

Faith and Society Files: Church and School - REInspired: Delivering Inspired RE

REInspired is a project based in East Reading which seeks to build partnerships between local churches and local schools. This File tells the story of REInspired, its approach to working with primary schools, and offers some pointers as to how you could begin to build relationships with your local schools in this way.



The REinspired Primary Model:

'Building creative partnerships with primary schools through RE'

The aim of this File is to tell you a little about the story of REinspired, its approach to working with primary schools and to offer some pointers as to how you could begin to build relationships with your local schools in this way. REinspired is supported by a Home Mission grant and a book outlining the project was published by BRF in February 2011 (ISBN: 978 184101 771 6).

REinspired is a church into schools project based in East Reading. It seeks to build partnerships between local churches and local schools. It aims to engage with 'every child, in every school, every year'. Currently, it works with 83% of pupils across 11 primary schools through leading RE sessions. In addition it assists with collective worship and engages with both RE and collective worship in two secondary schools with a special interest in 16-19s.



The story so far

Ten years ago a school requested support in their teaching of RE after an unfavourable Ofsted report. A suggestion was made that this could take place in a church rather than a classroom; where the teaching could come alive in the context of a place of worship. In the early years we delivered three and then six sessions for one school and this is a great way to begin and perhaps continue. However, today we deliver around 90 sessions a year for around 4,500 pupils and most will take place in a local church.

The big idea

We plan so that...

- each pupil year group will systematically experience our RE sessions, so that each child becomes familiar with the church context.
- sessions will be highly participative, hands on and above all fun.
- year on year the pupils will develop an understanding of church as a positive place to be.
- pupils should discover what Christian faith is like 'from the inside' and recognise it as something which holds intrinsic value.
- it is easy for Christians of all levels of spiritual maturity to contribute positively and that church leaders and paid staff don't have to be involved.

Our aim is to enable a generation of pupils 'to develop spiritually and engage creatively with faith', and with the Christian faith in particular. To achieve this across our community we need everyone on board. This is an approach which is largely not led by church leaders. Currently we have 80 volunteers from across 20 churches working with the project.

We believe that 'high value learning in RE' will explore the diversity of Christian expressions of faith on the ground. And working with other churches from different traditions will mean you have much more to offer, a greater capacity to deliver and a way to build positive cross church relationships. *Our goal* is... 'For local churches to become fully engaged in supporting local schools in the religious education and spiritual development of their pupils'.



What the school needs!

The 2010 primary curriculum emphasises the appropriateness of visits to places of worship and for faith visitors to come into school. Our RE sessions combine both these ideas. The curriculum recognises that it is important for students to learn from people of faith why they believe and what difference this makes to their lives. So schools need 'visitors' who can speak the 'language of testimony' but they struggle when churches slip into 'confessional mode'. Prefacing anything with the words 'I believe this because...' is a helpful approach whereas pointing out what 'you should believe' will not be acceptable.

In particular there are two educational aims to 'learn about' and to 'learn from' faith. Anything you do needs to have these aims as central. Teachers, who are of a different faith or no faith, may find it easier to teach the 'learning about' with objectivity in the classroom but struggle more with the 'learning from'. However, it is a much stronger educational experience for pupils to see, touch, experience the 'artefacts' that are in every church and hear firsthand what a Christian believes. And with care it is not difficult for wider applications about how pupils might 'learn from' Christian faith to be appropriately explored.

Making a start

Most schools need to visit places of Christian worship this is a good place to initiate a conversation. If you can surprise and delight the school with your understanding of their needs here it opens the door for further engagement. Obtain a copy of your local authority's locally agreed RE syllabus. This will outline for you the range of learning goals and questions teachers in your local schools are seeking to address with pupils. Most will outline a visit to a place of Christian worship to look at the main features of the church building. Sometimes there will be a need to contrast and compare this with another church from a different tradition. Looking around for another church willing to be involved, which has very different traditions and buildings, can greatly assist the school. In addition the visit can address the need to teach about the way Christians use signs and symbols.



However, there are other places in the curriculum where schools should be looking for input from local Christians. For instance the syllabus may suggest a Christian visits to talk about why they pray.

A church may engage by simply facilitating the requests of the school. Alternatively, you can offer to work with teachers to plan a session which a team of local Christians can deliver. Working from the learning goals the teachers need to meet is the key. Applying some creative thought to how that might be achieved is essential. Providing a range of short activities appropriate for the age of pupils you will work with can offer some fun and varied ways of learning to meet a wide range of pupil needs.

Core Values:

Setting out can seem very challenging but the reality is this is not 'rocket science' and the majority of volunteers with REinspired are in fact just ordinary Christians who can be relaxed around children. However, we find that being guided by certain values will avoid many pitfalls and setbacks. The REinspired approach is grounded in the belief that the church needs to understand:

- the educational needs of the school and to seek to serve them
- that a school is a unique place where the whole community will be represented and this needs to be respected
- the substantial opportunities that exist for churches to communicate Christian faith within an educational framework
- it is important to be transparent and open about their intentions and to avoid overstepping the invitation that has been extended to them.

Hot tips

- 1 Working with schools is a long term approach. The biggest benefits will come in future years. Laying a foundation of strong trusting relationships is where to begin. Being ready to be prayerfully patient if things are slow to get underway may be a necessary discipline but should not lead you to give up.
- 2 Aim to become a trusted supporter of the school.
- 3 Understanding the locally agreed syllabus is a great place to begin. It helps you to realise how much Christianity is being taught in school and gives you pointers about where your church can enrich what teachers are doing. If you want to look through the relevant parts of the primary curriculum and of the guidance of the 'non statutory framework' for the teaching of RE this will help you further.

REinspired also runs regular training days called 'REmatters' – the group is funded to enable it to train and mentor projects who would like to develop this sort of practice - please contact REinspired if you would like to know more or are interested to become a pilot project.

REinspired

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Useful links

REinspired

reinspired.org.uk

The new primary curriculum 2010

www.dcsf.gov.uk/newprimarycurriculum

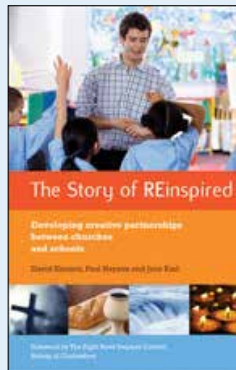
The Non-statutory framework for RE

www.qcda.gov.uk/12235.aspx

The Story of REinspired

Developing creative partnerships between churches and schools

This new book tells the story of how a group of churches in Earley and East Reading developed a way of working with primary schools to support the teaching of RE.



The material covers the background of how the project developed and explores the principles REinspired has worked to - including stories of how students have engaged with the materials, and how churches from a wide ecumenical base have been involved. It then provides a practical guide to enable others to use the model to develop links between their own church and local schools.

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