# Losing my religion, finding my faith.

## The challenge of implementing Fundamental British Values into the RE Classroom.

# Abstract

This research proposal will consider literature, including the mandatory framework on fundamental British values and the challenges of implementing this into the RE classroom. Consideration will be given to the purpose of Religious Education where its aim is to help young people understand world religions. Further consideration will be given to the subject regarding how students are able to develop skills which promote the “virtues of respect and empathy” which “foster civilised debate and reasoned argument”. The challenge of teaching a curriculum which helps students formulate their own opinions on religion and faith may be limited by mandatory policies in place for fundamental British values. If we try to promote the virtues of respect, is it possible to incorporate British values, It would be easier to agree that they are synonymous but as Pries writes “a value is something we intellectually hold as important but a virtue is a very different thing” (Pries, 2022[[1]](#footnote-1)).In this research one of the main objectives will be how can we implement fundamental British values into the RE classroom, when virtues are a “habit, cultivated and grown”(Pries 20222). The main objective will be a review of several schools to identify if the strategy for British values is challenging when teaching students about religious views on sexual orientation.

# Research Background

The main purpose of the research is to investigate and review how schools promote British values and put this into practise in the classroom. It will review where students talk about sexual orientation considering religion, parental influence, and their pathway through the education system, what happens when it is not in line with FBV. Whilst we have a “a duty to actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy” (Department for Education, 20143) we are also being asked to promote the “mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (Department for Education, 20144).

From the research so far, I have noticed lots of duplication of the following keywords (they are now titled the nine ‘P’s’) and for this purpose they will formulate the research strategy. The nine ‘Ps’ are ***purpose,*** ***policy, perspective, parents, pedagogy, promotion, practice, prevent and performance.***

Consideration has been given to the introduction of British Values into school policy. In 2014, when the Department of Education published a document on the obligation of schools “to recognise and promote FBV, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect of those with different faiths and beliefs” (Al Husban,20195) It was considered to be a move from respect for the values to clear strategy, as Lord Nash explained the changes were designed to improve safeguarding and standards on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to strengthen the barriers to extremism”

The rationale behind this was heavily influenced by the allegation of “an extremist plot to take over schools and run them according to radical Islamic principles. (Al Husban,20196). Whilst no charges were made at the Birmingham school it was clear that faiths schools had the opportunity to promote ideologies which did not fit into with FBV protocol. On review of the document by Al Husban, the scandal is considered to signify “international discriminatory and racial policies against Muslims and Islam” (Al Husban, 20197).

In response to the problem of equality a panel was set up which included Professor John Holmwood from the University of Nottingham. Holmwood explained “how the ‘Trojan Horse’ had shaped debates on community cohesion within the national curriculum. In the introduction of a new framework “British values become another medium to ideologically theorise the values of certain cultural differences” (Al Husban, 20198) This has raised one question which is significant to the research, when we talk about sexual orientation in the classroom, are we asking students to abandon the values of their culture “in favour of supposedly British values. Holmwood suggests “in the case of the Trojan Horse, the less Muslim you are, the more British you become” (Al-Husban, 20199).

In May 2015, Cameron gave a speech to the United Kingdom’s National Security Council where he outlined his plans for British values. Cameron told the council that for too long we have been a passive tolerant society” and this has helped foster a “narrative of extremism and grievance” (Vanderbeck, Johnson.2016 10). As a result, schools in England are expected to promote fundamental British values as part of SMCS in schools. Under section 78 of the Education Act (2002), schools must be “encouraged to regard people of all faiths, races and cultures with respect and tolerance” In addition it is considered that “pupils should understand that while people may hold different views about what is right and wrong, all people living in England are subject to its law. (Department for Education. 201411).

The implementation of British values into schools has challenged the education system for several reasons, parents, careers and the community will have already influenced children’s view on religion and faith.

1. If we consider the influence of some primary schools, Bruce writes that “much of Britian’s school system especially in rural areas and small towns were initially created by Chrisitan Churches”. (Bruce,202012).
2. In my initial finding from researching faith schools in Stoke, School A is the first Muslim school which has been awarded a good from Ofsted, from a review of the website intake is from primary school age through to secondary. ‘GCSE RE’ is not an option but the school does provide Islamic Studies and RSE. The policy states that the aim of RSE is to “educate people’s knowledge about sexual relationships” in line with the school’s Islamic ethos and values. In year nine, sexual relationships will be discussed but there is an option to withdraw from this part of the curriculum. ([N](https://www.northroadacademy.com)orth road Academy, 202313)
3. After an Ofsted Inspection, the Evangelical Alliance has complained to the Education secretary that ‘true British values cannot be represented by a secularist politically correct equality agenda” and such an agenda “is the wrong response to the challenges presented by parts of the Birmingham education system” (Vanderbeck, Johnson.201614).

This research is significant because the landscape of religious education is changing. The research will build on a recent article published in the British Journal of Religious Education where McDonnell suggests that it is impossible to live by British values without considering “British virtues” (McDonnell,202315). McDonnell takes the view that “schools are both by and for society being the products they seek to serve” (McDonnell, 202316). This raises another question, is it more difficult to implement British values dependent on school demographics? Research questions will consider the practicalities of incorporating FBV, where there is religious indifference which has been affected by globalisation, modernity, and change.

# Research Questions

It is my intention to approach three types of schools in relation to how they incorporate British values into school system and religious education curriculum. There are several gaps which suggest that this will be a challenge, there is a lot of talk around why schools do this but now how they do it and with the amount of freedom that schools potentially have within the system it will be interesting to see the information which can be feedback into this project. In looking at the relationship between the successful implementation of FBV into the classroom, the following pre-requisites will be considered:

Consideration will be given to:

1.The national curriculum as “a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary schools so that children learn the same thing. (UK, Government17).

2.Faith **schools** who “do have to follow the national curriculum but they can choose what they teach in religious studies”. (UK, Government18).

3. Academies who “have more control over how they do things, for example they do not have to follow the national curriculum” If the Academy is run by a trust “they will have staff who are responsible for the **performance** of the academies in the trust”. (UK, Government19).

4.Private schools (also known as ‘independent schools’) who “charge fees to attend instead of being funded by the government. Where pupils do not have to follow the national curriculum. (UK, Government20).

It is going to be a challenge to have one or two main questions when the subject matter is so complex. The following questions will need to be successfully answered in order that it stands out and provides new information to existing research in this field. Now there is a lot inf information on why schools need to implement FBV’s but there seems to be limited criteria on how they do it. I am hoping to gather data which will model what good looks like. My initial thoughts for the questions are as follows:

1. What is your policy on the promotion of fundamental British values in your school.?
2. How and who influences the implementation of FBV’s into the school framework?
3. What have been the challenges in doing this in relation to SMC and the RE classroom?
4. How do you measure your performance and why do you consider it is successful?

# Methodology

In selecting the schools to be part of the research, the strategy will be guided by the nine ‘P’s’. I do expect this will be a huge undertaking, but I do think that most of them will overlap. This research will consider the schools understanding of the purpose for implementing fundamental British values into their policies. It will seek the school’s perspective and intentions on why they have chosen to devise this type of policy. It will look at parental/carers influence and their right to remove children from sex and religious education. It will consider the quality of religious pedagogy which may be influenced by the national curriculum and local authority. Finally, it will consider how the schools actively promote and put FBV into practise, this will include a review of their prevent strategy and performance which may include the finding from the most recent Ofsted report***.***

Consideration will be given to the religious demographics of the population in relation the geographics of the school (by type and area.), I would like to draw attention to the following data from the world population review and 2021 census across England and Wales. 23)

1.Firstly Around 85% of the world’s population identify with a religion, with the most popular being Christian (World Population Review,202321)

2.The estimated total population for the Abrahamic faiths in 2020 is as follows: Christianity 2.38 billion, Islam 1.91 billion and Judaism 14.6 million (World Population Review,2023 22)

3.According the 2021 census. across England and Wales “46% of people identified as being Christian, 37% said they had no religion, 6% identified as Muslim and around 2% identified as Jewish”. This must be considered when we consider the effects of immigration and globalisation.

The methodology will also be influenced by the variations in religious affiliation in the local area. In 2021, the following demographics have been identified for Stoke, Telford, Shropshire, Herefordshire, and West Midlands.



Source: Varbes,2021 24)

According to the census, life in Stoke-On-Trent has changed from 2011. In comparison to 2021.Christian affiliation is down from 60.9% to 45.8% and Muslim affiliation is up from 6.0% to 9.2%. (Office for National Statistics,202125)

It is my intention to run a project which will consider a mixed method to balance out limitations, I anticipate I need to be able to access information which is made up of quantitative and qualitative data to answer my research question. Before the research can continue a series of documents will need to be produced and approved by my academy. The documents will include an agreement to disclose the information, a series of closed and open questions. For the research to be purposeful I also plan to further extend on the research data presented in this proposal and this will include the number of schools by type in England. Once the data has been gathered is my intention to write this up as a case study and I anticipate the research will take six months as a minimum.

# Additional Information

The research will have a positive intention, but I anticipate there will be constraints in the interests of safeguarding and protected characteristics. The research may have to be limited to several schools under one trust, as it might be difficult to ascertain information from faith schools. This may mean data needs to be reviewed, with a reduction in the number of questions asked and the type of methods used. This can only be achieved by support and co-operation of my school. Additional support will need to be sought from the relevant departments to ensure that the equality and dignity at work act is considered.

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1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)