is a really useful tool to find that relevance for people who have no faith. I think the dispositions of values-based and you know most I think human beings would agree that they are important values and inspirational things to sort of work towards. I think that that something relevance is something that you've got to make sure that you have.

SW: Two attainment targets in Birmingham. And we reverse them if you remember.

XX: Yes definitely.

SW: In the conference. Why do you think that is important?

XX: I think it is important because going back to the original point that I made about what I think the purpose all the aim of RE is.. Learning from faith emphasises the development of the child and the skills and the attitudes that the child is developing for them to turn out into a decent citizen. For them to take forward beyond to the already lesson and the course that they might be doing and I think that that is so much more valuable to a student than learning about religious traditions for many of whom you know it's not relevant. Even if you took a tradition and students follow a particular tradition of religion what you teach them in terms of the content isn't necessarily going to be relevant to their normal practice. And I think for students living in the world today how important is it that they can label all different features of a church? But they will have to make decisions about ethics and about things that affect them directly in their life. And I think that's because when we are looking at the content side of RE often unfortunately it tends to be about religion and not spirituality and faith. So I think that the religious side of it, isn't as easy for children to connect to because every church looks different. Every set of rituals that they might do in a church even Christians might do it differently.

SW: And do you think they agreed syllabus in Birmingham would have that spirituality and faith element?

XX: I think that when you are looking at to learning from faith and the spirituality can come in that part of it as well. I think if you are developing students' attitudes and their understanding and their empathy for others, all those things they spirituality and that aspect of things can come from learning from faith. It doesn't have to be about learning about. I find learning about religion I think personally as an RE teacher I find it quite dry. I am not

as excited about it. If I'm teaching children I don't see that it offers so much to the deep questioning and the provocative thinking. That as the ethical and the moral side of RE does.

SW: So I've been asking all the people that I've been interviewing what do you think the dispositions are about? Now you have got a unique perspective, of one of two people that I'm interviewing; ■■■ being the other one. You were part of the Agreed Syllabus Conference. So if you were explaining to alien what Birmingham was doing with the dispositions, what would you say wanted for its students? And why was it taking this approach rather than Year 8 are doing Islam or Year 9 do Sikhism? As other agreed syllabuses do.

XX: My understanding and please don't ask me to recite all 24 dispositions. My understanding of having been part of the process was that this was something where we were able to find some common agreement among different faith communities in the city, about what they aspire to for their young people. It was definitely conversation and a process that was about citizenship. It was about focusing on the child. It was very child centred. It wasn't about this is just a lump of knowledge, a body of knowledge that we want to throw out there and impart. Treating children as empty vessels just to fill up with content. The discussion of the process as I understand was very much how do we develop a cohesive society. How do you we have the type of communities around Birmingham where we can all be proud of the young people that are contributing to that community. I think the original syllabus might have been devised at a time when Every Child Matters was around and all those sorts of things, so there was a big focus nationally on the child being at the centre of it and the child's development and well-being being at the centre of it. So I believe that the the dispositional approach is about putting the child at the centre and let's not think about what

we want children to know. But who we want children to be. And the dispositions help drive that. So it's about what kind of society we want and the individuals are we trying to nurture in the future through using RE as a vehicle and the content happens to be a vehicle. But that is not the end goal. The end goal was always about we want to develop these attributes in our students. And I think that is the thing that I appreciate about the syllabus. The end goal I agree with, I think it's something about the child and who they are and what they can do. And their outlook rather than then walking away with bags of content that is no use to them whatsoever.

SW: Do you think it is having impact on the students? I don't want you to tell me anything that you don't think it's happening, if but do you see it?

XX: I think in our school, and other schools I've worked in, I'd like to say it does have an impact. I think it is something that we have, my school is very diverse so even if we said most almost 90% of students are Muslim they are from a vast array of nationalities or ethnic groups. They are not all, it is not a monocultural school by any means. We have got students here from Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Somalia. The work that that we've done through RE and we benefited from the fact that we have a stable and a strong RE team and we've got specialists and we've got a team of specialists who can bounce ideas off each other. And collaborate without planning et cetera I think because we have got that approach I would say our students are quite understanding and they have got that ability and the opportunities because they are going to school alongside people from other faiths and backgrounds to go and explore that. I don't think they do it enough. But I think they have got that opportunity and we won't see what the real benefits are of the RE teaching until these students are well into their adulthood. And it is seeds that we are planting. How you approach things and how

you think about things and how you look at things. So yeah I think it is having an impact but I think the impact will be evident well beyond what GCSE grade they've got. However, we do get the GCSE grades at the end of the course. And RE in the time that I have worked here, I think I've only come across one student who said he disliked RE. Our students... RE is not a subject that our students grumble about. I think that speaks volumes. In a school this size.

SW: So we have talked about the aims that you think are important and we have talked about the pedagogy of the syllabus and the methods that you use and you don't use. What do you think is the most important factor out of those three or how do those three interrelate? If you're talking about engagement. If you want your students to be engaged in RE is it the methods, the pedagogy or your overall aim as a teacher that sort of drives it forward? Or what order of those things need to be in order to have that impact?

XX: I actually think it is about relationships. I think none of those things or all of those things. It's how... I think for our students certainly you need to build those relationships and part of that is through your methodology, your approach to how you teach. I think the aims I don't think we necessarily make them explicit. We haven't talked about dispositions to students, partly because they were so wordy but also because they don't need to hear those words it's about what the teacher has in mind when they set out to teach the lesson. You don't need to tangle kids up in phrases like being imaginative and explorative or whatever. I think it is about the relationships and therefore your approach as a teacher is the important thing. As a teacher you have got to be skilled enough to balance the... you know the need to achieve a certain name with the need to engage the students and the method that you use is either going to engage them or not so it will vary as well it will depend on the topic because

some students if you have got a certain topic however dry your delivery might be might, they will have a natural interest in those topics. Whereas for the things you have to work much harder to get students to show an interest in it if they don't see the relevance. If you haven't with your pedagogy found a way in, to hook those kids and get them to see that relevance. Everything else is wasted. It's a bit of a mixture of those things. But I think relationships are very very important. Children need to trust that you know what you are talking about. Teachers need confidence to be able to ask challenging questions and to deal with a religious material especially in today's day and age confidently. And that wins a lot from our students. So you know the fact that I have learnt a huge amount about Islam having talked mainly Muslim kids, I think for our students that in terms my relationship with them I have already got that respect. Because they are respectful that you have taken the time to learn about something that matters so much to them.

SW: That goes a long way doesn't it? Thank you. The next question is a series of scenarios and they are at the back of your pack. It's about how you would engage each of these pupils. Now you might not have taught a Billy or a Sunita but it was having faced these pupils how would you engage them. We could do them one at a time. Or whether you want me to go through them all and then you throw them all in.

XX: No let's do them one at a time.

SW: So Billy is not religious. His mum doesn't want him going to the mosque visit. She says it's not educational. Billy is not interested in RE. Have you ever taught a Billy? How do you engage him?

XX: I would speak to Billy about what his reservations were about not going to the visit and obviously you'd need to make it clear that the visit is not because we will not worship at the

mosque. I will explain to Billy and his mom the educational value of the visit and I would use the fact that Islam is particularly is very current issue whether you are religious or not. It's been of high profile in recent years and in a school certainly in Birmingham it is very likely that this child will, and will continue to live and work alongside Muslims and I would try and share and encourage the parent to try and understand and appreciate the value therefore and some understanding of his neighbours and their perspective on things. But I would also try and look at a way that you know, maybe it might be that Billy needs a different angle for the visit so whereas other students might be naturally interested in it. I would suggest that you could devise a different approach for Billy. So is there another investigation you could set him so that you could ask him how are non Muslims welcomed in the mosque etc. You'd have to do some work with Billy and his mum of the fact what they could benefit from the visit and I would hope that we would not just going to the mosque that there are other visits. This is not because Islam is the only religion and we're not trying to convert you to Islam. But you've got to have that dialogue to try and understand what their reservations are. If he's not interested in RE then I would start talking about the value from a GCSE point of view, that in our school it is compulsory so he has to do it. He might as well get something useful out of it. If he wasn't coming around to the fact that this is a way to develop your values and attitudes towards others. I would share with him the curriculum and the fact that in all of the topics that we do we invite non-religious perspectives. That's an important part of the evaluation part of the exam questions anyway. So I would try and share that with him as well.

SW: Thank you. Moving on then. Sunita wants to be a doctor. And she places and her family place a high value on education and want her to do well. She has her own faith. And RE isn't seen as furthering her career. How would you get Sunita on board?

XX: I think some of the strategies I would try and share with Sunita what the value of doing RE is. I would talk to her about the fact that RE teaches evaluation skills and it is really important to be able to argue and put different perspectives across. I would say, you know, Hindu perspectives are even if we aren't teaching that in every topic directly, it provides an interesting other perspective and show Sunita, like I would do with Billy, how their contributions to class discussions would be a great importance to other students because they are providing a different viewpoint. And other students might not be able to see that so them being there actually makes a real difference to the other students. And try to make them feel valued like they have for something special to contribute ermm...

SW: So you might then see some similarities with Abdul. Abdul from a Muslim background. He goes to Madrasah after school. Erm... family place a high significance on his own faith but don't see the real value of him learning about other faiths. So anything different you might do?

XX: Although we are not here to do religious instruction, I think what I sometimes would be tempted to do is to try and find a position of interest, a common point of discussion so if the parents are showing that they highly value Islam and Islamic perspectives on things I might try to find an anecdotal account from Islam to show how it is important to learn about other cultures and other religions. And use that as a sort of a bit of leverage with the parents to help them to see actually learning about other religions is an important thing. Talking about the Prophet Muhammad and his tolerance of Christians and Jews and living alongside. The fact that as a growing religion and there are lots similarities with other religions and actually finding those common points might help us to get some community cohesion etc. I'd try and share that and look at it from a more what's the sort of values and ethical benefits of learning

about other religions and maybe help the parents to understand if we all took that approach we wouldn't learn about Islam and it's about everybody having an open mind about other people learning about other faiths.

SW: Thank you. And then the last one is Sarah. So she doesn't mind learning about almost facts and content about different faiths. She's quite interested in that; why does that person wear that and why is that person eating in that way... But doesn't see the relevance to the learning from. So how would you engage Sarah?

XX: So sometimes I ask students what are they ambitions? What is the career path they think they are likely to have and I would try to find a way to relate that so that as Sunita was planning to be a doctor I would say that as a doctor there might be considerations you will need to give of people's faith when you are making recommendations for their treatment and I would say if you worked in, if you were going to be a business manager what happens if you've got members of staff that want to be off work for a festival or whatever. So I'd try to find out what she is interested in or what her career plans are and try to see if I could find a relevance to that and her learning about other religions. And I would also share what the curriculum is about and what we actually cover. Even in Key Stage 3 we cover a lot of issues like poverty and that is relevant to everybody. I would just try to help the parents to see this is how we approaching things. I think sharing with the parents the sort of questioning we do in RE and the content outline. You know I think parents need to see that we are not hiding anything. The more explicit you can make that for parents this is what we will learn about and when and how and why. I think that parents' fear about the issues about RE would go away in most cases. I've never in this school had anyone withdrawn from RE.

So I think I'm all cases where I've had a student, students or parents raise questions once you've had that discussion, any fears have been allayed and they tend to be very supportive.

SW: Great. Ok. Thank you. And those sort of scenarios lead me into a question thinking about you've mentioned it already in terms of your background of teaching pupils of faith and non faith. Do you see a difference with how they engage in RE?

XX: Errmm...

SW: And you've spoken a little bit about how the dispositions enable that...

XX: I think it's. I'm of the mind that it's possible. It's not really a faith or no faith thing that makes a difference in children's attitudes. In some respects I think that there are some class issues there. Where you've got more errmm... middle class children of no faith I think there can sometimes be a negative view of RE and religion and they can be quite dismissive. I have had children in the past be quite dismissive of RE and not see the value of it but also quite dismissive also of RE teachers as if well that's kind of a lonely kind of job to do. Because my parents are doctors or because my parents are much more academic they've not seen that. With those children I've had to share and you know use arguments that RE is a very academic subject it's not something, it's something where you are learning genuine values and skills of analysis, of evaluation that are similar to other humanities subjects and therefore there is lots of learning to be valued within RE whether you care about the content or whether you believe in it is irrelevant. Again sharing, I've had students in the past who have come from that background where they've excelled and got A*s and they have worked hard. They've made the discussions really interesting because they have been quite vocal about their views etc and to show them that they are welcome. I think there is some kind of or possibly some sort of class divide between how RE is perceived in terms of people who

are not religious, non religious children coming from a background where it's working class for example for want of a better phrase, I think they are in my experience more open to learning about RE because even if they are not practising members of a religion they identify usually as British citizens as that is the traditional religion of the country therefore they've got some kind of interest in it. So yeah. It's something worth exploring a bit further but when you get kids throwing Richard Dawkins at you and things like that... I find it quite difficult when children are... It's ok for them to say RE, religion and faith is nonsense but it's ok to say that as long as they are willing to engage discussion about it and debate and provide arguments and listen to the opposite side as well. Because we are not here to convert anybody. But I think you know, I'd like to think that I encourage all children of faiths and non to keep an open mind and that is what RE is about. People being enquiring and ermm... yeah just thinking for themselves. Because equally the children that have a faith I don't want them just to accept something what someone told them in the Madrasah or me as a teacher and I've certainly said to kids in the past, if I've taught you something don't assume that I'm telling you the truth, go and check it out, find a response. I'm trying to get them to see just because it's on the internet doesn't mean it is true. Just because it's in this textbook doesn't mean it's true. Just because one person wrote that textbook, that's one person and actually what do we know about that person, where are they from, what did they do to qualify to write this book? So I've tried to teach children to have an open mind and to challenge and question even me therefore I would be disappointed if I had a student of no faith who was completely shut down to exploring things. I think it is not good for someone to have that kind of outlook at such a young age. I think all even an older age I think they need to keep an open mind on things.

SW: Thank you. Do you think that the dispositions enable 'a road in' for pupils of no faith? So if we say Year eight we are doing 'the mosque'. It could actually be no thanks it's nothing to do with me. But if we say we are looking at 'appreciating beauty' and we going to have a look at some calligraphy and then into the mosque, do you think there is something in that?

XX: Definitely, I think the dispositions... not themselves, like I said earlier you would not put that as a title of a lesson. But from the dispositions I think you can come up with lots of big questions and in the past we've use the big questions as the way into the lesson. The title would never be the mosque or the church or Christmas or Easter. The title is certainly, in the previous school when I taught, the title would always be a big question, and the big question would always be something that was relevant to the child, so about me or I or our and in the big question. And that was definitely hook to get them into so let's learn about this because it's relevant to me and the religion and the content you use was just a tool to get to the end of that the question and to explore that. I think that was a great way in for non-religious kids and a great way in if you've got mixed faiths class it was good because it meant that you went isolating anybody. Everyone can be just as interested in the questions as everybody else.

SW: On page 6 of the questionnaire I asked some statements about things and generally you are in support of the dispositions and that sort of way thinking so things like 'are the dispositions important' you answered strongly agree. 'For pupils of faith and no faith' you said strongly agree. Is there anything there that you want to pick up? So you said to 'the dispositions hide the differences between faiths' and you said you neither agree nor disagree with that.

XX: Yeah...

SW: That was quite different in many ways because you are quite in favour of the dispositions.

XX: Yeah I really wasn't quite sure whether they did anything to the differences between faiths because when you are looking at it from a disposition point of view, you don't necessarily have to compare the religions anyway. And even when you are looking at what different religions say you are not comparing them in evaluative way. You're not weighing is one better than the other anyway you are looking at from one religion says this and another religion there is that. You're not comparing those two views they are not competing against each other. So I think that's why I was not really sure whether it hides the differences or not.

SW: Thank you. So although you are part of the Agreed Syllabus Conference, are there things that you particularly like that you haven't covered already, or things that you don't particularly like about the dispositions in Birmingham?

XX: Initially I thought they were just wordy and so many of them that it was how will teachers get their heads around so many different things. I don't think... Having been part of the process and saw how painstaking it was to get to the point of those 24 agreed phrases. And I don't think you're not asking teachers to use them on a daily basis but what is important is to find a way to make sure that all of the RE teachers and kids who weren't part of the process understand the rationale behind it and understand what they mean each one. So I think that is important part of it in easy and accessible way. A lot of the material surrounds the dispositions when it first came out were academic. And way over my head as a person who sat round the table. So I can imagine they will way over everyone else's head.

So I think it's just keep the dispositions but also then have a simple little rationale which shows this is what we're trying to achieve this is where we trying to get to. And that would help RE teachers not to be scared of it and show them the different approaches like you don't have to talk about them but that's your thinking what you are planning your lesson. I'm sure most of that stuff has been done but I'm just not aware of it.

SW: Just wondering whether you want to add anything to what you said on page 3 about the strengths. And you might just said that now but just to give you a moment to read through and have a look at that.

XX: 'Shift of emphasis' that should say not 'sift of emphasis'. I think I've just said all of that.

SW: Thank you. And is there anything else you want to say? Just to give you an opportunity about the Birmingham agreed syllabus, and the dispositions, and RE in general?

XX: Like I said I think I've really enjoyed being part of the process and teaching it. I've got quite a clear understanding of what I think of what we're trying to achieve with the dispositions. I don't know whether SACRE could do more to make sure all RE teachers have that same level of understanding and that when we are trying to encourage even academies to take on board this are we pitching it in the right way? Which is about trying to promote community cohesion and trying to do the things that mean it is relevant to everybody and it is child focused and it's not just about saying here is loads of content I want you to learn about religion. So more maybe could be done about trying to make it a little bit more universal and across the city when trying to develop citizenship through this it's not going to work if some people have these attributes and some people don't it's going to be much more

challenging. I think we need to find routes in to try and get this adopted by more schools and make sure more people are actually using it...

SW: Because when I have gone into primaries and explained things they say, 'Oh got it, understand it and love it'. It's having that opportunity to get to them and to get it across. Thank you.

10.17. Appendix 17: Example of coded interview transcript Teacher 98 (Secondary)

Colour	Reference
Underlining	Research questions
Yellow	Aims of RE
Red	Dispositional approach
Pink	Dispositions
Purple	Critique of syllabus
Turquoise	Collective Worship
Grey	Engagement

Table 10-1 Colour coding key for transcript

SW: So I'm with [REDACTED] and at [REDACTED] and it's the 21st July.

SW: Could you just tell me about the population of the school in terms of number pupils that you have and different faith mixes and things?

XX: Ok so it's. We got around 1300 students in the school. Age group 11-18. It's a mixed gender. So boys and girls. And we have majority of students are from an Islamic faith. Just under 90%. And an increasing proportion of students, around 10% are of Christian faith. Tends to be more Pentecostal background at the moment and that is increasing. So the trend over the last few years has been an increase in the amount of Christians, due to the fact that we have become more of a school of choice for the Romanian community settling in the

local area. We have a very small number of Sikh children and children of no religious background in school and a couple of other religions.

SW: How is RE taught in the school? Is it specialists? Is it non specialists?

XX: We're very lucky in school. We have a team of specialists. It's generally taught by all RE specialists. Occasionally if there are issues with the timetable it might be taught by another member of the humanities faculty. Err... but then they've got, they are part of the same team. It's generally taught by specialists.

SW: And that's Key Stage 3 as well?

XX: Key Stage 3 and 4 and 5.

SW: Ok.

XX: All students in the school from Year 7-11 do RE. It's compulsory. For everybody through to the end of GCSE. And we offer it as an option at Key Stage 5.

SW: Err... In here there's a list of aims. And I asked you in your questionnaire, I've got your answers, to select which aim was important for you. And you said for yourself it was aim 5 ermm... and you said for the syllabus it was aim 1. Can you talk a little bit about why you choose that one for yourself and why the one for the syllabus is different?

XX: The reason I choose 5 is because having taught RE for twenty years it can make a contribution towards students' attitudes towards other members of the community. I think certainly my approach to teaching RE has been with an emphasis of trying to develop respect for difference but also an understanding of the diverse communities that we live amongst. So I think that is reflected in my own personal interest in religion and RE. The

reason why specifications and courses focus on one is because it's easier to measure knowledge and understanding, those are things that can be examined easily through written work at GCSE.

SW: Do you think the syllabus is about that?

XX: I think the Birmingham agreed syllabus has clearly made a shift between you know, from the previous syllabus we had, knowing about religion and learning from faith. So I appreciate that 'the from' is now the key part of what we're trying to achieve but it's still has a hook into different content as well so.

SW: So that still stands in terms of being number one?

SW: What are the challenges to teaching RE? Are there any any problems out there that you think the RE community sort of faces? Are there any particular for your school?

XX: The biggest challenge that we've had of late has been the Ebacc. Because I'm aware that for many schools that were teaching RE as part of Key Stage 4 curriculum and even part of Key Stage 3 in some respects they have changed their curriculum and dropped RE because it doesn't add as much weight to the progress measures that, well they perceive it doesn't. For me personally and in some of the schools I've worked in I've been fortunate that RE has been valued by the head teachers and therefore it has maintained a position on the curriculum and we've not had to fight for a place to be there. I think the head teachers I've worked with have understood the value RE has, not just in terms of the development of the students and their outlook on life, but they also recognise that the students I teach and we have in our schools, it's one of the subjects they do best in. So you know it has contributed to their grades. I think the other challenge to RE is the academisation because schools not

having to follow the national curriculum, very quickly people forget that RE is not part of the national curriculum officially and ditch RE when they are throwing other things out of the window. I think that is one of the ongoing threats that schools who feel that they've got that freedom to devise their own curriculum might not prioritise Religious Education and if they do it's not easy to regulate what approach they take and to dictate their approach to RE and what they see its purpose other than just another GCSE.

SW: I asked in the questionnaire, it's pages four, five and six, there was a list of 27 methods that Astley has used in his study. I might use it for some comparison. It's in terms of ones that you use regularly and ones that that you don't use. Ones that you said to use regularly are thematic approaches, looking at religions separately, evaluation of morals, evaluation of religious practices. Can you say anything more about methods that you use quite a lot and perhaps and a little bit as to why you use them?

XX: I think often the methods that I said we use, or driven in some respects by the way we approach the GCSE curriculum, so even though we are trying to follow the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007 in Key Stage 3, how we approach Key Stage 3 is directed by what we are aiming to get to by the end of Key Stage 4. And even more so now that I'm teaching Key Stage 5, where we are trying to get them by the end of Key Stage 5. So I think that why the units for the GCSEs we have chosen to do are, the content is not about a religious perspective at a time, it tends to be thematic. We will look at issues of life and death, and look at it from my point of different religions. But the starting point is the theme, the issue, rather than the religion. We do look at the religious perspective, on other things but it tends to be that approach that I take.

SW: That makes sense. OK. And in terms of the methods you don't use very often we've got; role-play, studying scripture, religious language, artefacts and visits. Do you want to say why you use those rarely, why you don't use them?

XX: I think personally, I am a member of a leadership team, so for me teaching is a commitment, I do that and I enjoy it but I have lots of other priorities. And I don't have a classroom, so using artefacts and things that, there are logistical challenges to trying to do things that might need a lot of resources in a lesson. And in terms of visits, we do have a regular visit day which is for one year group as part of an enrichment programme where the whole year group get to go to visit three or four places of worship. Different groups will go to different centres. But again it is the logistics of trying to balance the priorities of my leadership role in school and trying to make my teaching interesting enough for students, I think also having visitors coming to school it's just having the time to organise that. And having the connections, to they're people that you can rely on. If I'm trying to get to visitors into school and I've got to year 10 classes, will they come into both, than one. So it is having the availability to come into both classes and days that fit into our timetable. It's just to do with logistics really. I would say. The drama and role-play again having a space and a regular space to teach in would mean I could be a bit more flexible about how I approach it. But often with my classes I will teach one group in three different rooms over the timetable so it's not an excuse if I desperately wanted to, I could find a way to do role-play and other things but I just haven't pushed myself to explore it a bit more.

SW: I think you are busy enough! No this is about what makes a good lesson basically. It might be one that you have taught yourself or one that you have observed or generally what

do you think makes a good RE lesson? Could you just tell me what would be the main components in a good lesson?

XX: I think one of the most important components of a good RE lesson is trying to promote original thinking and independent thinking of students. We are not there to indoctrinate children. I think we are there to challenge children's thinking and misconceptions they may have. So I'd like to see if I went to see an RE lesson and it was an all outstanding lesson I would want to see really effective questioning techniques from the teacher which don't just accept shallow answers from students but really probe and provoke students to looking at things from different angles. I would like to see teachers helping students to understand when you're looking at moral and ethical issues it is never just black and white. There is that really messy grey area in the middle and getting kids to explore that in a lot more detail you know. If you are doing something like abortion, it's not just yes we all for it or against it, it is why is it such a controversial issue. Otherwise we would all be in agreeing we thought the view is on it. So I would like to see that and I would like to see that every single lesson you need to see pupils taking some responsibility for their own learning. There needs to be evidence that students are making progress, but I think that there is pressure that you've got to have kids writing things down. But in a lesson yesterday where most of the lesson was discussion based and actually I think you've got to have the confidence to trust that that is evidence of learning. If students are able to express their views and challenge and respond to other views then that is evidence of progress and we shouldn't dismiss that kind of evidence just because it's not something that can be checked in a book. All put on the form somewhere. So I'd like to see that. Students having positive learning relationships with each other. So their interactions are supporting their learning they are not just being social. Students who are focused. The material has to be engaging and has to be relevant. I think

that is a really important thing about RE. I have been fortunate that the school I work in students value religion. Because it is a key part of their identity. I have also taught in a school where students are not religious and not appreciate the relevance of RE. And I think it is important for teachers to find a connection. And I think the syllabus in Birmingham because the focus is on different dispositions, I think it is a really useful tool to find that relevance for people who have no for the faith. I think the dispositions of values-based and you know most I think human beings would agree that they are important values and inspirational things to to sort of work towards. I think that that something relevance is something that you've got to make sure that you have.

SW: Two attainment targets in Birmingham. And we reverse them if you remember.

XX: Yes definitely.

SW: In the conference. Why do you think that is important?

XX: I think it is important because going back to the original point that I made about what I think the purpose all the aim of RE is.. Learning from faith emphasises the development of the child and the skills and the attitudes that the child is developing for them to turn out into a decent citizen. For them to take forward beyond to the already lesson and the course that they might be doing and I think that that is so much more valuable to a student than learning about religious traditions for many of whom you know it's not relevant. Even if you took a tradition and students follow a particular tradition of religion what you teach them in terms of the content isn't necessarily going to be relevant to their normal practice. And I think for students living in the world today how important is it that they can label all different features of a church? But they will have to make decisions about ethics and about things that affect them directly in their life. And I think that's because when we are looking at the content side

of RE often unfortunately it tends to be about religion and not spirituality and faith. So I think that the religious side of it, isn't as easy for children to connect to because every church looks different. Every set of rituals that they might do in a church even Christians might do it differently.

SW: And do you think they agreed syllabus in Birmingham would have that spirituality and faith element?

XX: I think that when you are looking at to learning from faith and the spirituality can come in that part of it as well. I think if you are developing students' attitudes and their understanding and their empathy for others, all those things they spirituality and that aspect of things can come from learning from faith. It doesn't have to be about learning about. I find learning about religion I think personally as an RE teacher I find it quite dry. I am not as excited about it. If I'm teaching children I don't see that it offers so much to the deep questioning and the provocative thinking. That as the ethical and the moral side of RE does.

SW: So I've been asking all the people that I've been interviewing what do you think the dispositions are about? Now you have got a unique perspective, of one of two people that I'm interviewing; ■■■ being the other one. You were part of the Agreed Syllabus Conference. So if you were explaining to alien what Birmingham was doing with the dispositions, what would you say wanted for its students? And why was it taking this approach rather than Year 8 are doing Islam or Year 9 do Sikhism? As other agreed syllabuses do.

XX: My understanding and please don't ask me to recite all 24 dispositions. My understanding of having been part of the process was that this was something where we were able to find some common agreement among different faith communities in the city.

about what they aspire to for their young people. It was definitely conversation and a process that was about citizenship. It was about focusing on the child. It was very child centred. It wasn't about this is just a lump of knowledge, a body of knowledge that we want to throw out there and impart. Treating children as empty vessels just to fill up with content. The discussion of the process as I understand was very much how do we develop a cohesive society. How do you we have the type of communities around Birmingham where we can all be proud of the young people that are contributing to that community. I think the original syllabus might have been devised at a time when Every Child Matters was around and all those sorts of things, so there was a big focus nationally on the child being at the centre of it and the child's development and well-being being at the centre of it. So I believe that the the dispositional approach is about putting the child at the centre and let's not think about what we want children to know. But who we want children to be. And the dispositions help drive that. So it's about what kind of society we want and the individuals are we trying to nurture in the future through using RE as a vehicle and the content happens to be a vehicle. But that is not the end goal. The end goal was always about we want to develop these attributes in our students. And I think that is the thing that I appreciate about the syllabus. The end goal I agree with, I think it's something about the child and who they are and what they can do. And their outlook rather than then walking away with bags of content that is no use to them whatsoever.

SW: Do you think it is having impact on the students? I don't want you to tell me anything that you don't think it's happening, if but do you see it?

XX: I think in our school, and other schools I've worked in, I'd like to say it does have an impact. I think it is something that we have, my school is very diverse so even if we said

most almost 90% of students are Muslim they are from a vast array of nationalities or ethnic groups. They are not all, it is not a monocultural school by any means. We have got students here from Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Somalia. The work that that we've done through RE and we benefited from the fact that we have a stable and a strong RE team and we've got specialists and we've got a team of specialists who can bounce ideas off each other. And collaborate without planning et cetera I think because we have got that approach I would say our students are quite understanding and they have got that ability and the opportunities because they are going to school alongside people from other faiths and backgrounds to go and explore that. I don't think they do it enough. But I think they have got that opportunity and we won't see what the real benefits are of the RE teaching until these students are well into their adulthood. And it is seeds that we are planting. How you approach things and how you think about things and how you look at things. So yeah I think it is having an impact but I think the impact will be evident well beyond what GCSE grade they've got. However, we do get the GCSE grades at the end of the course. And RE in the time that I have worked here, I think I've only come across one student who said he disliked RE. Our students... RE is not a subject that our students grumble about. I think that speaks volumes. In a school this size.

SW: So we have talked about the aims that you think are important and we have talked about the pedagogy of the syllabus and the methods that you use and you don't use. What do you think is the most important factor out of those three or how do those three interrelate? If you're talking about engagement. If you want your students to be engaged in RE is it the methods, the pedagogy or your overall aim as a teacher that sort of drives it forward? Or what order of those things need to be in order to have that impact?

XX: I actually think it is about relationships. I think none of those things or all of those things. It's how... I think for our students certainly you need to build those relationships and part of that is through your methodology, your approach to how you teach. I think the aims I don't think we necessarily make them explicit. We haven't talked about dispositions to students, partly because they were so wordy but also because they don't need to hear those words it's about what the teacher has in mind when they set out to teach the lesson. You don't need to tangle kids up in phrases like being imaginative and explorative or whatever. I think it is about the relationships and therefore your approach as a teacher is the important thing. As a teacher you have got to be skilled enough to balance the... you know the need to achieve a certain name with the need to engage the students and the method that you use is either going to engage them or not so it will vary as well it will depend on the topic because some students if you have got a certain topic however dry your delivery might be might, they will have a natural interest in those topics. Whereas for the things you have to work much harder to get students to show an interest in it if they don't see the relevance. If you haven't with your pedagogy found a way in, to hook those kids and get them to see that relevance. Everything else is wasted. It's a bit of a mixture of those things. But I think relationships are very very important. Children need to trust that you know what you are talking about. Teachers need confidence to be able to ask challenging questions and to deal with a religious material especially in today's day and age confidently. And that wins a lot from our students. So you know the fact that I have learnt a huge amount about is Islam having talked mainly Muslim kids, I think for our students that in terms my relationship with them I have already got that respect. Because they are respectful that you have taken the time to learn about something that matters so much to them.

SW: That goes a long way doesn't it? Thank you. The next question is a series of scenarios and they are at the back of your pack. It's about how you would engage each of these pupils. Now you might not have taught a Billy or a Sunita but it was having faced these pupils how would you engage them. We could do them one at a time. Or whether you want me to go through them all and then you throw them all in.

XX: No let's do them one at a time.

SW: So Billy is not religious. His mum doesn't want him going to the mosque visit. She says it's not educational. Billy is not interested in RE. Have you ever taught a Billy? How do you engage him?

XX: I would speak to Billy about what his reservations were about not going to the visit and obviously you'd need to make it clear that the visit is not because we will not worship at the mosque. I will explain to Billy and his mom the educational value of the visit and I would use the fact that Islam is particularly is very current issue whether you are religious or not. It's been of high profile in recent years and in a school certainly in Birmingham it is very likely that this child will, and will continue to live and work alongside Muslims and I would try and share and encourage the parent to try and understand and appreciate the value therefore and some understanding of his neighbours and their perspective on things. But I would also try and look at a way that you know, maybe it might be that Billy needs a different angle for the visit so whereas other students might be naturally interested in it. I would suggest that you could devise a different approach for Billy. So is there another investigation you could set him so that you could ask him how are non Muslims welcomed in the mosque etc. You'd have to do some work with Billy and his mum of the fact what they could benefit from the visit and I would hope that we would not just going to the mosque

that there are other visits. This is not because Islam is the only religion and we're not trying to convert you to Islam. But you've got to have that dialogue to try and understand what their reservations are. If he's not interested in RE then I would start talking about the value from a GCSE point of view, that in our school it is compulsory so he has to do it. He might as well get something useful out of it. If he wasn't coming around to the fact that this is a way to develop your values and attitudes towards others. I would share with him the curriculum and the fact that in all of the topics that we do we invite non-religious perspectives. That's an important part of the evaluation part of the exam questions anyway. So I would try and share that with him as well.

SW: Thank you. Moving on then. Sunita wants to be a doctor. And she places and her family place a high value on education and want her to do well. She has her own faith. And RE isn't seen as furthering her career. How would you get Sunita on board?

XX: I think some of the strategies I would try and share with Sunita what the value of doing RE is. I would talk to her about the fact that RE teaches evaluation skills and it is really important to be able to argue and put different perspectives across. I would say, you know, Hindu perspectives are even if we aren't teaching that in every topic directly, it provides an interesting other perspective and show Sunita, like I would do with Billy, how their contributions to class discussions would be a great importance to other students because they are providing a different viewpoint. And other students might not be able to see that so them being there actually makes a real difference to the other students. And try to make them feel valued like they have for something special to contribute ermm...

SW: So you might then see some similarities with Abdul. Abdul from a Muslim background. He goes to Madrasah after school. Erm... family place a high significance on

his own faith but don't see the real value of him learning about other faiths. So anything different you might do?

XX: Although we are not here to do religious instruction, I think what I sometimes would be tempted to do is to try and find a position of interest, a common point of discussion so if the parents are showing that they highly value Islam and Islamic perspectives on things I might try to find an anecdotal account from Islam to show how it is important to learn about other cultures and other religions. And use that as a sort of a bit of leverage with the parents to help them to see actually learning about other religions is an important thing. Talking about the Prophet Muhammad and his tolerance of Christians and Jews and living alongside. The fact that as a growing religion and there are lots similarities with other religions and actually finding those common points might help us to get some community cohesion etc. I'd try and share that and look at it from a more what's the sort of values and ethical benefits of learning about other religions and maybe help the parents to understand if we all took that approach we wouldn't learn about Islam and it's about everybody having an open mind about other people learning about other faiths.

SW: Thank you. And then the last one is Sarah. So she doesn't mind learning about almost facts and content about different faiths. She's quite interested in that; why does that person wear that and why is that person eating in that way... But doesn't see the relevance to the learning from. So how would you engage Sarah?

XX: So sometimes I ask students what are they ambitions? What is the career path they think they are likely to have and I would try to find a way to relate that so that as Sunita was planning to be a doctor I would say that as a doctor there might be considerations you will need to give of people's faith when you are making recommendations for their treatment and

I would say if you worked in, if you were going to be a business manager what happens if you've got members of staff that want to be off work for a festival or whatever. So I'd try to find out what she is interested in or what her career plans are and try to see if I could find a relevance to that and her learning about other religions. And I would also share what the curriculum is about and what we actually cover. Even in Key Stage 3 we cover a lot of issues like poverty and that is relevant to everybody. I would just try to help the parents to see this is how we approaching things. I think sharing with the parents the sort of questioning we do in RE and the content outline. You know I think parents need to see that we are not hiding anything. The more explicit you can make that for parents this is what we will learn about and when and how and why. I think that parents' fear about the issues about RE would go away in most cases. I've never in this school had anyone withdrawn from RE. So I think I'm all cases where I've had a student, students or parents raise questions once you've had that discussion, any fears have been allayed and they tend to be very supportive.

SW: Great. Ok. Thank you. And those sort of scenarios lead me into a question thinking about you've mentioned it already in terms of your background of teaching pupils of faith and non faith. Do you see a difference with how they engage in RE?

XX: Errmm...

SW: And you've spoken a little bit about how the dispositions enable that...

XX: I think it's. I'm of the mind that it's possible. It's not really a faith or no faith thing that makes a difference in children's attitudes. In some respects I think that there are some class issues there. Where you've got more ermm... middle class children of no faith I think there can sometimes be a negative view of RE and religion and they can be quite dismissive. I have had children in the past be quite dismissive of RE and not see the value of it but also

quite dismissive also of RE teachers as if well that's kind of a lonely kind of job to do. Because my parents are doctors or because my parents are much more academic they've not seen that. With those children I've had to share and you know use arguments that RE is a very academic subject it's not something, it's something where you are learning genuine values and skills of analysis, of evaluation that are similar to other humanities subjects and therefore there is lots of learning to be valued within RE whether you care about the content or whether you believe in it is irrelevant. Again sharing, I've had students in the past who have come from that background where they've excelled and got A*s and they have worked hard. They've made the discussions really interesting because they have been quite vocal about their views etc and to show them that they are welcome. I think there is some kind of or possibly some sort of class divide between how RE is perceived in terms of people who are not religious, non religious children coming from a background where it's working class for example for want of a better phrase, I think they are in my experience more open to learning about RE because even if they are not practising members of a religion they identify usually as British citizens as that is the traditional religion of the country therefore they've got some kind of interest in it. So yeah. It's something worth exploring a bit further but when you get kids throwing Richard Dawkins at you and things like that... I find it quite difficult when children are... It's ok for them to say RE, religion and faith is nonsense but it's ok to say that as long as they are willing to engage discussion about it and debate and provide arguments and listen to the opposite side as well. Because we are not here to convert anybody. But I think you know, I'd like to think that I encourage all children of faiths and non to keep an open mind and that is what RE is about. People being enquiring and ermm... yeah just thinking for themselves. Because equally the children that have a faith I don't want them just to accept something what someone told them in the Madrasah or me as a teacher

and I've certainly said to kids in the past, if I've taught you something don't assume that I'm telling you the truth, go and check it out, find a response. I'm trying to get them to see just because it's on the internet doesn't mean it is true. Just because it's in this textbook doesn't mean it's true. Just because one person wrote that textbook, that's one person and actually what do we know about that person, where are they from, what did they do to qualify to write this book? So I've tried to teach children to have an open mind and to challenge and question even me therefore I would be disappointed if I had a student of no faith who was completely shut down to exploring things. I think it is not good for someone to have that kind of outlook at such a young age. I think all even an older age I think they need to keep an open mind on things.

SW: Thank you. Do you think that the dispositions enable 'a road in' for pupils of no faith? So if we say Year eight we are doing 'the mosque'. It could actually be no thanks it's nothing to do with me. But if we say we are looking at 'appreciating beauty' and we going to have a look at some calligraphy and then into the mosque, do you think there is something in that?

XX: Definitely, I think the dispositions... not themselves, like I said earlier you would not put that as a title of a lesson. But from the dispositions I think you can come up with lots of big questions and in the past we've use the big questions as the way into the lesson. The title would never be the mosque or the church or Christmas or Easter. The title is certainly, in the previous school when I taught, the title would always be a big question, and the big question would always be something that was relevant to the child, so about me or I or our and in the big question. And that was definitely hook to get them into so let's learn about this because it's relevant to me and the religion and the content you use was just a tool to get to the end of

that the question and to explore that. I think that was a great way in for non-religious kids and a great way in if you've got mixed faiths class it was good because it meant that you went isolating anybody. Everyone can be just as interested in the questions as everybody else.

SW: On page 6 of the questionnaire I asked some statements about things and generally you are in support of the dispositions and that sort of way thinking so things like 'are the dispositions important' you answered strongly agree. 'For pupils of faith and no faith' you said strongly agree. Is there anything there that you want to pick up? So you said to 'the dispositions hide the differences between faiths' and you said you neither agree nor disagree with that.

XX: Yeah...

SW: That was quite different in many ways because you are quite in favour of the dispositions.

XX: Yeah I really wasn't quite sure whether they did anything to the differences between faiths because when you are looking at it from a disposition point of view, you don't necessarily have to compare the religions anyway. And even when you are looking at what different religions say you are not comparing them in evaluative way. You're not weighing is one better than the other anyway you are looking at from one religion says this and another religion there is that. You're not comparing those two views they are not competing against each other. So I think that's why I was not really sure whether it hides the differences or not.

SW: Thank you. So although you are part of the Agreed Syllabus Conference, are there things that you particularly like that you haven't covered already, or things that you don't particularly like about the dispositions in Birmingham?

XX: Initially I thought they were just wordy and so many of them that it was how will teachers get their heads around so many different things. I don't think... Having been part of the process and saw how painstaking it was to get to the point of those 24 agreed phrases. And I don't think you're not asking teachers to use them on a daily basis but what is important is to find a way to make sure that all of the RE teachers and kids who weren't part of the process understand the rationale behind it and understand what they mean each one. So I think that is important part of it in easy and accessible way. A lot of the material surrounds the dispositions when it first came out were academic. And way over my head as a person who sat round the table. So I can imagine they will way over everyone else's head. So I think it's just keep the dispositions but also then have a simple little rationale which shows this is what we're trying to achieve this is where we trying to get to. And that would help RE teachers not to be scared of it and show them the different approaches like you don't have to talk about them but that's your thinking what you are planning your lesson. I'm sure most of that stuff has been done but I'm just not aware of it.

SW: Just wondering whether you want to add anything to what you said on page 3 about the strengths. And you might just said that now but just to give you a moment to read through and have a look at that.

XX: 'Shift of emphasis' that should say not 'sift of emphasis'. I think I've just said all of that.

SW: Thank you. And is there anything else you want to say? Just to give you an opportunity about the Birmingham agreed syllabus, and the dispositions, and RE in general?

XX: Like I said I think I've really enjoyed being part of the process and teaching it. I've got quite a clear understanding of what I think of what we're trying to achieve with the dispositions. I don't know whether SACRE could do more to make sure all RE teachers have that same level of understanding and that when we are trying to encourage even academies to take on board this are we pitching it in the right way? Which is about trying to promote community cohesion and trying to do the things that mean it is relevant to everybody and it is child focused and it's not just about saying here is loads of content I want you to learn about religion. So more maybe could be done about trying to make it a little bit more universal and across the city when trying to develop citizenship through this it's not going to work if some people have these attributes and some people don't it's going to be much more challenging. I think we need to find routes in to try and get this adopted by more schools and make sure more people are actually using it...

SW: Because when I have gone into primaries and explained things they say, 'Oh got it, understand it and love it'. It's having that opportunity to get to them and to get it across. Thank you.

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