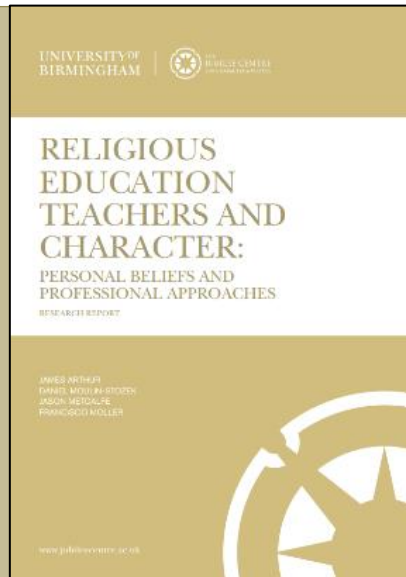


Religious Education Teachers and Character:

Personal Beliefs & Professional Approaches



Key Findings:

- 1) **Personal worldviews informed RE teachers' approaches in the classroom:**
RE teachers reported identifying with a wide range of personal worldviews in faith and non-faith schools. Their worldviews inform their vision of what the subject of RE is and should be, and underpin their motivation to teach the subject.
- 2) **RE teachers were found to have fair and tolerant views of other religions and worldviews:**
RE teachers with and without religious faith, in faith and non-faith schools, were found to have fair and tolerant approaches to religious diversity. The findings however suggest that RE teachers with a religious faith were more open to learning from other religions and interreligious dialogue.
- 3) **There was strong agreement among RE teachers that RE contributes to pupils' character development:**
97.7% of RE teachers agreed or strongly agreed that RE contributes to pupils' character development, and 94.5% agreed or strongly agreed that RE teachers should model good character for their pupils.
- 4) **RE teachers that have a religious faith were more likely to think religions promote good character:**
RE teachers with a religious faith were more likely to think that religious traditions provide a source of good role models. They were also more likely to care about their impact on pupils' religious beliefs and to believe pupils emulate their religious views.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, based at the University of Birmingham, is a world leading research centre for the examination of how character and virtues impact individuals and society. The Centre partners with schools, practitioners and academics globally.

Character Education

Character education is an umbrella term, it can be thought of as synonymous with moral or values education. It includes all educational activities that help develop a set of positive traits (virtues) which equip and enable young people to deal with the difficult tasks they will encounter throughout their lives.

About the Research

This briefing paper provides a summary of the findings from the *Religious Education Teachers and Character: Personal Beliefs and Professional Approaches Research Report*.

This briefing is intended to provide an concise summary of the Religious Education (RE) report, for those with an interest in the RE report, or a broader interest in how character can be developed through RE.

The report details a study of RE teachers, which encompassed 30 life-story interviews and a survey of 314 participants. The aim of the research was to explore RE teachers' worldviews and their approaches in promoting pupils' character growth through RE. 'Worldviews' is a term used to replace simple designations of religious and non-religious identity, referring to an individual's broader understanding of the world.



Implications of the Report:

- More opportunities should be made available for RE teachers to reflect on their own worldviews and consider the effect of their worldviews on their teaching practice.
- As participants widely held a belief about the contribution of RE to pupils' character development, the report suggests RE rationales and syllabi should be written to maximise opportunities for developing character.

Background:

Religious Education is a statutory subject in England and Wales for pupils of all ages. Despite the legal status of the subject, RE provision is in decline¹.

The recent inclusion of character development in the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook demonstrates that ideas of character are receiving renewed attention. However, the Handbook does not specify how character should be developed². The question naturally arises, to what extent does RE contribute to pupils' character development?

Two briefing papers published prior to the publication of the final report explore this question in detail, summarising the evidence that suggests that RE can make a positive contribution to the development of pupils' character³ and their development of practical wisdom⁴. Practical wisdom means the kind of understanding that develops through our experiences, and focuses on context-dependent activity.

A further challenge is that empirical research has tended to ignore the relationships between RE teachers' professional identity and their personal commitments and motivations. Studies have focussed on professional negotiations of identity necessary to teach RE⁵.

This report makes a new contribution through seeking to address the issues in the background literature. It examines how professional identities are formed by personal factors, such as religious, moral or ethical beliefs, and examines RE teachers' perspectives on the extent that RE contributes to character education.

Discover more:

For information about the Religious Education Teachers project, please visit: jubileecentre.ac.uk/reteacher

To learn more about the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, please visit: jubileecentre.ac.uk

For any other questions, please contact Jason Metcalfe. Email: J.M.Metcalfe@bham.ac.uk Tel: 0121-414-4479

Further Reading

The following publications, referred to in this briefing paper, may be useful for those interested in learning more about RE or Character Education within schools:

- 1) CoRE [Commission on Religious Education] (2018) [*Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward, A National Plan for RE*](#), London: Religious Education Council of England and Wales.
- 2) Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills] (2019) [*School Inspection Handbook for Inspecting Schools in England Under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005*](#), Manchester: Ofsted.

The report authors have published two preceding briefing papers. The former explores the contribution of RE to pupils' character development; the latter explores the contribution of RE to practical wisdom:

- 3) Moulin-Stožek, D. and Metcalfe, J. (2019) [*The contribution of religious education to pupils' character development*](#), *Jubilee Centre Insight Series*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- 4) Metcalfe, J. (2019) [*To What Extent Can Religious Education Help Shape Pupils' Practical Wisdom?*](#), *Jubilee Centre Insight Series*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

This research briefing paper contains a summary of the background and main findings of the RE report. The full findings are available in:

- 5) Arthur, J., Moulin-Stožek, D., Metcalfe, J. and Moller, F. (2019) [*Religious Education Teachers and Character: Personal Beliefs and Professional Approaches: Research Report*](#), Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

