



Ofsted subject conference report: religious education

16 September 2005

**Better
education
and care**

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Synopsis

The conference was planned jointly by HMI lead inspectors for religious education (RE) in schools and initial teacher training (ITT) in collaboration with the religious studies department at St Martin's College, Lancaster. This was a one day conference with the option of a Saturday morning additional workshop. The intended audience was RE teachers who act as mentors in partnership with teacher training providers. The purpose of the conference was to:

- improve the quality of school-based training for trainee RE teachers in secondary schools
- improve the quality of activities set for trainees in the context of departmental practice
- encourage RE subject mentors to use the opportunity of mentoring to create outstanding RE departments
- develop outstanding assessment practice in training schools
- improve trainers' and trainees' use of the information from assessment to make RE provision inclusive.

Summaries of seminar sessions

Friday September 16

What are the key areas for development in religious education?

Barbara Wintersgill HMI, Ofsted specialist adviser for religious education

The full conference was addressed by Barbara Wintersgill HMI, who set out the key national weaknesses in RE and their implications for the quality of school-based training. It was suggested that any RE department in partnership with an ITT provider should strive to be outstanding. The Ofsted criteria for outstanding performance were explained and the barriers to outstanding performance identified. First among these is weak assessment practice and a lack of differentiated teaching and learning strategies with mixed ability classes. Teachers too often 'teach to the middle ability', thus disadvantaging gifted pupils and those with learning difficulties. Delegates were encouraged to read Ofsted's most recent reports on RE: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Making mentoring work for you

Alan Child and Stephen Merrill¹

The session considered the benefits of partnership between schools and higher education institutions and provided practical examples of how mentors can work with trainees. The role of the mentor was explored through a case study approach. Research had shown that:

- ITT brings validity to schools
- ITT can motivate the teacher who could be described as 'professionally stagnant'
- ITT can raise professional standards
- the presence of trainees in a school encourages an evaluative culture.

Interviews with mentors revealed that:

- ITT is a vehicle for staff training with a focus on teaching and learning
- departments involved in ITT consider their own organisation, administration and communication and improve standards
- observing and questioning keeps staff alert and up-to-date with new developments
- good trainees bring in new ideas and approaches
- poor trainees sharpen reflection
- ITT provides continual reflective practice.

Workshops

Delegates attended workshops run by experienced mentors Nigel Fancourt from Lord Williams School, Thame, Oxfordshire, and Deborah Weston from Mulberry School for Girls, Tower Hamlets.

Using the non-statutory national framework (NSNF) levels for assessment at Key Stage 3

Deborah Weston

The workshop focused on:

- the importance of baseline assessment in RE at the beginning of Year 7 (or year of transfer)
- the use of non-subject data (e.g. CATs and SATs) to identify pupils' general abilities and to set appropriately challenging work
- the value of recording assessment data on a spreadsheet
- the analysis of spreadsheet data, for example, to look at the quality of pupils' responses to questions based on different objectives and identify areas of learning that proved difficult for many pupils

¹ Contact at Impress UK 2000; e-mail:Impressuk2000@yahoo.o.uk.

- discussion about how the skills in the NSNF should be used to set a variety of tasks at different levels.

Differentiation for trainees in RE

Nigel Fancourt

This session took as its starting point Ofsted's judgement that:

The best trainees plan carefully to meet the needs of these pupils, varying their teaching styles and forms of assessment as appropriate... However a minority of trainees continue to rely too heavily on differentiation by outcome. (Ofsted report on secondary initial teacher training establishment, 2002)

The aim of the workshop was to evaluate a variety of training situations for using assessment evidence for differentiation. It posed the question 'How do we differentiate *well*?' Delegates discussed the merits and weaknesses of a range of examples of common practice in differentiation, for example extension work, 'by outcome', assertive seating, and differentiated worksheets and tasks using different levels of text, font and graphics.

The session moved on from identifying good practice to discussing the value of specific school-based tasks to enable trainee teachers to differentiate well. These included analysing data, shadowing a class for a day with a focus on three pupils of different abilities and preparing resources for pupils with learning difficulties and gifted and talented pupils.

Saturday September 17

The planned outcome of the second day was a set of school-based tasks for trainees, to be prepared by delegates who opted to stay for the Saturday morning session. These tasks would build on ideas generated in the workshops on the Friday.

As a result of the deliberations of the small working group on Saturday, the following ideas were generated about school-based tasks for ITT trainees.

Outcomes from working groups

The working groups on day two identified the following as suitable tasks to enable trainees to learn to differentiate well:

- working with other departments to observe effective teaching, for example to examine assessment practice and review the use and structure of fieldwork
- carry out structured interviews with groups of pupils, for example about how they learn, preferred teaching styles and boys' underachievement
- make better use of lesson observation in the **latter** phase of training when trainees' knowledge and their ability to reflect will be better developed and there is more value in observation
- provide opportunities for the trainee to offer a perspective on the development of departmental self-evaluation.

A second placement task on assessment was devised which would involve trainees working with a specific group taught during the first placement in order to:

- use the assessment data available for the class to inform judgements about their ability
- examine the different assessment practice of other departments working with the year group
- devise a baseline assessment task at the outset of a sequence of teaching to evaluate progress by comparing the standards achieved by the pupils with those seen during the trainee's first placement
- develop a sequence of learning activities focused on developing the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in a targeted area of RE
- offer targeted feedback to individual pupils.

Next steps

Details of the school-based training activities described above have been made available to delegates. They are available to a wider audience on request from gary.linin@ofsted.gov.uk.