



# CONTACT IN THE CLASSROOM

## School Linking: A Research Evaluation Report

Dr Lucy Peacock

November 2020

**The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum**



**Research Centre**  
Trust, Peace and  
Social Relations

**Coventry**  
University 



## About the author

Dr Lucy Peacock re-joined the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in 2020 as a Research Fellow following the completion of her doctoral research in interfaith relations and young people upon which this report is based.

Lucy is a member of the Centre's Faith and Peaceful Relations research group and primarily works on research related to religion and higher education. Alongside this, Lucy has maintained a good relationship with the Faith & Belief Forum and is currently undertaking two projects; one investigating the impact of the ParliaMentors university interfaith leadership programme, and the other exploring interfaith dialogue as a tool to tackle faith-based hate and harassment in London and Birmingham.

Lucy has a First-Class BA in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Cambridge and an MSc with distinction in Global Governance and Ethics from University College London. Lucy's professional background is in peacebuilding NGOs.





# Acknowledgements

The doctoral research upon which this report is based was made possible by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University and the Faith & Belief Forum, who designed and advertised the PhD studentship. I am grateful to my PhD supervisory team, Professor Kristin Aune, Dr Chris Shannahan and Dr Patricia Sellick, for their guidance throughout the research.

Thank you to the staff at the Faith & Belief Forum, who engaged wholeheartedly with the research process. Staff members from the Education and Learning team offered constructive and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this report; thank you to Sarah Koster and Evi Koumi.

A special thank you goes to the teachers and students who welcomed me into their schools. I am honoured to have been a part of their School Linking journey. The research could not have taken place without their commitment, enthusiasm and honesty.

- Dr Lucy Peacock

**To cite this report:** Peacock, L. J. (2020) *CONTACT IN THE CLASSROOM: School Linking: A research evaluation report*. London: Faith & Belief Forum and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.

You can contact the author at [lucy.peacock@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:lucy.peacock@coventry.ac.uk).

Twitter: @Lucy\_J\_Peacock, @faithbeliefforum, @CTPSR\_Coventry

© front cover image: The Faith & Belief Forum, 2020

# Contents

Foreword	1
Executive summary	2
1. Introduction	5
2. Importance of the research	8
3. Methodology	14
4. Key findings	16
4.1 Student surveys	16
4.2 What influences students' attitudes towards School Linking?	22
4.3 Teachers and school support	25
4.4 Selection, power and space	26
4.5 Difference, religious (il)literacy and strategic ambiguity in School Linking	28
4.6 Summary of findings	30
5. Reassessing the theory behind School Linking	31
5.1 Intergroup contact theory: An introduction	31
5.2 Creating a recipe of success for School Linking	32
5.3 Reimagining contact for School Linking	34
6. Moving forward: The future of School Linking	37
6.3 Capturing impact	38
6.4 Contact and COVID-19	39
References	40
Endnotes	49

# Foreword

So here we find ourselves in December 2020 and we've come to the end of this three and a half-year process with Dr Lucy Peacock. In the following report you'll find an evaluation of the Faith & Belief Forum's (F&BF's) School Linking programme, academic years 2016-2018.

School Linking has been operating successfully for more than ten years and you may ask why, as an organisation that firmly believes in its impact, we wanted to expose it to critique. When we asked ourselves this question, we recognised that it is only through making ourselves and School Linking vulnerable that we can be receptive to learning. Strengthening the programme through research enables us to meet the changing needs of our teachers and students and so the opportunity for an extensive research-based evaluation was too good to miss.

Indeed, in the few years that Lucy has been working with us, we've seen a significant shift in the RE landscape. As we experience a potential paradigm shift from the teaching of world religions to 'worldviews', we are excited to draw upon this report to illustrate that informal education programmes (that nevertheless have a vital presence in schools) can engage in current debate. Many of our School Linking teachers are RE teachers, and this evaluation has strengthened the relationship between our work and curricula. It was auspicious that Lucy joined the F&BF family just one year after we welcomed community schools onto the programme; her findings relating to the influence of schools' religious characters enable us to engage in challenging discussions around non-religious worldviews in the classroom.

Within this report you will read findings that are not only crucial for F&BF, but anyone involved in contact-based programmes. Lucy's reassessment of contact theory in Section 5 has not only developed our understanding of School Linking's theoretical underpinnings, but has increased our confidence in articulating theory to the extent that it now forms an integral part of our teacher training.

Finally, and I would argue most importantly, you will see in Section 6 how we have been working closely with Lucy to implement some of the more detailed research findings over the years. For me, the implications of power dynamics is something I hadn't considered before. We now better understand how power permeates all parts of the School Linking process, from recruitment of schools to teacher partnerships, as well as the 'where' and 'how' of student encounters. This learning has enabled us to develop strategies (such as formal school recruitment guidelines) to support equal status throughout the School Linking journey.

It has been an immense pleasure to have worked with Lucy. Many of the more personal reflections she has shared as a researcher have given us a special insight into the touching experiences and positive moments the School Linking journey can provide.

We are immensely proud of School Linking and invite you to engage, support, and for any teachers reading, join us and become a part of this meaningful journey for your school!

- Sarah Koster

**Programmes Manager,  
Education & Learning  
The Faith & Belief Forum**

# Executive summary

This report is based on doctoral research conducted at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, between 2016 and 2020. The objective of the research was to provide an original account of how the Faith & Belief's Forum's (F&BF's, formally Three Faith Forum's) School Linking programme fosters 'peaceful relations' in schools.

School Linking trains teachers in interfaith and intercultural dialogue facilitation skills, and brings two classes of students together at three 'Link Days' to explore issues around faith, identity and community. For details please visit <https://faithbeliefforum.org/programme/school-linking/>.

The research was conducted in three phases:

1. 1,488 surveys designed by F&BF staff and completed by students and teachers in 2016-17 were analysed to determine the impact of School Linking captured by historic evaluation data. The electronic dataset created by the researcher was the first of its kind to capture attitudes of students and teachers from 75 schools in London and Birmingham.
2. New data were collected by the researcher through surveys, focus groups and participant observation of teacher training and school activities to explore in detail the ways in which School Linking informs or inhibits 'peaceful relations' at interpersonal and institutional levels.
3. The findings of the first two phases were reflected upon to reassess the theory underpinning the programme ('contact theory') and better understand what 'peaceful relations' looks like in the context of School Linking.

The research was critical of assumption-based models of evaluation often used in the charitable sector. It challenged ideas of hypothesis-testing, where concepts such as 'peaceful relations' are operationalised, or represented by a set of indicators and subsequently tested. Rather, its priority was to inductively uncover findings that may or may not have been assumed to be an indicator of 'peaceful relations' at the outset. The research was open to complex, or rival explanations of the processes of relationship-building involved in School Linking. It also recognised that "interventions always and only take place in context" (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 277). Rather than simply asking whether the programme worked, the research asked what worked for different people in different circumstances.

The research speaks to four strands of social and academic debate: the move towards the concept of 'worldviews' in religion and education, young people's attitudes to religious and cultural diversity in the UK, the role faith schooling plays in the promotion of community cohesion, and the ways in which previous interfaith initiatives with young people have been evaluated. Situating the research findings within the literature can further learning amongst academics and practitioners.

The first phase of the research found the following:

- Around three quarters of students reported feeling positive about the prospect of School Linking, and at the end of the programme reported enjoying the experience.
- By the end of School Linking, students' reported 'knowledge of the faiths and beliefs' of the students in the school with which they were partnered increased.

- During the Link Days, almost two thirds of students shared and asked things based around the theme of 'who am I?', with hobbies and interests the most common topic of conversation.
- Both before and after School Linking, students reported a feeling of 'difference' from their Link School students.
- Students' age, schools' religious characters, academic performance, and whether the teachers had taken part in School Linking before influenced student and teacher survey responses.

Two key themes emerged from the survey data analysis: low levels of religious literacy at student and teacher levels, and ambiguity around student interpretation of the concept of 'difference'.

Since the first phase was solely based on surveys, this quantitative data was unable to capture the *complexities* of the processes underlying how peaceful relations are formed through participants' experiences of School Linking. The second phase of the research, based on qualitative data, sought to fill this gap. Whilst the full report discusses the findings of this phase in detail (see Section 4.6 for a summary), a selection of those with significant implications for learning are as follows:

- While teachers new to School Linking tended to implement the activities and skills taught during the teacher training, some 'experienced' teachers displayed an overconfidence in an unstructured approach to Link Days, risking disruptive behaviour from students.
- Teachers appreciated support from school leadership, but in practice were faced with multiple logistical and pedagogical constraints that affected the delivery of School Linking.

- Methods of selecting students for School Linking channelled power dynamics. For example, in some schools 'gifted' students were prioritised for School Linking.
- Where unequal power dynamic between partnered teachers were played out through gender roles, the teachers' interactions could perpetuate preconceived cultural norms about unequal gender roles in interfaith dialogue more generally.
- The 'spaces' in School Linking were relational, and often defined in terms of power by 'hosting' and 'visiting' student roles.
- Students' apparent negative interpretations of 'difference' in their survey responses may be exacerbated by teachers, some of which prioritised ideas of similarity between students at the detriment of recognising meaningful difference.
- Potential religious illiteracy identified in the student and teacher survey responses may be reinforced by question and answer sessions during Link Days which encouraged oversimplified generic factual knowledge often associated with examinations.
- There is a 'strategic ambiguity' around School Linking goals; teachers could largely agree on general goals, but interpret them in such a way that they could also satisfy specific school agendas.

During and following the research process, F&BF reviewed the research findings to make meaningful changes to the design, delivery and evaluation of School Linking. Section 6 of the full report details the ways in which the above findings have been addressed, and sets out the expected long-term impact of the practical changes made to School Linking.

The final phase of the research reflectively considered the findings from the previous two phases to explore how the concept of 'peaceful relations' can be better understood in the context of School Linking. It did this through the lens of contact theory – School Linking's theoretical framework.

The 'intergroup contact' model (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Hewstone and Brown 1986; Pettigrew 1998) is based on Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis', which proposed that interaction between groups can decrease prejudiced attitudes.

The research sought to create a first of its kind 'recipe for optimal interfaith contact' in the School Linking context. It did this by mapping the research findings above onto four 'conditions' of contact that maximise prejudice reduction: equal status, common goal(s), cooperation/collaboration and social/institutional support (see Section 5.2 of the full report).

The model of intergroup contact itself was subsequently reassessed in order to better understand the unique nature of the School Linking contact encounter.

Significantly, the research argued that the intergroup model's implicit 'secondary transfer effect' (the claim that prejudice reduction towards a representative member of the 'outgroup' is generalisable to the outgroup as a whole) is incompatible with School Linking's ethos and methods, as well as the discursive shift in religion and education towards 'personalised worldviews'. The 'effect's' reliance on the homogeneity or typicality of members of 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' is flawed, in that it risks exacerbating students' negative perceptions of difference by failing to recognise religious plurality within the classroom.

The research illustrated the benefits of the 'decategorization' model of contact (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988, Miller 2002) as School Linking's theoretical framework moving forward. This model emphasises the deconstruction of group salience in favour of individual-level relationships. The benefits of the approach are clear:

- a) It mitigates the risk of the type of religious illiteracy identified in the research developing among students and teachers.
- b) It offers F&BF the opportunity to facilitate intrafaith contact between schools of the same religious character to explore religious and cultural plurality *within* faiths.
- c) It widens academic and social debate to recognise the importance of informal education interventions like School Linking that play a vital role in exploring worldviews in the classroom.

As with the empirical findings, F&BF adapted School Linking in light of the theoretical insights provided by the research. As a result, F&BF is in a position to better articulate the unique nature and effectiveness of 'peaceful relations' fostered by School Linking in a way that is theoretically robust.



# 1. Introduction

This report presents doctoral research conducted by Lucy Peacock between October 2016 and April 2020 at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University.

The research arose from a studentship designed in partnership between CTPSR and the Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF), advertised in early 2016. Its purpose was to evaluate how F&BF's School Linking programme fosters interfaith relations between young people in schools through academic research.

This report introduces the School Linking programme, the importance of the research and its underlying methodology, and the key research findings in six stages. The first two stages relate to statistical analysis conducted on almost 1,500 student surveys completed in the 2016-17 academic year. The following three stages present thematic qualitative findings from in-depth research with School Linking teachers, as well as classes from four schools. Whilst the qualitative findings are not representative of all School Linking students, they provide a more detailed picture of the processes underlying *how* relationships are formed between young people taking part in School Linking. The final stage recaps the key findings.

In light of the findings, the report presents a reassessment of the theoretical underpinnings of School Linking: a context-specific form of 'peaceful relations' framed through 'contact theory'. The report closes with an update on how the outcomes of the research have informed the future planning, delivery and evaluation of School Linking moving forward.

## Key terms

**CPD day:** 'Continuing professional development' day in which teachers are trained by F&BF in interfaith and intercultural dialogue facilitation skills. At the time of the research, CPD days were held three times a year for teachers on the School Linking programme.

**Experienced teacher:** A teacher who has participated in School Linking programme for one or more previous years.

**Focus School:** One of four schools which agreed to be subjects of participant observation.

**Link Day:** Day in which two classes meet at a neutral venue, or a school, as part of the School Linking programme. Held three times a year.

**Link School:** School participating in the School Linking programme.

**Linking Teacher:** Teacher leading a class participating in the School Linking programme.

**New teacher:** A teacher who has not been part of the School Linking programme in previous years.

## School Linking: An overview

Founded in 1997 and formally known as Three Faiths Forum (3FF), F&BF is an organisation aimed at bringing people of "all faiths and beliefs" together. The organisation asserts that this is "the most effective way to tackle ignorance and challenge stereotypes – and create understanding and trust between people" (Faith & Belief Forum 2020a). School Linking

is one of F&BF's programmes that seeks to achieve this goal.

With its origins in The Linking Network (TLN, explored in Section 2 of this report), the structure of School Linking is twofold. F&BF facilitates three CPD days every academic year, during which training in interfaith and intercultural dialogue is delivered to the teachers who are participating in School Linking. The training activities are at times tailored to 'new' teachers, who are new to the programme, and 'experienced' teachers, who have taken part in School Linking for one or more years. During the training, teachers are provided with age-specific (primary or secondary school) resources.

Prior to the CPD training, F&BF 'links' teachers for the duration of the academic year, who in partnership deliver three 'Link Days'. At each Link Day the teachers bring their respective classes together for a number of activities, based upon three questions. 'Who am I?' explores identity, 'Who are we?' explores belonging and community, and 'Where do we live and how do we live together?' explores society and citizenship. The activities are often creative; past Link Days have included poetry, art and story-telling. The first Link Day takes place at a neutral venue and the second and third held at the teachers' respective schools.

During the course of the research upon which this report is based, the language F&BF used to describe School Linking evolved. When the research commenced in 2016, the programme was publicly called the 'Faith School Linking' programme and described in F&BF's annual report as "an effective way in which students can learn about other faiths and beliefs, and enrich the wider school community by bringing students of other faith and belief backgrounds into their school" (Three Faiths Forum 2016: 5).

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the programme's name changed to 'School Linking' to reflect the fact that schools without a religious character were integrated into the initiative. One year later, the organisation adopted the name the Faith & Belief Forum (originally named Three Faiths Forum), to "clearly communicate that we are completely inclusive and welcome to people of all faiths and beliefs, whether religious or not" (Faith & Belief Forum 2020c).

At the time of writing this report, School Linking is described as follows:

---

The School Linking Programme matches students and classes from different cultural or faith backgrounds to explore issues of identity, community and belief. [...] the programme's focus is to equip teachers with the skills, knowledge and support to provide these opportunities for their students. (Faith & Belief Forum 2020b)

---

The research findings presented in this report should therefore be interpreted against the backdrop of F&BF's evolving organisational identity.

## The linking process

The research involved teachers and students from two academic years: 2016-17 and 2017-18. At the start of the research process, the basis upon which schools were paired together in 2016-17 were analysed to uncover nuances, and potential implications of, the linking process.

The 2016-17 academic year consisted 52 classes from 45 schools in London, Greater

London, Hertfordshire and Birmingham. F&BF held the following demographic information on the classes: key stage, school faith 'ethos', school borough, gender of entry and 'experience' of the teacher (see Key Terms). Using the schools' locations, the research further identified the classes' levels of 'ethnic diversity'<sup>i</sup>, levels of social deprivation<sup>ii</sup> and levels of academic performance<sup>iii</sup>. Whilst these indicators were representative of the school students on average, it was important to use the statistics as a guide only, since the extent to which the students chosen to take part in School Linking are representative of the students as a whole differs between schools.

No links were made between schools of the same faith ethos. Rather, of the 26 'links', 12 were between Christian-ethos and Muslims-ethos schools and six between Jewish-ethos and Muslim-ethos schools. There were two links between Christian-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools, and two between Jewish-ethos schools and community schools (the latter with no religious character<sup>iv</sup>). The three remaining links were between Sikh-ethos and Christian-ethos schools, Sikh-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools and Hindu-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools.

Other demographics were as follows:

- Over two thirds (34) of the classes were from primary schools and 18 were from secondary schools.
- More than three quarters were from co-educational schools, five were from boys' schools and seven were from girls' schools.
- 39 classes were led by teachers who were new to School Linking. 13 were led by 'experienced' teachers (see Key Terms).

- 24 classes were from schools with above average levels of ethnic diversity, 26 were from schools with below average levels and data was unavailable for two classes.
- Six classes were from schools with above average levels of social deprivation, 14 were from schools with below average levels and data was unavailable for 20 classes.
- 28 classes were from schools with above average levels of academic performance, 11 were from schools with below average levels and data was unavailable for 13 classes.

An analysis of this combined demographic information revealed that F&BF tended to link classes across the same key stage, gender and levels of teacher experience. Similarly, more than half of the classes were paired within the same London borough (in Birmingham and Hertfordshire, the classes were all based in the same area). Of the other pairs, all but three were within five miles of each other.

With regard to the demographic statistics uncovered by this research (ethnic diversity, social deprivation and academic performance) and unknown to F&BF, classes were much less likely to be matched with a class with a similar level to them. The research thus took the opportunity to explore how these demographics affected students' experiences of School Linking (See Section 4.2).

In 2017-18, there were 74 classes from 68 schools taking part; an increase on 2016-17. Whilst 11 classes did not return for 2017-18, 15 classes from 13 schools joined for the first time. The demographic details were largely unchanged, however the data collected in 2017-18 focused solely on schools in London and Greater London.

## 2. Importance of the research

This research speaks to four strands of social and academic debate: the role of ‘worldviews’ in religion and education, young people’s attitudes to religious and cultural diversity in the UK, faith schooling and its role in promoting community cohesion, and the evaluation of interfaith initiatives with young people. Each of these themes reveals original ways in which research into School Linking can further learning amongst academics and practitioners.

### Religion and education: A move towards worldviews

Although School Linking does not constitute part of the national curriculum, research into Religious Education (RE) highlights a number of themes relevant to this research.

Education literature has been recently grappling with the practical and conceptual implications of the inclusion of non-religious beliefs into RE, with the Commission on Religious Education’s 2018 report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* presenting a vision for the future of RE through the suggested subject title of ‘Religion and Worldviews’ (CoRE 2018). Defined in the report as “a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world” (CoRE 2018: 26), the report’s proposal to integrate the concept of ‘worldview’ into RE welcomes recommendations by the 2004 British National Framework for Religious Education and the British Humanist Association, that non-religious views be incorporate into local

and national curricula (BHA 2015a, 2015b; Watson 2008, 2010). Whilst the Commission’s proposal has been praised among academics and practitioners (Casley 2019; Dinham 2019; Flanagan 2019; Religious Education Council 2018; Theos 2017), the then Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP stated that no curriculum changes would be made as a result of the report (Hinds 2018). At the time of writing, further research has been undertaken to explore different interpretations of the concept of ‘worldview’ in greater detail in order to explore and defend the recommendations in the report (Theos 2020).

The government’s hesitancy to implement change is symbolic of the issues around the ambiguities and practicalities of teaching a model of RE that is inclusive of the Commission’s categorisation of “personal worldviews”.<sup>v</sup>

---

The integration of ‘non-religious worldviews’ into an area that previously, in many countries, has dealt specifically with religions is probably the biggest challenge facing educators in this field. (Jackson 2014a: 139)

---

Firstly, there are conceptual issues, not least the question of what do we mean by ‘worldviews’? Academics are studying an apparent move towards belief that is more individualised in nature (Davie 1990, 1994; Woodhead and Heelas 2005) and those researching young people in particular point to a process of religious and non-religious identity formation that is increasingly complex and shaped by multiple factors, including family, school, gender, media and world events (Catto 2014; Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019). It is difficult, then, to define

worldviews in a way that presents it in its complexity.

Secondly, alongside the conceptual issues, there are practical ones. Although research in this area is limited, academics, supported by The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) have argued that despite RE teachers expressing interest in the teaching of personal worldviews, including those that are non-religious, there are associated challenges with teacher capacity. For example, time constraints, classroom management, a lack resources and an absence of specialist training for non-specialist teachers are all stated as barriers to the effective inclusion of worldviews in the RE curriculum (Dinham and Shaw 2015; Everington 2018; NATRE 2017).

It is against this backdrop that teachers (both religion specialists and non-specialists) take part in School Linking. This research indicates that practical constraints can inhibit their participation in the programme (see Section 4.3), thus contributing to the growing body of evidence recommending more teacher support from school leadership. Similarly, the difficulties of understanding and integrating the concept of ‘worldviews’ into School Linking is one which this research addresses; Section 5 explores how the programme can use theory to embrace, rather than shy away, from the concept.

## Attitudes to religious and cultural diversity

As School Linking supports the move towards language of worldviews, so too does it hold the core view that the school is a site where young people develop

attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity.

This position reflects that of a body of research that has taken place over the past 14 years to explore how young people’s attitudes to diversity have been shaped in the UK. Two research projects conducted by teams from the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick have generated a wealth of learning relevant to this research.

The ‘REDCo’ project, *Religion in Education: a Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?*, was conducted in the UK alongside eight other European countries to explore how students’ attitudes to religious diversity and RE informed dialogue and influenced potential instances of conflict. Notably, the project suggested that, for students, a safe classroom environment was essential for facilitating open and honest discussion (Jackson 2014b). This finding was further developed by Jackson (2014a) in his seminal work on the religious dimension to intercultural education, *Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education* (referred to in this report as ‘Signposts’).

Jackson’s advocacy of ‘safe space’ as the optimum classroom atmosphere for discussions about religious and cultural diversity mirrors the position of School Linking, in which the importance of setting a safe space through five key principles (respect, active listening, ‘dialogue not debate’, ‘I statements’ and ‘oops and ouch’) is emphasised during the teacher CPD days. Moreover, teachers are expected to visit and revisit the concept of safe space with their students at all three Link Days. The

concept is discussed in relation to this research in Section 4.5.

The *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project, an extension of the UK strand of the REDCo research, resulted in numerous studies and publications about the ways in which students' attitudes to diversity develop. Of particular relevance to School Linking, Arweck (2017) studied how attitudes to diversity were fostered in community schools, which do not have a religious character. Arweck found that the community school, by its nature as a site in which students are exposed to religious and cultural diversity, provide "external and internal scaffolding" (2017: 147) for the development of positive attitudes towards other students.

---

[C]ommon interests and shared activities foster intercultural and interreligious understanding by allowing young people to do things together without any particular focus on religious or cultural background. Their schooling is thus a kind of apprenticeship for life. (Arweck 2017: 148)

---

This positive depiction of the community school has been mirrored by other researchers, who suggest that community schools foster interfaith understanding between students by virtue of their diversity (Burtonwood 2006: 74, Jackson 2003: 79, MacMullen 2007: 32).

This evaluation of School Linking was fortunate to commence immediately following the first year that community schools took part in the programme. Thus the research had the opportunity to consider for the first time the unique role that community schools play a) in the

programme, and b) in shaping students' attitudes towards diversity more generally, with the findings reported in Section 4.5.

Lastly, Jackson advocated in *Signposts* a greater focus on hosting religion-related events in schools, and taking school trips to external venues, such as places of worship. He sees these as tools to foster 'intercultural competence', which he describes as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes which enables learners to: understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself; respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people [and]; establish positive and constructive relationships with such people" (Jackson 2014a: 34).

---

There is a limited amount of European research on the use of visitors and outside visits and related activities in creating links between schools and wider communities in the field of religions and beliefs. (Jackson 2014a: 95)

---

That there is a limited amount of existing research in this area means that there is a space for this research into School Linking and its focus on the importance of between-school visits to contribute to a small but significant area of work.

## Community cohesion and faith schooling

In spite of an increasing number of community schools joining School Linking since 2016, the programme first and foremost works with faith schools.<sup>vi</sup>



In the past two decades, discourse on faith schooling in the UK has been characterised by conflict. There is a body of organisational literature, spearheaded by the 2001 *Cantle Report*<sup>vii</sup>, that represents faith schools as inhibiting ‘community cohesion’, defined in 2008 by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG 2008: 10), as “what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together” (Bell, 2005; Cantle 2016; Casey 2016; Home Office 2001; Ouseley 2001).

The perceptions that faith schooling inhibits community cohesion appear to be validated by research demonstrating the negative impact of the physical segregation of young people in schools. Studies into Roman Catholic and Protestant schools in Northern Ireland validate claims that the physical segregation of students who attend single-faith schools has a negative impact of cohesion by promoting suspicion, distrust and extreme views on politics (Hayes et al. 2007, 2013, Hughes et al. 2013, Stringer et al. 2000, 2009). Other research has illustrated the positive impact of attending integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Studies suggest that integrated schooling develops mixed faith friendships (Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery 2003; Hughes et al. 2013; McGlynn et al. 2004) and positive attitudes towards students of other faiths (Schubotz and Robinson 2006).

A number of criticisms have been levelled at the *Cantle Report*, however, including claims that it promotes Islamophobia (Alam and Husband 2012) and problematises ideas around ‘difference’ (Shannahan 2017). Others argue that faith schools in fact *promote* cohesion, citing higher social cohesion Ofsted scores for faith schools (Church of England Archbishops’ Council Education Division 2009) or the ethos of faith schooling, which reportedly promotes

tolerance (Flint 2009) and confidence (Miller 2001) among young people.

This research into School Linking does not take an explicit stance on the role of faith schooling in the community cohesion agenda. However, it recognises a trend in critiques of faith schools to oversimplify and generalise their religious characteristics. The tendency to frame single-faith schools as homogenous, or as ‘communities’ in and of themselves, is recognised by some academics (Grace 2003; Hemming 2011; Jackson 2003; 2014a; MacMullen 2007), who argue that potential religious plurality among students, *within and between* religious and non-religious beliefs, risks being overlooked. After all, not all students attending a faith school will share the same beliefs or indeed be religious at all (Hemming and Roberts 2018).

---

Many of the [...] debates have focused on the macro-scale of the community, namely residential segregation [...] often ignoring the micro scale of the educational institutions themselves. (Hemming 2011: 64)

---

This research into School Linking thus took the opportunity to highlight the negative consequences of this rhetoric and explore the potential for multiple interfaith encounters amongst young people within and between faith schools.

## Evaluating interfaith

There have been a number of other organisation-driven interfaith initiatives with young people in the UK, two of which are concerned with facilitating contact

between students from schools with and without religious characters.

Identified in the *Cantle Report* as a means of addressing the “problems of mono-cultural schools” (Home Office 2001: 35), the concept of ‘school twinning’ between two to four schools was recommended for both faith and community schools. The Linking Network (TLN) was funded by the then-Labour government in 2007 and as of 2020, TLN oversees 28 linking programmes (of which School Linking is one) in which 30,000 children in 1,063 classes participate. The programme structure largely mirrors School Linking’s as described in Section 1 of this report.

The Northern Irish initiative of Shared Education, established in 2007, is structured around a high frequency of contact between young people. The programme creates partnerships between Roman Catholic, Protestant and integrated schools, and facilitates joint lessons based upon the curriculum. Students attend the lessons as often as once a week for at least a year (Loader 2016). More than 100 schools have participated in the programme and the proportion of integrated schools has increased to the extent that they are now overrepresented (Gallagher 2016: 9).

---

Shared education [...] seeks to provide frequent, sustained opportunities for Catholic and Protestant pupils to meet and build relationships, with the aim of promoting more positive attitudes and thereby challenging existing patterns of separation and division. (Loader and Hughes 2017a: 119)

---

Despite differences in the frequency of the contact between the young people taking part in TLN and Shared Education, the

findings of evaluation research into the programme share common themes. Evaluations have attributed the development of friendship between students to participation in the programmes (Raw 2006; Borooah and Knox 2013; Hughes et al. 2012; McClure Watters 2014), however evaluators questioned whether the types of friendships formed during these programmes were sustainable (Raw 2006; Loader and Hughes 2017b). They also stated a need for greater support from school leadership to enable teachers to meet the demands of participating (Shannahan 2018; Borooah and Knox 2013). The findings of this research into School Linking are situated in the context of these previous evaluations to maximise opportunities for shared learning.

Alongside practitioner-based initiatives, research-based interfaith work, although still concerned with issues of segregation and community cohesion, primarily aims to provide a greater understanding of the students’ own perceptions of interfaith encounters, as well as develop academic understanding of concepts such as ‘dialogue’. Leaders in this field have framed their research through a ‘dialogical’ approach, defined as one which enables young people to “engage in dialogue with other persons possessing other values and ideas” (Council of Europe 2008).

Ipsgrave conducted dialogical research within (2003b, 2013) and between (2003a, 2009) schools in a number of studies, including the first of its kind ‘email exchange’ programme, *Building E-Bridges*. The project, based in fifteen faith and community schools, paired students across schools (ensuring cultural and ethnic difference) and enabled them to communicate via email, as well as meet in



person. The purpose of the project was to develop understandings of the interfaith dialogue process itself, and explore the ways in which young people engage in, and communicate, ideas around 'difference'.

McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson's (2008) evaluation of *Building E-Bridges* found that, as with TLN and Shared Education, students' conversations implied the formation of friendships. In this case, young people's dialogue prioritised the themes of personal interests and religious practices over discussion of social issues or theological questions of belief. Once again, the evaluation highlighted the practical constraints on teachers as a barrier to the sustainability of the project.

So, evaluations of different kinds of interfaith initiatives throw up similar themes. This may be a reflection of the similarities between the evaluation processes. There is a tendency for evaluations to use multiple methods to collect and analyse data and links are regularly made with the community cohesion agenda.

However, there are some stark differences. Evaluations of practitioner- and government-based initiatives tend to conduct the evaluation in a way which maximises opportunities to directly attribute positive outcomes to the programme's activities. Such approaches are built upon the concept of 'theory of change' (Weiss 1995), described by Shannahan (2018: 35) as "a stepped assessment of the actions that need to be taken and the resources that need to be in place to generate specific measurable outcomes" (2018: 35). Evaluation of dialogical approaches to interfaith work, conversely, tends to avoid testing for assumed project outcomes, instead acknowledging that academic concepts are

difficult to define in such a way that they can be measured.

---

[T]he tools needed for such an approach would be measurement, scientific objectivity and prediction. However, religion, which by its very nature is uncertain, controversial and subjective, fits uneasily into such a frame. (Gay 2018: 1)

---

Recognising the differences of these evaluation approaches reveals a gap which this research into School Linking addresses. Namely, there is a space for this study of School Linking to *combine* academic research with impact evaluation in order to develop a unique understanding of the processes involved in School Linking's interfaith encounters. Presenting a context-specific understanding of the outcomes of School Linking will allow F&BF to reflectively design the programme and evaluation of School Linking based on the findings of this research.

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this research was to provide an original account of the relationships between ‘interfaith encounters’ and ‘peaceful relations’ in schools, by exploring and evaluating School Linking. The research took a three-fold approach to meeting this objective and integrated an evaluative component into the research design to maximise its practical application to School Linking.

#### A three-phased research design

The structure of the research was based on three phases, each with the purpose of addressing a different question. The first phase sought to answer the question, ‘What impact can be captured by the Faith & Belief Forum’s evaluation data?’ This phase analysed 1,488 surveys designed by the School Linking team and completed during the 2016-17 academic year by students (1,427 surveys) and teachers (61 surveys). The electronic dataset based upon these documents and created for this research was the first of its kind to capture attitudes of students and teachers from 75 schools in London and Birmingham.

The second phase of the research drew upon new data collected during the 2017-18 academic year, to address the question, ‘How does school linking inform or inhibit peaceful relations in schools at the interpersonal and institutional levels?’. For this phase, teachers were requested to complete an open-ended survey at the beginning of the School Linking year, in which they were asked about their expectations of the programme under the headings of ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘attitudes’. These, academic literature

argues, are the key components of ‘intercultural competence’ (Council of Europe 2014; Jackson 2014a). Focus groups were subsequently held with School Linking teachers to discuss the outcomes of the programme in relation to their expectations that they shared at the start of the year. Teacher training was observed, as were six Link Days conducted by four ‘focus schools’ (two of which had a Muslim-ethos, one a Jewish-ethos, and one a Church of England-ethos). This provided an opportunity for in-depth analysis of the Link Days themselves.

The final phase of the research reflected on the quantitative and qualitative findings to address the final question, ‘How can school linking influence academic understandings of ‘peaceful relations’?’. The purpose of this final phase was to develop an understanding of what ‘peaceful relations’ looks like in the context of School Linking. The research did this in terms of a specific academic theory, ‘contact theory’, which is explained in more detail in Section 5.

#### Approach to evaluation

Whilst this study constituted doctoral research, the research design integrated aspects of impact evaluation. The approach was critical of the assumption-driven model of evaluation often used by practitioners. Notably, it challenged the hypothesis-testing aspect of ‘theory of change’. Within a theory of change, concepts are often represented by a set of indicators which are subsequently measured, in this case ‘interfaith encounters’ and ‘peaceful relations’. However, the priority for this research was to inductively uncover findings that may or may not have been posited as an indicator of ‘peaceful relations’ had it taken a theory of change approach. The research similarly embraced the idea that

alternative, or other unexpected variables could be at play in School Linking.

---

Watch carefully for the unexpected – little things along the way that almost go unnoticed and unexpected changes often provide insight into the complexity of the change process. (Lederach, Neufeldt and Culberston 2007: 5)

---

It was important that the research recognised that “interventions always and only take place in context” (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 277). So, rather than simply asking whether a programme works, this research asked what worked for different actors, in different circumstances.

Lastly, the research was designed to build upon School Linking’s staff and students’ intrinsic knowledge and experience of the programme. By adopting a “double reflexive” approach advocated by Knauth and Vieregge in their religion and education research (2019: 32), the study placed significant value on the researcher-participant relationship in order to generate a unique theoretical framework of peaceful relations with practical relevance to the actors in School Linking.

## Limitations and Ethical considerations

By design, this research challenged the assumption that generalisations can be made about the findings which supersede the context of School Linking itself. A benefit to case study research is that a context can be understood in its entirety to understand the specific processes within it. Similarly, the evaluative aspect of this

research is one which values context; it questions the assertion that such research should be replicable. Therefore these findings cannot be applied outside of the research sample. Rather, they contribute to the social and academic debates outlined in Section 2 and underpin a unique theory of ‘peaceful relations’ that may inform or generate discussion in religious organisations, schools and other interfaith or intercultural organisations which are grappling with how to foster constructive dialogue and peaceful relations in contexts where conflict is present.

The research recognises the limitations of studying School Linking for a limited time. In a school context, School Linking’s long-term impact may only be revealed once the students are in a new class. To manage expectations, the research adopted Parker-Jenkins’ (2018) ‘ethno-case study’ approach, which, “employs techniques associated with long-term and intensive ethnography, but which is limited in terms of scope and time spent in the field” (2008: 24).

The research adhered to Coventry University’s ‘Data Protection and Principles and Standards of Conduct on the Governance of Applied Research policies’ at all times. A data management plan was created to ensure the safety of all data and participants, which was approved by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations Ethics Committee. The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants was upheld throughout the research. Recognising that there are a particular set of ethical challenges to address when undertaking research with young people, stringent ethical procedures regarding consent and assent were rigorously followed and reviewed throughout the duration of the research.

## 4. Key findings

The research generated a wealth of quantitative and qualitative findings, which this section presents in six themes.

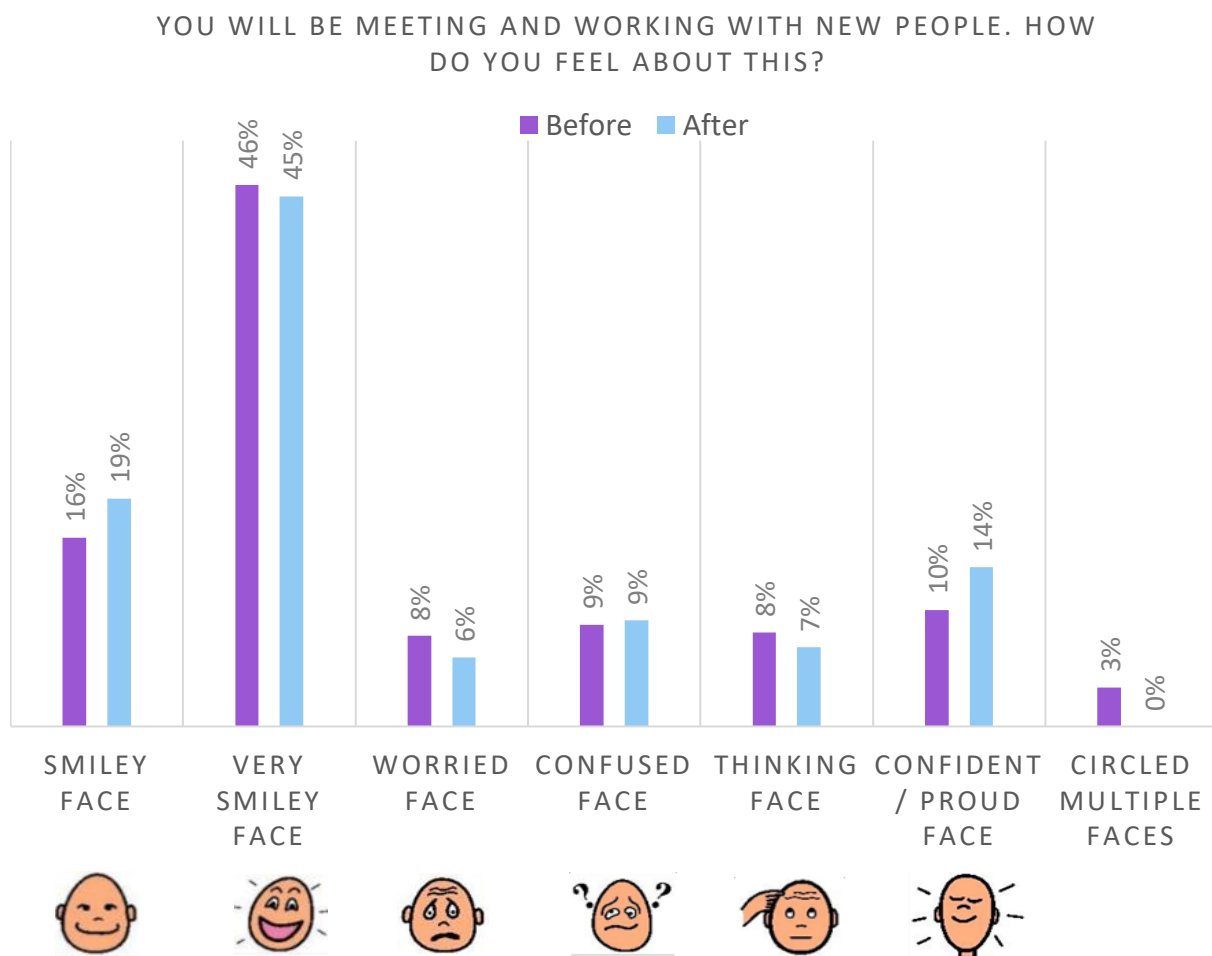
### 4.1 Student surveys

This section presents the findings from 1,427 surveys completed by primary and secondary School Linking students in 2016-17. Of the surveys, 777 were completed at the start of School Linking, 260 at the end of School Linking and 390 as reflections after individual Link Days.

### Perceptions and enjoyment of School Linking

At the beginning of School Linking 634 primary school students circled a face to represent how they felt about the prospect of taking part. Almost three quarters chose the 'very smiley', 'smiley' or 'confident/proud' face, compared to fewer than one in five choosing the 'worried' or 'confused' face: a very positive start.

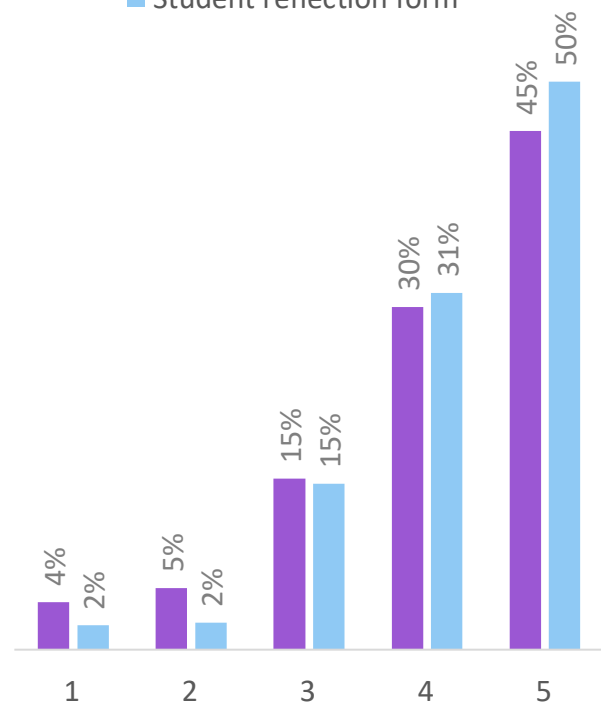
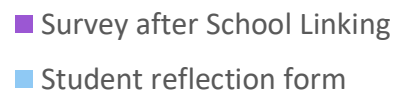
Of the 222 students who chose to respond again at the end of School Linking, the percentages were largely unchanged, although there was a notable increase in students feeling confident or proud.



*Word cloud of feelings stated by secondary school students in response to the prospect of School Linking<sup>viii</sup>*



Again, the overall picture is very positive, with more than three quarters of students (75% in the survey at the end of School Linking and 81% in the student reflection forms) circling a 4 or a 5. Fewer than 1 in 10 students scored a 1 or a 2.



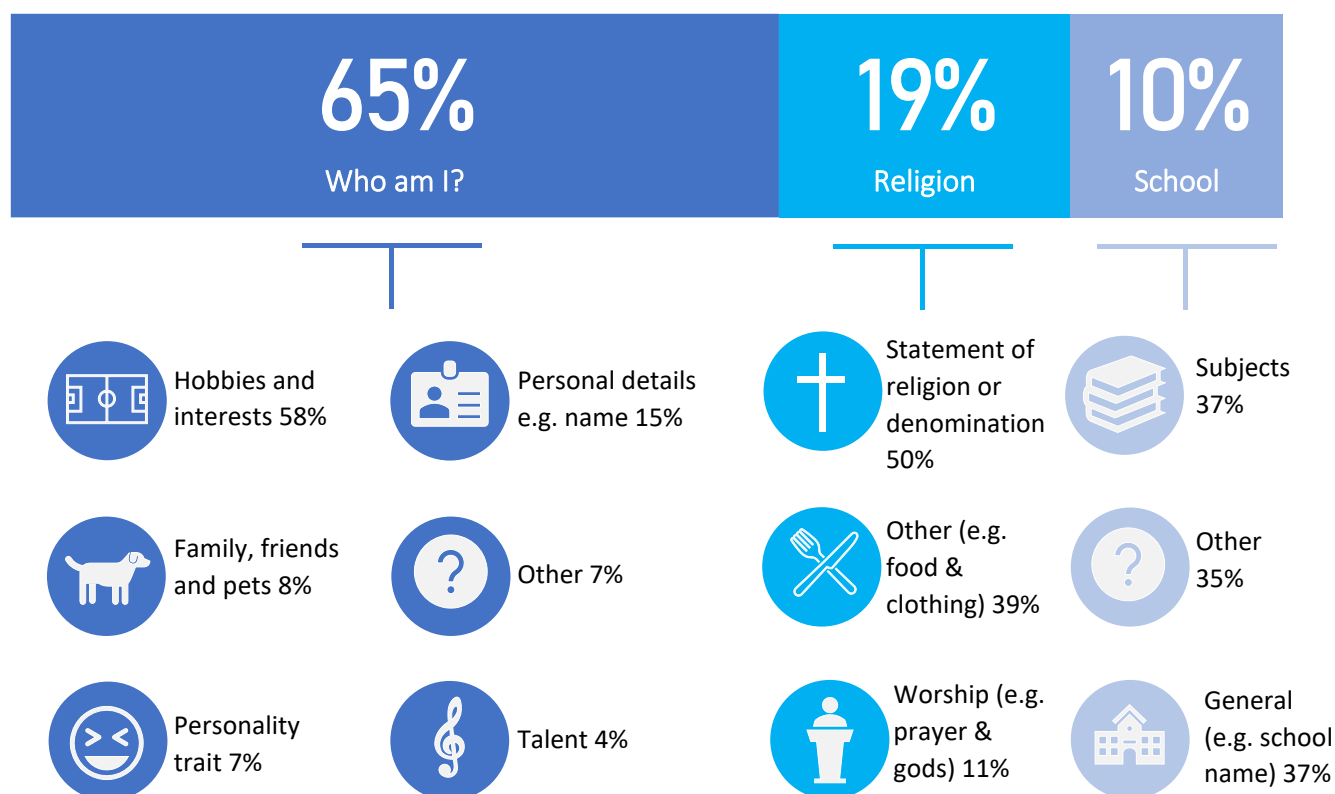
17

More than a third of students shared that there was no room for improvement in School Linking, and just under a third suggested improvements with the School Linking structure, such as extending the programme to include more Link Days or expanding the links to more than two schools. Previous evaluations of TLN discovered similar student ideas (Kerr et al. 2011: 60). These positive suggestions allude to the potential for longevity and inclusivity in School Linking. Almost one in five students suggested an improvement to the Linking content or experience, for example having more free time. This example was identified by Raw (2009: 26) in her evaluation of TLN and again suggests that unstructured time for interaction may have a specific value or meaning for the students.

## Discussions, similarities and differences

At the start of School Linking, primary school students were requested to list up to three things they would like to share with, and three things they would like to ask, students from their Link School. Secondary school students were asked to write a single, longer response. After School Linking, students were again asked what they shared with, and asked, their Link School. In total, students shared 4,288 questions and statements, which were analysed under the headings of 'religion', 'who am I?' and 'school'.

*Categorisation of 4,288 questions and statements shared by students during Link Days*

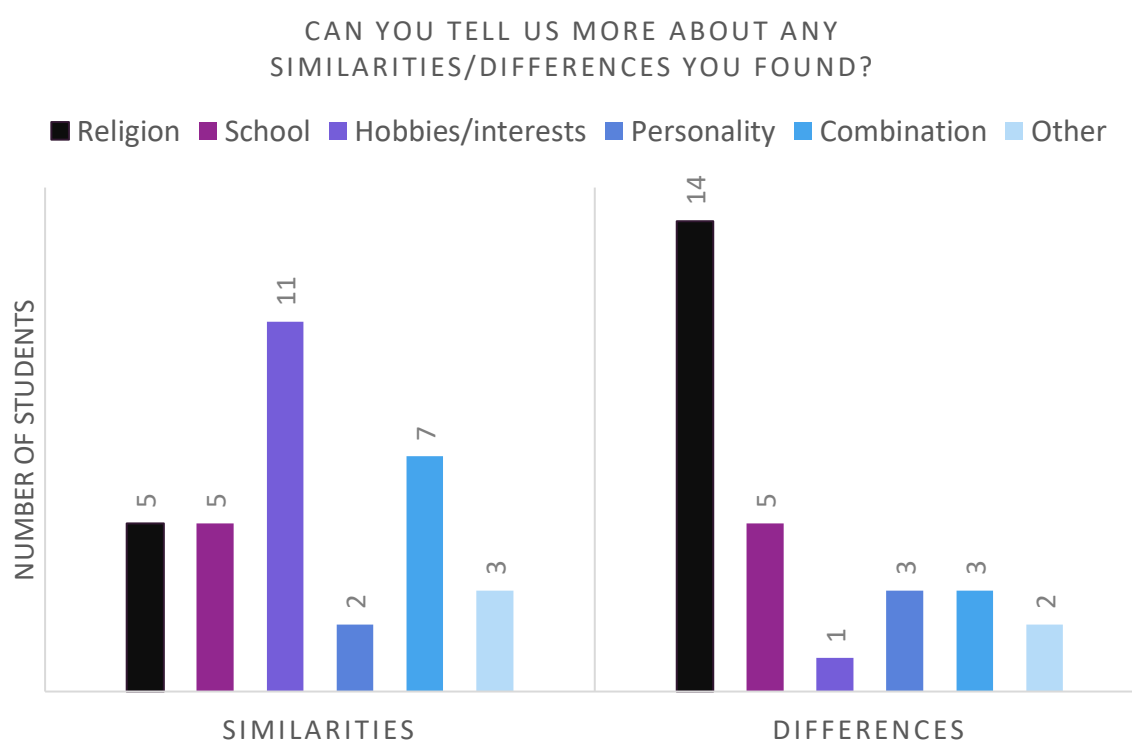


Both before and after School Linking, almost two thirds of responses related to ‘who am I?’, with ‘hobbies/likes and dislikes’ overwhelmingly the most frequent theme discussed in the Link Days. This finding is echoed in previous evaluations of interfaith initiatives. Loader and Hughes (2017b: 125), for example, found that personal interests were largely discussed among young people in the Northern Ireland Shared Education programme.

Almost one in five responses related to ‘religion’, with half of these simply a statement of religious belief or denomination. Just one in ten was related to ‘school’. The students’ hesitancy to discuss aspects of their schools is once again a finding identified by other researchers, with Kerr et al. (2011: 7) noting that TLN’s impact on students’ “willingness to express opinions and perceptions of school” is limited.

Alongside this question, secondary school students were additionally asked at the end of School Linking to reflect on similarities and differences they found with their Link School. The 33 responses were analysed under six headings: ‘religion’, ‘school’, ‘hobbies/interests’, ‘personality’, ‘combination’ and ‘other’.

A third of the students perceived similarities in hobbies/interests with the students from their Link School, reflecting findings from evaluations of TLN (Kerr et al. 2011: 55), as well as research into intercultural education, which found that students perceive “shared interests” as a “precondition for peaceful coexistence” (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 7). This supports the previous finding that students largely asked about, and shared, this aspect of personal identity with the students from their Link School.





When students were asked about perceived differences, half of all students stated 'religion'. This is more than twice that identified in other evaluations. Kerr et al. (2011: 51) found, for example, that less than a quarter of students taking part in TLN identified differences in 'religious practices'. Section 4.5 revisits how meaningful difference is explored in School Linking.

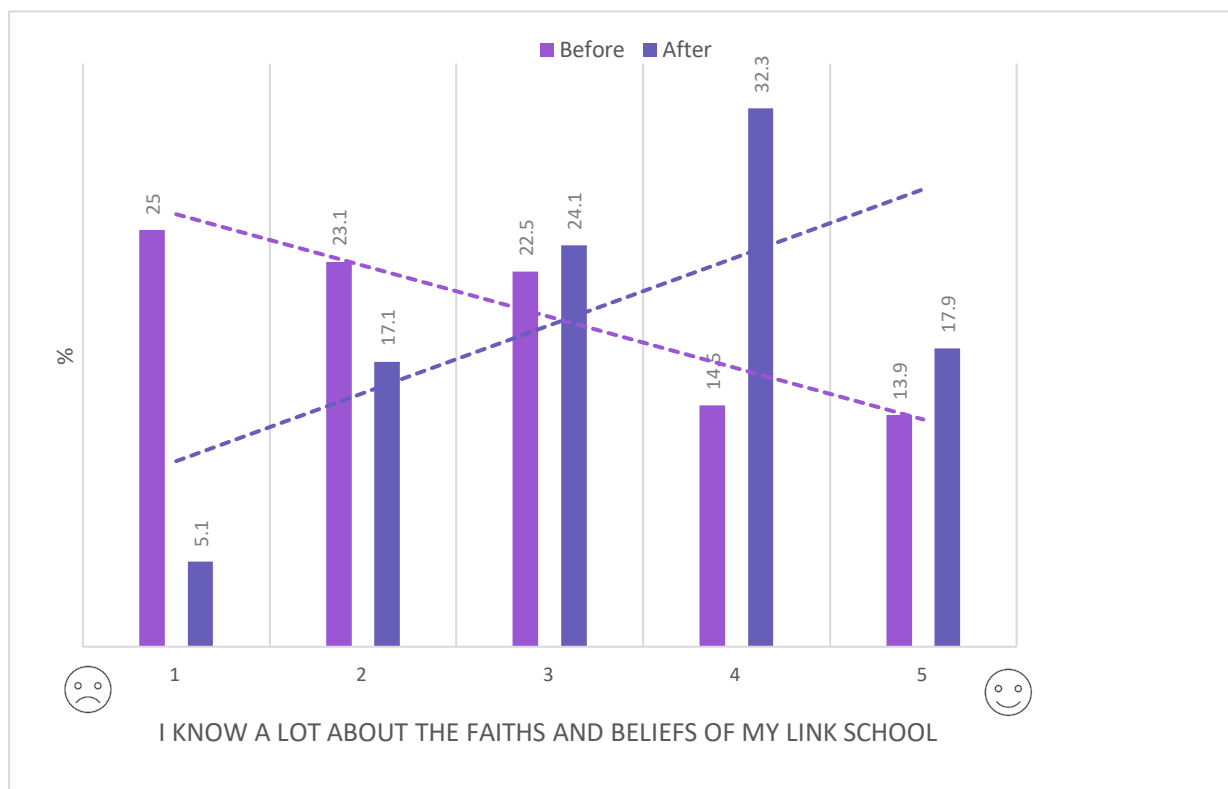
## Before and after – what changed?

In the surveys, students were presented with attitude statements and asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with them (from 1, disagree to 5, agree). Analysing their responses at the beginning and end of School Linking revealed the extent to which students' attitudes had changed during the programme.

The most drastic change was observed in relation to the statement, 'I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of my Link School'. Before School Linking, almost half of the 761 students who responded disagreed, scoring a 1 or a 2. After School Linking, the trend inverted, with half of the 257 students who responded at the end of the programme now scoring a 4 or a 5, and just 5% scoring a 1.

This echoes Kerr et al.'s (2011) evaluation of TLN, which found that more than half of students indicated that they had "learned something new [...] about people from different backgrounds" (2011: 66).

Moreover, as students reportedly learned more about the students from their Link School, their confidence working with, and talking to, the students increased.





This data alone, however, is unable to convey the *type* of knowledge reported by the students. The student reflection forms, which were completed after individual Link Days, provided 367 examples of what students felt their Link School learned about them, and what they themselves had learned about ‘the faith or belief of someone else’. Typical responses relating explicitly to religion tended to draw upon generic, factual knowledge. For example:

- Atheists don’t believe in anything.
- Muslims pray on a mat in a temple.
- Hindus eat only veg.

These examples illustrate the potential for students to take away a type of knowledge that is potentially more factually oversimplified or inaccurate than anticipated, demonstrating that the learning outcomes are more complex than indicated in the student surveys alone. This issue is revisited in Section 4.5.

Aside from the reported increase in knowledge, both before and after School Linking, students generally agreed with the following statements:

- The children from the Link School will be/were interested in me and will want/wanted to know more about me.
- I will feel/felt able to work with the children from the Link School.
- I will feel/felt able to talk to the children from the Link School.
- I think the students at my Link School will be/were different to me.
- I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class.

School Linking students, then, were generally confident about the prospect of

interaction and cooperation with the students from their Link School, and this attitude remained unchanged. Similarly, the first three statements were positively correlated; in other words, if a student agreed with one statement, they were likely to agree with the others, illustrating the multidimensional nature of attitudinal change.

Lastly, students generally agreed with the statement ‘I think the students at my Link School will be/were different to me’. Both before and after School Linking, more than half of the students scored either a 4 or a 5, indicating that a feeling of ‘difference’ among the students was tangible and unchanged throughout the programme.

What is unclear, however, is the extent to which students were interpreting ‘difference’ in positive or negative terms. Some student responses clearly reported an optimistic take on the concept:

---

...even though our religions are different we are all still girls and like to do the same types of things.  
(Year 8 student from a Church of England-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school)

---

However, students were more likely to report enjoying School Linking if they felt that their Link School students were *similar* to them. Equally, if a student perceived similarity with their Link School students, they were more likely to report that they were interested in each other. The ambiguity of ‘difference’ deserved further attention in the second phase of the research, addressed in Section 4.5.

## 4.2 What influences students' attitudes towards School Linking?

The findings summarised in the previous section were influenced by a number of 'variables' identified through statistical testing. The following factors were found to be statistically significant<sup>x</sup> in influencing the students' survey responses.<sup>xi</sup>

### Age

Despite previous academic research into young people's attitudes to religious diversity finding "no significant association" between attitude and age (Francis and McKenna 2017), whether a student attended a primary or secondary school influenced their responses in the student surveys.

In general, primary school and early secondary school students reported the most positive perceptions of the prospect of School Linking at the start of the year. Although older students were more likely to report neutral or indifference attitudes towards the programme at the start of the year, there was positive change in attitude by the end of the programme.

Primary school students were most likely to share aspects of 'who am I?', for example, hobbies, with their Link School Students. They also associated School Linking with the potential to make new friends.

Secondary school students were most likely to view School Linking as an explicitly religion-based activity, and frame the programme as an educational tool to develop knowledge, skills or attitudes.

---

I am interested in learning RE in a different environment and this may also help me in my GCSEs. (Year 9 student from a Muslim-ethos school, linked with a Roman Catholic-ethos school)

---

After School Linking, primary school students generally reported that they had made friends, and secondary school students were more likely than primary school students to state that they had developed knowledge, skills or attitudes. Both cases demonstrate that the expectations of different age groups were met, providing evidence for the benefit of F&BF's different age-based resources prescribed for primary and secondary schools on the programme.

### Teacher experience

At the start of School Linking, students with 'experienced' teachers (see Key Terms) felt relatively more positive at the prospect of the year than students led by a teacher who was taking part for the first time. Similarly, students with 'experienced' teachers were more likely than those with 'new' teachers to feel that the students from their Link School would be interested in them.

However, after School Linking, it was the students with 'new' teachers who were the mostly likely to report feeling able to talk to their Link School students. Moreover they were more likely to report that their Link School students were similar to them than those with 'experienced' teachers.

These survey responses alone are unable to explain *why* this unexpected change occurred. Section 4.3 explores this finding in

light of additional data collected in the second phase of the research.

## Faith ethos

The research was unable to infer influence from a school's *specific* faith ethos. This was due to the unrepresentative nature of the 2016-17 School Linking survey responses. When surveys were completed at the start of School Linking, the students who responded were largely representative of the Linking cohort in general. However, the 260 survey responses at the end of School Linking did not represent the students taking part. For example, students from Christian- and Jewish-ethos schools were overrepresented and students from Muslim-ethos schools very underrepresented.

However, the research revealed significant findings comparing students from schools with a faith ethos in general with students from community schools.

At the start of School Linking, on the whole students from faith schools felt positive about the prospect of taking part. However, one in three students from community schools students felt negative.<sup>xii</sup> After School Linking had taken place, the faith school students who were *linked with* community school students, on average, reported feeling that the students were less interested in them than expected. What is more, the proportion of faith school students who initially felt that community school students would be similar to them before School Linking took place halved by the end of the programme.

For example, a year 5 student from a Jewish-ethos school, linked with a class from a community school, reported feeling "clueless" about his School Linking

experience, stating "because they had a whole different religion".

Unfortunately, no students from community schools returned their surveys at the end of School Linking.

These findings are surprising since academics have described community schools as sites providing "the obvious opportunity for [...] inter-cultural experience" (Burtonwood 2006: 74), as "the institutions that can best provide the context for every child on his or her path to full participation in the liberal democratic polity" (MacMullen 2007: 32), and "ideally placed for dialogue and communication between different positions, whether between children and others beyond the school or between children from different backgrounds within the school" (Jackson 2003: 79).

---

...the overarching advantages of multi-faith schools [...] mixing with young people with a range of beliefs and customs is good preparation for meeting people from diverse backgrounds at university or in employment. (Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 170)

---

Then again, there is a lack of consensus when it comes to research into relationships between students attending faith and community schools. Whilst Bruegel (2006: 2) claims that secondary community school students are "largely opposed to 'faith' schools", others found that whether or not a student attends a school with a religious character has no influence on attitudes to religious diversity (Francis and Village 2014; Raw 2006).

In acknowledging findings from previous research, there is a danger of overstating

the hostility relating to community schools in the survey analysis. It is also important to recognise that there were three classes from community schools participating in School Linking in 2016-17, and only two responded to the survey at the start of the programme. Since the findings relating to school faith ethos were perhaps more complex than first appeared, the second phase of the research engaged with the community school teachers taking part in the programme in more detail. The additional findings are presented in Section 4.5 of the report.

## Academic performance

The schools' levels of academic performance influenced some of the classes' survey responses, indicating that factors unknown to F&BF when they pair schools (see Section 1) have the potential to influence students' experiences of the programme.

First, when students completed surveys at the start of School Linking, the higher the school's level of academic performance, the more likely the students were to a) feel positive about the prospect of the programme b) feel able to work with their Link School students, c) know about the faith of their Link School students, and d) know about the faith of their own class.

However, secondary schools in particular illustrated a huge range of levels of academic performance. The English secondary school average for students achieving grade 5 or above in the 2016-17 Maths and English GCSEs was 39.6%. The average was higher for schools taking part in School Linking that year (58%), but the levels ranged from 7% to 93%.

Potential negative outcomes occurred when schools were linked *across* particularly high and low levels of academic performance (in one case a school performing at 25% was linked with a school performing at 80%). In these links, at the end of the programme students reported lower levels of confidence in being able to work with, and talk to, each other.

Students from schools with different levels of academic performance similarly reported enjoying very different aspects of School Linking. Over a third of students from schools with above average levels of academic performance stated visiting the neutral venues, visiting the Link Schools and hosting the Link Day as their favourite parts, compared to just 3.8% of students from schools performing at below average levels. Rather, students from underperforming schools were most likely to favourite the structured activities during the Link Days.

These findings thus serve as an illustration of how school demographics can influence the dynamics of the School Linking experience. Section 5 will explore this further, when the implications of demographics as indicators of equal or unequal status between students in School Linking are considered.

The following three sections summarise findings from the second phase of the research, which collected and analysed qualitative data from a smaller sample of Linking Teachers and students to generate an in-depth understanding of the processes underlying relationship building in School Linking.

## 4.3 Teachers and school support

Interpersonal relations between teachers were found to be generally very strong. Positive relations between teachers were observed at the CPD days, and teachers reflected on what was often an explicit attempt at modelling positive interfaith relations to their respective classes.

---

[Students] see you and I embrace at the beginning and at the end. And they also see our teachers embracing the other teachers. [...] So if we can get on with each other, we're modelling it for them but we're not doing it in a false way because we're actually doing it because we're friends. [...] It's modelling in the best way. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

---

However, where communication between teachers was observed as breaking down, this at times resulted in student activities not being effectively managed.

Teachers' ability to effectively run Link Days was also influenced by their respective school roles. Where teachers with class teaching responsibilities were linked with teachers for whom interfaith activity was integrated into their job role, the problematic consequences of the difference in their capacity was highlighted.

Issues relating to practical challenges recurred in both the teachers' survey responses in 2016-17 and the data collected in 2017-18 through focus groups and observation. Logistical constraints relating to time and resources were an especially

common challenge for teachers, reflecting findings from previous evaluations of School Linking and TLN, as well as RE literature described in Section 2 that asserted a need for teacher training.

The previous section explored findings relating to differences in student outcomes resulting from the 'experience' of their teacher. Namely, levels of confidence among students with 'experienced' teachers tended to decrease by the end of School Linking compared to students with teachers new to the programme. Participant observation revealed that at an interpersonal level, disruptive behaviour among, or a lack of communication between, Link School students appeared to be driven by some 'experienced' teachers' unstructured approach to School Linking. Examples included using activities in Link Days that were not endorsed by F&BF and encouraged uncooperative behaviour among students, or implementing F&BF activities incorrectly (such as using age-inappropriate resources). That teachers' confidence in these approaches potentially blinded them to negative outcomes at the student level is a finding that mirrors

---

Teachers cited many examples of successful teamwork during link days, [... but] The extent of teamwork or cooperation actually taking place during these processes has varied, depending on the skill and attentiveness of teachers. (Raw 2006: 24)

---

previous evaluations of linking programmes.

An overconfidence in such approaches was found to be driven by a lack of engagement in the CPD days among 'experienced'

teachers who had taken part in School Linking for a significant number of years, highlighting the importance of catering for the specific needs of long-term Linking Teachers.

Lastly, at an institutional level, teachers reported their desired impact of School Linking on the school community in terms of the development of group attitudes, such as “open mindedness and accepting others” and “a consistent presence and voice to the importance of tolerance”. Whilst teachers described a feeling of sole responsibility for communicating their involvement in School Linking with the wider school community, and by extension, responsibility for facilitating the changes in institutional attitude, they were found to appreciate support from school leadership.

Support from leadership was sometimes leveraged by using School Linking as a tool to meet external pressures, such as Ofsted and duties associated with the community cohesion agenda. So, whilst external demands on teachers can exacerbate practical challenges (for example, time management), participation in School Linking can conversely offer an opportunity for the school as a whole to satisfy these demands.

## 4.4 Selection, power and space

Teachers’ methods of selecting students for School Linking channelled different ‘dimensions’ of power (Haugaard 2012). Some had implications at a school level, such as using a written application system to select the most ‘gifted’ students, or in one teacher’s words, “the best of the best”.

In this case, applications were judged on academic writing ability, presupposing an absence of equal opportunity for students’ right to take part in School Linking. Some teachers appeared to use this selection method to meet the challenges of an increasingly neoliberal education system. In other words, as schools compete to achieve “quantitatively measurable productivity and efficacy” (Noula and Govaris 2017), teachers are under pressure to further the profiles of academically talented students thereby enhancing the schools’ perceived achievements.

---

I think almost we want the programme to hit students that don’t opt in. (Focus group, male teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

---

Some co-educational schools were observed using a different selection method: segregating their students by gender out of respect to a single-sex faith school’s cultural practices. Segregating students must be done with caution, since the research showed that doing so risks feeding into harmful discourse around faith school policies.

Other selection methods concerned tensions at an interpersonal level. The role of parents was twofold. On the one hand, some schools asked parents to sign their children up to participate in School Linking. This resulted in the researcher encountering a student who was unaware that he was taking part in School Linking until he was taken out of class to go to the first Link Day. On the other hand, teachers spoke in their focus groups of the challenges associated with parents refusing permission for their child to participate. This tension speaks to ongoing debate around the extent to which parents have the legal right to dictate their



child's education, versus the cultural or moral argument for students' personal autonomy to override parental involvement.

The reality is that F&BF cannot control the schools' policies or selection procedures, however recognising that power dynamics underlie different student selection methods enables a clearer understanding of the power dynamics within the two 'linked' classes.

The research also uncovered findings relating to the power dynamics between Linking Teachers and their students. Namely, power dynamics between the two Linking Teachers can be mirrored in their respective students' interactions. Although not a trend in School Linking, the research observed an instance of unequal teacher power dynamics defined by gender. In this specific case, the teachers' interactions were at risk of perpetuating the preconceived cultural norm that female participation is suppressed in interfaith dialogue.

---

[I]nterreligious dialogue is seen as an encounter between representatives of religious traditions deeply marked by patriarchy [...]. If this is not challenged, the dialogue can confirm and strengthen the traditions and respective practices. (Grung 2011: 29)

---

With regard to space, the research found that spaces shared by teachers and students were 'relational'. An illustration of this concerns the 'hosting' and 'visiting' roles given to students during the second and third Link Days which take place in the respective schools. The students' roles were defined in terms of power. Namely, in instances where the 'host' school was

greater in resources or size or resources, the hosting students were observed exhibiting power *over* the visiting students from smaller schools. This finding contributes to a small but significant area of educational research that Section 2 highlighted as deserving of greater attention.

The research further identified that an observed hesitancy for the students to mix within the physical spaces during Link Days could be understood when viewed through the lens of power dynamics. Despite academic research directly associating student mixing with positive interpersonal relations (Bruegel 2006, Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery 2003, Hughes et al. 2013, McGlynn et al. 2004, Schubotz and Robinson 2006), in the case of School Linking, a lack of mixing between students was not necessarily a negative finding. Instead, the research offered an alternative perspective that stressed the need for a) greater reflection time for the students during Link Days and b) the recognition and readdressing of the Link Day spaces as ones that are explicitly 'owned' by the teachers.

Lastly, findings relating to 'safe space' revealed differences in teacher and student interpretations of the concept. In particular, they were found to place different value on the role of 'risk'. Whilst teachers were keen to embrace risk and move towards a form of safe space in which debate around controversial issues is encouraged, described in research as a 'brave space' (Arao and Clemens 2013), students remained cautious and at times were hesitant to contribute to discussion for fear that they might accidentally offend their Link School students.

Researchers highlight the danger of ambiguities around safe space, suggesting that what teachers perceive to be 'safe' is

not necessarily experienced as such by their students (Barrett 2010). Thus, teacher-student relationships and shared understandings of the spaces in which School Linking takes place deserve further attention.

## 4.5 Difference, religious (il)literacy and strategic ambiguity in School Linking

Section 2 demonstrated that students reported feeling a sense of ‘difference’ with their Link School students, although the survey data alone was unable to explain to what extent students were interpreting difference as a positive or negative concept. That the students reportedly enjoyed School Linking more if they felt that the Link Day students were similar to them implied a negative association with those that were ‘different’ from them, echoing findings from previous research into interfaith dialogue and contact between young people (Ipgrave 2003b; Loader and Hughes 2017b).

Link Day observations revealed instances of teachers communicating the positive connotations of difference. However, where the survey findings allude to difference being interpreted negatively, the Link Day observation and focus groups found that this attitude may be unintentionally exacerbated by some Linking Teachers. Specifically, while Link Day activities facilitated the identification of similarities between students (which, research suggests, is a foundation for friendship (Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 164; Jackson and McKenna 2017: 7)), the focus

on similarity was prioritised *at the expense* of the recognition and appreciation of difference. Vitally, a lack of reference to difference risks aligning itself with rhetoric in policy documents and academic literature on community cohesion (see Section 2) that problematises the concept.

---

...narratives of difference reflect an excluding camp mentality, which frames identity around a binary understanding of cultural ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (Shannahan 2017: 414)

---

There is thus a need to retain efforts to identify similarities whilst incorporating *meaningful* difference within and between religious and non-religious beliefs as a vehicle for exploration during School Linking.

The focus groups and participant observation also helped to explain another potential issue that arose from the survey analysis: potential religious illiteracy among students. Section 4.1 demonstrated that despite students reporting a significant increase in their ‘knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School’, their student reflection forms alluded to the development of an oversimplified and sometimes inaccurate factual knowledge.

Link Day observations identified that the popular activity of question and answer sessions (used as a tool to promote similarity between students and serve young people’s natural curiosity about each other) risked reinforcing a form of religious illiteracy among students that overlooked the complexity of religious plurality emphasised in literature relating to ‘personal worldviews’. Instead, they used language that presented faith communities,



and faith schooling, as homogenous, or ‘one size fits all’ (see Section 2).

Academics argue that this framework for religious literacy stems from a type of knowledge appropriate for teaching and examination, but which does not sufficiently capture the context which informs religious and non-religious worldviews (Conroy 2015, Dinham and Francis 2015).

---

[There is] a tendency to explain some behaviour in terms of a community’s culture or religion, without considering the possible interplay of other factors, or that the same decisive influences may be at work in society as a whole. For example, Sikhs are sometimes stereotyped as being marked by the ‘five Ks’, and Muslim girls as wearing a headscarf. (Nesbitt 2004: 21)

---

Lastly, the research explored how the teachers’ understanding and interpretations of the aims of School Linking informed or inhibited the processes of relationship building between their students.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, a lack of agreement on aims between some teachers was observed in relation to the role of School Linking in developing students’ intercultural competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes). In particular, disagreement about the development of knowledge as a practical aim of School Linking risked exacerbating the issues of religious illiteracy previously reported.

The ways in which teachers were found to interpret the aims of School Linking at a school-wide level, however, highlighted the value of the programme’s ‘strategic ambiguity’, a term used to describe

“instances where individuals use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals” (Eisenberg 1984: 230). For School Linking, in which teachers reported a variety of motivations to take part (including meeting Ofsted requirements through the duty to promote community cohesion and supporting the RE curriculum), F&BF expertly alluded to multiple interpretations of the goal of the programme. For example, “[School Linking] helps the schools with their SMSC [spiritual, moral, social and cultural development], and British Values provision” (Faith & Belief Forum 2020b).

By keeping explicit goals of the programme largely ambiguous and open to interpretation, Section 4.3 illustrated that teachers can contextualise School Linking to satisfy multiple social and political agendas. Moreover, the use of strategic ambiguity is encouraged as an organisational tool to recognise individual schools’ motivations and thus maximise the recruitment and retention of schools.

## 4.6 Summary of findings

### Student surveys

- Almost three quarters of students reported feeling positive about the prospect of School Linking. More students felt confident and proud at the end of School Linking.
- More than three quarters of students reported enjoying School Linking at the end of the year.
- The Link Day structured activity was students' reported favourite part of School Linking.
- Both before and after School Linking, almost two thirds of students shared and asked things related to 'who am I?', with 'hobbies/likes and dislikes' overwhelmingly the most frequent discussion theme.
- Knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the Link Schools significantly increased by the end of School Linking.
- Both before and after School Linking, students reported feeling 'different' to their Link School students.
- Age, teacher experience, school faith ethos and academic performance influence students' attitudes towards School Linking.

### Teachers and school support

- Interpersonal relations between teachers are generally very strong, however when communication between teachers break down, student activities may not be effectively managed.
- Teachers face numerous logistical challenges, including time constraints, exacerbated by teachers' roles within their schools and external pressures (such as Ofsted).
- At an interpersonal level, disruptive behaviour among Link School students appear to be driven by some experienced teachers' overconfidence in an unstructured approach to School Linking.
- Teachers report feeling responsible for communicating their involvement in School Linking with the wider school community, but are found to appreciate support from school leadership.
- Support from leadership can be leveraged by using School Linking as a tool to meet external demands.

### Selection, power and space

- Teachers' methods of selecting students for School Linking channel different 'dimensions' of power.
- Power dynamics between Linking Teachers can be mirrored in their students' interactions. If gendered, this can exacerbate preconceived cultural norms about unequal power dynamics in interfaith dialogue.
- Spaces shared during School Linking are 'relational'. 'Hosting' and 'visiting' student roles may contribute to unequal power dynamics when the hosts represent a larger or better resourced school.
- A hesitancy for the students to mix can be better understood when viewed through the lens of power dynamics and may not necessarily have negative consequences.
- Teachers tend to place greater value on the role of risk in safe space than their students.

### Difference, religious (il)literacy and strategic ambiguity in School Linking

- When celebrating similarities between students, teachers sometimes unintentionally align their language with rhetoric that homogenises and denigrates the concept of difference.
- Moving away from question and answer sessions can avoid teaching oversimplified factual knowledge.
- Religious illiteracy among community school teachers undermines arguments in literature that community schools are ideal sites for peaceful relations by virtue of their diversity.
- Whilst ambiguity of aims can have negative consequences at an interpersonal levels, a 'strategic ambiguity' of the aims of School Linking at an institutional level enables schools to satisfy social and political agendas, and F&BF recruit and retain schools.

## 5. Reassessing the theory behind School Linking

In the final phase of the research, the quantitative and qualitative findings were reflected upon to address the final research question, 'How can school linking influence academic understandings of 'peaceful relations'?'. The purpose of this phase of the research was to explore and better understand the theoretical underpinnings to the processes of relationship building in School Linking.

As Section 3 explained, the data were analysed inductively, outside of an assumed theoretical framework. This meant that the findings could be reflectively applied to the context of School Linking through a number of different theoretical lenses.

The research chose to reassess 'contact theory', the notion that interaction between groups can lead to a decrease in prejudiced attitudes. This theory has the widest relevance and application to this area; it serves as the theoretical backdrop to other school interfaith programmes (for example Shared Education in Northern Ireland, see Section 2), it underpins notions of 'peaceful relations' in debates around faith schooling and community cohesion (see Section 2) and F&BF itself uses language of intergroup contact in its literature.

By its nature, then, a reassessment of contact theory questions an entire approach towards relationship building in a brand new context: School Linking.

### 5.1 Intergroup contact theory: An introduction

The theoretical model of 'intergroup contact' (developed by Hewstone and Brown (1986) and reviewed by Pettigrew (1998) and Brown and Hewstone (2005)) is based on Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis', which proposed that interaction between groups can decrease prejudiced attitudes.

Allport proposed four conditions of contact that maximise prejudice reduction: a) equal status between the individuals, or the groups between which contact takes place b) the pursuit of common goal(s) during the contact, c) cooperation or collaboration between the individuals or groups, and d) social or institutional support that validates the contact.

There is a body of academic evidence supporting the basic notion that contact reduces prejudice. Contact has been found to develop trust towards those with whom an individual is in contact (Tam et al. 2009), forgiveness (Hewstone et al. 2006, Tam et al. 2007) and a decrease in feelings of threat (Blascovich et al. 2001).

There are various forms of contact. 'Extended' contact (Wright et al. 1997) takes place when an individual's positive attitude towards an 'outgroup' of people different to him or herself can develop from the knowledge that another member of their 'ingroup' has a relationship with an outgroup member. Alternatively, 'imagined contact' (Turner, Crisp and Lambert 2007) can reduce prejudice by "simply imagining contact with out-group members" (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 377). Lastly, 'vicarious' contact describes "instances in which intergroup contact is observed via

some forms of media” (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 377f).

The most prevalent form of contact, however, concerns ‘direct’, or face-to-face contact; the type found in School Linking.

## 5.2 Creating a recipe of success for School Linking

In order to understand how School Linking can maximise prejudice reduction between teachers and students, the research mapped the findings from Section 4 onto Allport’s conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support. Summarised here, the resulting exploration provided a contextualised, evidence-based framework for optimal contact in School Linking.

In terms of equal status, contact theorists have found that contact encounters may be perceived differently according to whether an individual belongs to a ‘majority’ or ‘minority’ group (Hewstone and Swart 2011; Shelton 2003). Namely, members of groups that are disadvantaged (in School Linking, for example, students from schools that are smaller or less resourced, see Section 4.4) may expect to experience prejudice or discrimination towards them from members of the advantaged group. Moreover, since Section 4.4 showed that power dynamics between teachers may be mirrored in student interaction, in cases where teachers represent a majority-minority relationship (for example, in terms of gender), it is vital that elements of prejudice, discrimination or threat are not present.

When it comes to common goals and cooperation, education researchers have developed the concept of ‘goal

interdependence’, where teachers purposely structure individual students’ goals so that the classroom activity will only succeed if they work together (Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama 1983). This tool facilitates a ‘cooperative structure’ (Deutsch 1949), where “an individual can attain his or her goal if and only if the other participants can attain their goals” (Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama 1983: 7). Section 4.3 illustrated the need for common goals and cooperation; the Link Day activities used by some teachers lacked these crucial elements, resulting in a breakdown of communication amongst students. Contact theorists similarly found that in contact encounters, competitive activities can generate anxiety and perpetuate prejudiced attitudes towards others. If competition is structured into Link Day activities, then, they must be effectively managed.<sup>xiii</sup>

Allport’s final condition is ‘institutional support’. In this case, teachers may be perceived as institutional representatives (Turner et al. 2008: 851) and so have the responsibility of facilitating a supportive atmosphere for School Linking. The need to resolve ambiguities around safe space, then, is vital (Section 4.5). In addition, contact theory research suggests that visible institutional support (in this case school leadership and the wider school community) can lead to “a new social climate in which more tolerant norms can emerge” (Liebkind and McAlister 1998: 766). Section 4.3 explored how Linking Teachers felt responsible for sharing their involvement in School Linking with the wider school community, but appreciated support from school leadership. There must thus be a collective effort to cultivate the normalisation of School Linking within and beyond the school, for example through noticeboard displays and school newsletter articles.

## Equal status

Careful preparation at a staff and student level is required before school visits to manage perceived levels of deprivation (e.g. school size and resources) by minority group members.

Tools such as the 'buddying system' can ensure a balanced ratio of group members. Logistical factors inhibiting the use of this tool should be discussed with F&BF prior to the first Link Day.

School size and resources, academic performance and minority/majority status of school faith ethos should be considered by F&BF prior to linking schools.

Where a Linking Teacher represents a majority outgroup, there should be greater focus on direct contact between that teacher and minority group students.

Modelling of positive Linking Teacher relations during Link Days is encouraged.

## Common goals and cooperation

Link Day activities not recommended by F&BF should be evaluated prior to the Link Day taking place.

The unique needs of 'experienced' teachers should be catered for in the CPD training, but the mandatory element of 'safe space' revisited at each training day.

Linking Teachers should commit to attending all CPD days, take shared responsibility for planning and agree on their shared goals prior to the Link Days.

F&BF should place greater focus on exploring the aim(s) of School Linking during CPD training.

Link Day activities should avoid elements of competition. If competitive elements are present, teams should be mixed between schools and students should be encouraged to support those from the linked school.

## Institutional support

As institutional representatives, teachers should create a supportive atmosphere during Link Days by implementing a 'safe space' based on shared understanding.

The wider school community should actively support Linking Teachers throughout the programme (e.g. participating in assemblies, endorsing display boards and newsletters).

Individual motivation and benefits for schools taking part in School Linking should continue to be recognised by F&BF to encourage support from school leadership.

It is important to recognise that there is a growing body of research into 'negative contact', where "intergroup contact relate[s] to greater prejudice" (Pettigrew 2008: 190). Research suggests that negative contact typically occurs when participants enter into the contact situation involuntarily (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). Whilst this research uncovered almost no instances of negative contact, one example aligns with

this evidence. During a Link Day observation, a student opted out of School Linking because his parents had signed him up to the programme without his awareness or consent. However it is unclear if and how F&BF can avoid future instances without 'selection bias', the concept that participants are chosen to participate in contact encounters because they are predisposed to unprejudiced attitudes.<sup>xiv</sup>

## 5.3 Reimagining contact for School Linking

Beyond providing a first of its kind ‘contextualised recipe for successful contact’, the research sought to use the findings to retrospectively assess elements of contact theory itself.

First, contact theorists have argued that cross-group friendships exemplify an ‘ideal’ form of contact (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) and the importance of friendship has been emphasised in literature on interfaith initiatives outlined in Section 2. Contact theory research into Shared Education in Northern Ireland, for example, found that the programme “improve[s] intergroup attitudes mainly by increasing the number of outgroup friends and reducing intergroup anxiety” (Hughes et al. 2012: 535). Similarly, Raw’s 2006 and 2009 evaluations of TLN found a key impact was students’ “readiness to broaden contacts/consolidate friendships beyond their own cultural community” (2006: 51). On average, Raw found that each student made 2.6 new cross-cultural friendships by the end of the school year.

In School Linking, the nature of ‘friendship’ is unclear. Section 4’s survey analysis found that primary school students saw ‘making friends’ as a key aim of the programme and, by the end of the year, were more likely to state that friendships had been made than secondary school students. However, the observation data subsequently revealed that the *type* of relationships formed during Link Days were not necessarily intimate enough to align with measures of ‘friendship’ used in other research, such as ‘closeness’ or ‘cooperativeness’ (Brown et al. 2007).<sup>xv</sup>

It has been argued that the potential for friendship is inhibited by the short-term nature of linking programmes. For example, Bruegel’s (2006) study of ‘twinning’ primary schools in the North of England argued that “day-to-day contact between children has far more chance of breaking down barriers between communities, than school twinning” (2006: 2). Similarly, in Loader’s (2016) words, Kerr et al.’s (2011) TLN evaluation finding that some students met only twice, “may give cause for scepticism about the scheme’s potential to foster durable relationships and change attitudes”.

However, even in extended contact, in which there is a higher frequency of contact and therefore greater opportunity for friendship, there may be a similar pattern to School Linking. Loader and Hughes’ (2017b) research into Shared Education found that:

---

While pupils commonly identified ‘meeting new people’ or ‘making new friends’ as benefits of shared education, it was apparent that most had not formed the type of relationship that might constitute ‘friendship’ [...] In comparison, by far the most common relationship was what might be termed ‘acquaintanceship’ [...] pupils’ interactions had focused primarily on schoolwork and their acquaintanceship was at a relatively early stage. In all cases, however, the relationships were casual and were confined to the classroom. (2017b: 123)

---

By its nature, School Linking provides a limited opportunity for extended contact (which itself raises the question of whether School Linking would do well to extend beyond one academic year). As a result, and



observed in this research, the term 'acquaintance' may oftentimes more accurately describe the type of relationships formed between students.

Nevertheless, even forming a short-lived acquaintance can remain an effective means of reducing prejudice. Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) argue that this is because in some circumstances acquaintances can meet the optimal conditions of equal status, common goals and cooperation. Moreover, others suggest that 'acquaintance potential' is a basic condition for friendship (Feddes, Noack and Rutland 2009).

Ultimately, the potential contact effects of acquaintanceship-building should not be overlooked. F&BF may want to consider the value of School Linking's potential impact in terms of acquaintances in order to validate their impact potential within a contact theory framework.

The second contribution that this research makes to furthering understanding of contact theory relates to religious literacy and the role of 'knowledge' as a mediator of contact. In recent years, research has considered the 'how' of contact theory by questioning the ways in which mediating factors, or 'mechanisms' (Hughes et al. 2012) influence attitudinal change.

Quantitative research has found that the most effective mediators of contact are reduced levels of anxiety and increased level of empathy towards the 'other' (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). In contrast, knowledge of the 'other' has been found to have a significantly weaker effect on attitudinal change. Al Ramiah and Hewstone (2013: 533) echo these sentiments, arguing that learning "general knowledge" can "mask deeper group differences, in terms of values and historical experiences".

---

...simply knowing more about the outgroup typically does not have a major effect on reducing prejudice. (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008: 927)

---

This research provides a contextualised example of this. The qualitative data in Section 4.5 highlighted the questionable role of knowledge-based activities during Link Days (for example, question and answer sessions) which were found to develop a form of religious illiteracy among students and teachers in terms of oversimplified, general factual knowledge associated with curriculum teaching and examination. This type of knowledge risks reifying religious groups and disregarding the complexity of religious and worldview plurality.

Should F&BF wish to develop a framework of peaceful relations for School Linking that is built upon contact theory, the risks associated with a knowledge-based approach can be mitigated by shifting the focus of Link Days to factors known to positively influence contact: reducing intergroup anxiety and increasing empathy. Such factors may also be present as measures in the evaluation documentation to ensure that the impact of School Linking can be communicated in such a way that its groundings in contact theory are clear.

Lastly, this research indicates that in this context, the 'intergroup' model of contact (the model upon which other interfaith initiatives are based) is flawed. Namely, the model's reliance on the homogeneity or 'sameness' of 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' risks exacerbating students' negative perceptions of difference by failing to recognise religious and cultural plurality within the classroom.



A key feature of intergroup contact is the 'secondary transfer effect' (Pettigrew 1997, 2009). This is the claim that prejudice reduction towards a single member of the 'outgroup' (in this case a student from the Link School) can be generalised to the outgroup as a whole including those who did not take part in the contact encounter (for example, all students from that Link School, or all members of the faith or belief that the individual student 'represents').

The principle of generalisation makes the model appealing for those who wish to demonstrate the impact of a contact intervention in the broadest possible terms. However, underlying the principle is a need for 'group salience'. In other words, contact would need to take place between individuals who are representative or typical of their respective groups (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 529).

---

"contact with members of an outgroup can improve intergroup attitudes, but especially if those people can be seen as representative of their group" (Brown et al. 2007: 692).

---

This research questions the usefulness of a model which is built upon inherent assumptions of generalisability for School Linking, one of the primary aims of which is to explore notions of religious and cultural plurality. Specifically, encouraging 'typicality' within groups risks teachers expressing religious and non-religious worldviews as homogenous, reinforcing rhetoric around community cohesion and faith schooling which problematises the concept of 'difference' (see Section 2). It also risks exacerbating the issue of religious illiteracy discussed above.

Brewer and Miller's (1984, 1988, Miller 2002) 'decategorization' model of contact avoids issues associated with generalisation, since the primary aim of the contact is to "reduce the salience of available social categories and increase the likelihood of a more 'interpersonal' mode of thinking and behaving" (Brown and Hewstone 2005: 262). The process of 'decategorization' breaks down perceptions of homogeneity within groups by exchanging personalised information. This model can be applied to different situations with the same or different individuals since the skills developed through this kind of contact "undermines the availability and usefulness of category identity as a basis for future interactions" (Brewer and Miller 1984: 288–289).

The benefits of communicating the decategorization model of contact as School Linking's theoretical framework moving forward are clear. First, the approach is accessible for community school teachers, who, the research found, were predisposed to communicate religious and non-religious beliefs in homogenous terms. Second, it offers opportunities for School Linking to explore *intrafaith* contact between faith schools of the same religion (but potentially different denominations). Third, decategorization encourages students and teachers to learn more about their own faiths and beliefs, as well as those of others in their own class. Lastly, the model positions School Linking at the forefront of current debates in religion and education which are defined by language of 'worldviews' (see Section 2). The conceptualisation of Link Days as contact encounters underpinned by decategorization illustrates that School Linking is ideally placed to meet the complexities of this discursive shift.

## 6. Moving forward: The future of School Linking

Informally throughout the research process, and formally during summer 2020, the research findings were shared with F&BF. This section outlines how the research has shaped the future direction of School Linking, and has enabled F&BF to capture and communicate the impact of their work more effectively.

### 6.1 Responding to the findings

As qualitative data were collected throughout the 2017-18 academic year, observations relating to the tendency for ‘experienced’ teachers (see Key Terms) to take an unstructured approach to the Link Days (see Section 4.3) were shared with the School Linking staff team. Changes were implemented during the final years of the research in response. Notably, the CPD training is no longer split between ‘new’ and ‘experienced’ teachers; rather by splitting the training into primary and secondary teachers, the basic yet vital principles of School Linking, such as the requirement to set a ‘safe space’ are revisited by all teachers, and the aims of School Linking can be communicated in line with the age-specific survey findings. Furthermore, it is now mandatory for ‘experienced’ teachers to attend the training days in full, and F&BF ensures that each year includes new

training content to maximise engagement from all teachers.

Moreover, Section 4.4’s findings around selection, space and power have significantly influenced, and will provide ongoing support to, new measures that F&BF have implemented to maximise equal status between Link Schools and their students.

Where schools use selection processes to determine which students take part in School Linking, the nature and implications of the schools’ respective selection systems will be written into F&BF’s school recruitment plan, as well as ‘partnership guidance’ documents that will be shared during teacher consultations. Specifically, teachers will be asked to reflect on why students have been selected to take part and will be prompted to consider the extent to which the Linking Classes stereotypically reflect their school demographics. Moreover, teachers will be required to justify their selection of students as those who will benefit most from the experience. Lastly, the ethics of selection will be discussed with teachers (specifically regarding the problematic nature of parental consent in permitting or denying their child’s participation) to ensure that all students actively consent to be part of School Linking.

F&BF’s new understanding of power dynamics and the need to manage contact across meaningful difference (see Section 4.5) has also resulted in the development of a ‘matching system’ for schools. The system now considers a variety of school demographics, including school size and resources, socioeconomic status and ethnic diversity of the student population, which are subsequently discussed with the Linking Teachers at the start of the academic year. In instances where ‘experienced’ teachers

wish to re-partner for a subsequent year, the teacher consultations will still be held at the start of the new academic year.

Recognising that there is no such thing as a 'perfect' match between Link Schools, F&BF will raise awareness among the teachers of how meaningful differences between students can be navigated during the Link Days. Moreover, F&BF has agreed to develop 'best practice guidelines' for school partnerships which will be shared within the organisation to ensure that institutional memory is maintained.

In terms of communicating the aims of School Linking, and interpretations of aims at institutional and interpersonal levels (see Section 4.5), F&BF will retain the 'strategic ambiguity' of institutional aims in the marketing of School Linking to maximise its potential for meeting individual schools' specific needs and agendas.

The distinction between institutional and interpersonal aims of School Linking will be made clearer in the teachers' CPD days; the interpersonal-level aims of School Linking have been mapped against key criteria for positive contact (see Section 5.2) as a visual aid for teacher training.

F&BF's consideration of School Linking's theoretical underpinnings continues. The research has aided F&BF in clarifying how School Linking influences the type of relationships built between students (see Section 5.3). F&BF has reworded training and evaluation materials more accurately capture how acquaintance-building can lay foundations for friendship in the future.

Moreover, the ways in which F&BF communicates the aims and outcomes of School Linking have evolved to capture the research's findings around religious illiteracy and its link to knowledge as a mediating factor of contact encounters. As

findings were shared with F&BF, the CPD training materials were adapted to emphasise that a) religious literacy is second to dialogue skills, and b) lived experience supersedes collective norms.

Once School Linking resumes 'in person' (see Section 6.4 for information on how the programme has been temporarily affected by Covid-19), F&BF plans to move from, or more clearly articulate a move from, intergroup contact to the research's recommendation of decategorization (see Section 5.3). Moreover, the factors that have been shown to facilitate contact (reduced anxiety and increased empathy) most effectively will be explicitly built into School Linking delivery and evaluation.

## 6.3 Capturing impact

The research analysed almost 1,500 surveys developed and disseminated by F&BF during the 2016-17 academic year (see Sections 4.1 and 4.2). Access to this material enabled the research to identify gaps in F&BF's impact evaluation, and make recommendations for how these gaps could be filled in order for the evaluation to accurately capture School Linking's unique nature of relationship building.

The analysis process revealed potential issues with the design and dissemination of the evaluation material.

First, it appeared that some teachers did not disseminate the initial student survey at the start of School Linking as prescribed. Rather some completed the survey after the first Link Day had taken place. This risks the responses not accurately representing students' feelings at the start of the process, and may consequentially over- or

under-represent the extent to which students' attitudes have reportedly changed by the end of the programme. Furthermore, some classes gave almost identical survey responses across the students, suggesting that the teacher was 'leading' the students' responses and/or the surveys were completed as a whole class activity.

Second, none of the evaluation documents were completed anonymously. If students and teachers know that they can be identified, they are at risk of responding in such a way they deem to be 'desirable' to, in the students' case, their teacher or, in the teachers' case, F&BF.

Third, survey wording and formatting can be problematic. For example, students were asked what they learned about "the faith or beliefs of [their] Link School", rather than the students *within* the school. This phrasing may be interpreted to assume that all faith school students represent their schools' religious characters.

Lastly, images of faces were used alongside a '1-5' scale for students to indicate agreement (a smiley face) or disagreement (a sad face) with different statements. However, using a sad face to represent disagreement with the statement, 'the students at my Link School will be/were similar to me' assigns negative connotations to the concept of 'difference'. This may have contributed to causing or exacerbating students' negative attitudes towards difference discussed in previous sections.

The issues identified here can be easily remedied with a review of how survey documents are phrased, formatted and disseminated in the future.

## 6.4 Contact and COVID-19

Like many organisations, F&BF has been hit by the consequences of Covid-19. In the 2020-2021 academic year, School Linking will continue (starting January 2021), but will be delivered electronically.

Nevertheless, some of these research findings are transferable to online delivery. Notably, as F&BF currently undertakes the recruitment and matching process with schools, their new emphasis on power dynamics has extended to consider Covid-19. For example, staff are engaging with schools about their student's lockdown experiences as well as the schools' capacity to access the equipment and resources needed for online delivery. By taking class' needs and abilities into consideration F&BF are maximising equal status in the contact encounter.

Moreover, whilst the theory underlying this research concerns 'direct', or face-to-face contact, delivering School Linking online will give F&BF staff the opportunity to further their understanding of the research findings in relation to 'indirect' contact, where Link School students are not present within the same room. Research into indirect forms of contact with the 'other' (in this case the Link School students), such as having a video call with, reading about, or even imagining them ('vicarious' contact, Cameron et al. (2006) and 'imagined' contact, Stathi et al. 2014)) has been argued to increase confidence in the *prospect* of direct contact.

Though not a replacement for direct contact, an online School Linking programme has the potential to lay the groundwork for successful contact in the years to come.

# References

- Al Ramiah, A. and Hewstone, M. (2013) 'Intergroup Contact as a Tool for Reducing, Resolving, and Preventing Intergroup Conflict Evidence, Limitations, and Potential'. *American Psychologist* 68 (7), 527-542
- Alam, Y. and Husband, C. (2012) 'Parallel Policies and Contradictory Practices: The Case of Social Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism in the United Kingdom'. in *In Collegium, Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11. ed. by Husband, C. Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 136-156
- Allport, G. W. (1954) *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley
- Arao, B. and Clemens, K. (2013) 'From Safe Spaces to Brave Space: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice'. in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. ed. by Lanreman, L. M. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 135-150
- Arweck, E. (2017) 'Religious diversity as a personal and social value: impressions from a multicultural school in London'. in *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity*. ed. by Arweck, E. London: Routledge, 125-150
- Barrett, B. J. (2010) 'Is "Safety" Dangerous? A Critical Examination of the Classroom as Safe Space'. *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 1 (1), 1-12
- Bell, D. (2005) *A speech to the Hansard Society, London, 17th January* [online] available from <<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5245/1/Citizenship.pdf>> [20 July 2018]
- Blascovich, J., Berry Mendes, W., Hunter, S. B., Lickel, B. and Kowai-Bell, N. (2001) 'Perceiver Threat in Social Interactions with Stigmatized Others'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80 (2), 253-267
- Borooah, V. and Knox, C. (2013) 'The contribution to Catholic-Protestant reconciliation in Northern Ireland: A third way?'. *British Educational Research Journal* 39 (5), 925-946
- Brewer, M. B. and Miller, N. (1984) 'Beyond the contact hypothesis: Theoretical perspectives on desegregation'. in *Groups in contact: The psychology of desegregation*. ed. by Miller, N. and Brewer, M. B. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 281-302
- British Humanist Association (2015a) *Open letter to Minister of State for School Reform Nick Gibb MP supporting Humanism in Religious Studies* [online] available from <<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Open-letter-to-Minister-of-State-for-School-Reform-Nick-Gibb-MP-supporting-Humanism-in-Religious-Studies.pdf>> [28 November 2017]
- British Humanist Association (2015b) Rowan Williams heads religious leaders in call for fair study of Humanism in schools [online] available from <<https://humanism.org.uk/2015/02/05/rowan-williams-heads-religious-leaders-call-fair-study-humanism-schools/>> [5 February 2018]

- Brown, R. and Hewstone, M. (2005) 'An integrative theory of intergroup contact'. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 37, 255-343
- Brown, R., Eller, A., Leeds, S. and Stace, K. (2007) 'Intergroup contact and intergroup attitudes: A longitudinal study'. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37 (4), 692-703
- Bruegel, I. (2006) *Social Capital, Diversity and Education Policy*. Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group [online] available from <<http://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/SCDiversityEdu28.8.06.pdf>> [12 April 2017]
- Burtonwood, N. (2006) *Cultural Diversity, Liberal Pluralism and Schools: Isaiah Berlin and education*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Cameron, L. Rutland, A., Brown, R. and Douch, R. (2006) 'Changing children's intergroup attitudes towards refugees: Testing different models of extended contact'. *Child Development* 77 (5), 1208-1219
- Cantle, T. (2016) *Understanding School Segregation in England: 2011 to 2016* [online] available from <<http://tedcantle.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Understanding-School-Segregation-in-England-2011-2016-Final.pdf>> [13 September 2018]
- Casey, L. (2016) *The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration* [online] available from <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/575973/The\\_Casey\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf)> [23rd August 2017]
- Casley, G. (2019) *Comments on recommendations 1 and 2* [20 February] available from <<https://www.reonline.org.uk/blog/comments-on-recommendations-1-and-2-george-casley/>> [4 April 2019]
- Catto, R. (2014) 'What can we say about today's British religious young person? Findings from the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme'. *Religion* 44 (1), 1-27
- Church of England Archbishops' Council Education Division (2009) *Strong Schools for Strong Communities: Reviewing the Impact of Church of England Schools in Promoting Community Cohesion* [online] available from <<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1204726/strong%20schools%20for%20strong%20communities%20-%20cofe%20report%20final.pdf>> [6th June 2017]
- Coldwell, M. and Maxwell, B. (2018) 'Using evidence-informed logic models to bridge methods in educational evaluation'. *Review of Education* 6 (3), 267-300
- Commission on Religious Education (2018) *Final Report: Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* [online] available from <<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>> [2nd January 2020]
- Conroy, J. C. (2015) 'Religious illiteracy in school Religious Education'. in *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*. ed. by Dinham, A. and Francis, M. Bristol: Policy Press, 167-186
- Council of Europe (2008) *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe (CM/Rec(2008)12)

- Council of Europe (2014) *Developing intercultural competence through education*. ed. by Huber, J. and Reynolds, C. Strasbourg: Council of Europe
- Davie, G. (1990) 'Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?'. *Social Compass* 37 (4), 455-469
- Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) *The Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion* [online] available from <<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7608/1/681624.pdf>> [18 January 2018]
- Department for Education and Employment (2001) *Schools Building on Success* [green paper] London: Department for Education and Employment (Cm 5050)
- Deutsch, M. (1949) 'An experimental study of the effects of cooperation and competition upon group process'. *Human Relations* 2 (3), 199-232
- Dinham, A. (2019) *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward* [1 April] available from <<https://www.reonline.org.uk/blog/religion-and-worldviews-the-way-forward-adam-dinham/>> [6 August 2019]
- Dinham, A. and Francis, M. (2015) *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Dinham, A. and Shaw, M. (2015) *RE for Real: The Future of Teaching and Learning About Religion and Belief* [online] available from <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-units/faiths-and-civil-society/REforREal-web-b.pdf>> [18th December 2019]
- Eisenberg, E. M. (1984) 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication'. *Communication Monographs* 51 (3), 227-242
- Everington, J. (2018) 'Including nonreligious worldviews in religious education: the views and experiences of English secondary school teachers'. *British Journal of Religious Education* 41 (1), 14-26
- Faith & Belief Forum (2020a) Who we are [online] available from <<https://faithbeliefforum.org/about/who-we-are/>> [2 February 2020]
- Faith & Belief Forum (2020b) School Linking [online] available from <<https://faithbeliefforum.org/programme/school-linking/>> [2 February 2020]
- Faith & Belief Forum (2020c) History [online] available from <<https://faithbeliefforum.org/about/history/>> [4 February 2020]
- Feddes, A. R., Noack, P. and Rutland, A. (2009) 'Direct and extended friendship effects of minority and majority children's interethnic attitudes: A longitudinal study'. *Child Development* 80 (2), 377-390
- Flanagan, R. (2019) *Changing the name to 'Religion and Worldviews': a dilution or salvation of RE?* [25 February] available from <<https://www.reonline.org.uk/blog/changing-the-name-to-religion-and-worldviews-a-dilution-or-salvation-of-re-ruth-flanagan/>> [6 August 2019]



- Flint, J. (2009) 'Faith-based school: institutionalising parallel lives?' in *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices*. ed. by Dinham, A., Furbey, R. and Lowndes, V. Bristol: The Policy Press, 163-182
- Francis, L. J. and McKenna, U. (2017) 'Assessing attitude toward religious diversity among Muslim adolescents in the UK: The effect of religious and theological factors'. *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3), 328-340
- Francis, L. J. and Village, A. (2014) 'Church schools preparing adolescents for living in a religiously diverse society: An empirical enquiry in England and Wales'. *Religious Education* 109 (3), 264-283
- Gallagher, T. (2016) 'Shared education in Northern Ireland: school collaboration in divided societies'. *Oxford Review of Education* 42 (3), 362-375
- Gallagher, T. Smith, A. and Montgomery, A. (2003) *Integrated Education in Northern Ireland: Participation, Profile and Performance*. Coleraine: UNESCO Centre University of Ulster
- Gay, J. (2018) 'Christian faith in English church schools: research conversations with classroom teachers'. *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 39 (1), 118-120
- Gov.uk (2020) Types of School [online] available from <<https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>> [14 January 2020]
- Grace, G. (2003) 'Educational Studies And Faith-Based Schooling: Moving From Prejudice To Evidence-Based Argument'. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 51 (2), 149-167
- Haugaard, M. (2012) 'Rethinking the four dimensions of power: domination and empowerment'. *Journal of Political Power* 5 (1), 33-54
- Hayes, B. C., McAllister, I. and Dowds, L. (2007) 'Integrated Education, Intergroup Relations, and Political Identities in Northern Ireland'. *Social Problems* 54 (4), 454-482
- Hayes, B. C., McAllister, I. and Dowds, L. (2013) 'Integrated Schooling and Religious Tolerance in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28 (1), 67-78
- Hemming, P. J. (2011) 'Meaningful Encounters? Religion and Social Cohesion in the English Primary School'. *Social and Cultural Geography* 12 (1), 63-81
- Hemming, P. J. and Roberts, C. (2018) 'Church schools, educational markets and the rural idyll' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (4), 501-517
- Hewstone, M. and Brown, R. (1986) 'Contact Is Not Enough: An intergroup perspective on the 'contact hypothesis'. in *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters*. ed. by Hewstone, M. and Brown, R. Oxford: Blackwell, 1-44
- Hewstone, M. and Swart, H. (2011) 'Fifty-odd years of inter-group contact: From hypothesis to integrated theory'. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50 (3), 374-386
- Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., Voci, A., Hamberger, J. and Niens, U. (2006) 'Intergroup contact, forgiveness, and experience of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland'. *Journal of Social Issues* 62 (1), 99-120

- Hinds, D. (2018) Letter to the Very Reverend Doctor John Hall from Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP [online] available from: <<https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Letter-to-The-Very-Reverend-Doctor-John-Hall-from-Rt-Hon-Damian-Hinds-MP...-2.jpg>> [7 February 2019]
- Home Office (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*. London: Home Office
- Hughes, J. (2014) 'Contact and context: sharing education and building relationships in a divided society'. *Research Papers in Education* 29 (2), 193-210
- Hughes, J., Campbell, A., Lolliot, S., Hewstone, M., and Gallagher, T. (2013) 'Inter-group contact at school and social attitudes: Evidence from Northern Ireland'. *Oxford Review of Education* 39 (6), 1-19
- Hughes, J., Lolliot, S., Hewstone, M., Schmid, K. and Carlisle, K. (2012) 'Sharing Classes between Separate Schools: A Mechanism for Improving Inter-Group Relations in Northern Ireland?'. *Policy Futures in Education* 10 (5), 528-539
- Hughes, J., Lolliot, S., Hewstone, M., Schmid, K. and Carlisle, K. (2012) 'Sharing Classes between Separate Schools: A Mechanism for Improving Inter-Group Relations in Northern Ireland?'. *Policy Futures in Education* 10 (5), 528-539
- Ipgrave, J. (2003a) *Building E-Bridges: Inter Faith Dialogue by Email*. Birmingham: Christian Education
- Ipgrave, J. (2003b) 'Dialogue, citizenship, and religious education'. in *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. ed. by Jackson, R. London: Routledge, 147-168
- Ipgrave, J. (2009) 'The Language of Friendship and Identity: Children's Communication Choices in an Interfaith Exchange'. *British Journal of Religious Education* 31 (3), 213-225
- Ipgrave, J. (2012) 'Conversations between the Religious and Secular in English Schools'. *Religious Education* 107 (1), 30-48
- Ipgrave, J. (2013) 'The Language of Interfaith Encounter among Inner City Primary School Children'. *Religion and Education* 40 (1), 35-49
- Jackson, R. (2003) 'Citizenship as a replacement for religious education or RE as complementary to citizenship education?'. in *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. ed. by Jackson, R. London: Routledge, 67-92
- Jackson, R. (2014a) *Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe
- Jackson, R. (2014b) 'The development and dissemination of Council of Europe policy on education about religions and non-religious convictions'. *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 35 (2), 133-143
- Jackson, R. and McKenna, U. (2017) 'The Young People's attitudes to Religious Diversity project in the context of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) research'. in

- Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity*. ed. by Arweck, E. London: Routledge, 3-18
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T. and Maruyama, G. (1983) 'Interdependence and Interpersonal Attraction Among Heterogeneous and Homogeneous Individuals: A Theoretical Formulation and a Meta-analysis of the Research'. *Review of Educational Research* 53 (1), 5-54
- Kerr, D., Keating, A., Poet, H., Spielhofer, T., Lopes, J., and Mundy, E. (2011) *Evaluation of the Schools Linking Network: Final Report* [online] available from <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182402/DFE-RR090.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182402/DFE-RR090.pdf)> [1st June 2017]
- Knauth, T. and Vieregge, D. (2019) 'Researching religion-related dialog in schools – theoretical and methodological considerations'. *Religion and Education* 46 (1), 20-39
- Lederach, J. P., Neufeldt, R., and Culbertson, H. (2007) *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit* [online] available from <<https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/reflective-peacebuilding.pdf>> [1 August 2017]
- Liebkind, K. and A. L. McAlister (1998) 'Extended contact through peer modelling to promote tolerance in Finland'. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 29 (5-6), 765-780
- Loader, R. (2016) *Faith schools, 'twinning' and inclusivity: what can England learn from Northern Ireland?* [3 October] available from <<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/faith-schools-twinning-and-inclusivity-what-can-england-learn-from-northern-ireland>> 2 February 2019
- Loader, R. (2016) *Faith schools, 'twinning' and inclusivity: what can England learn from Northern Ireland?* [3 October] available from <<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/faith-schools-twinning-and-inclusivity-what-can-england-learn-from-northern-ireland>> 2 February 2019
- Loader, R. and Hughes, J. (2017a) 'Balancing Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Education: The Potential of Shared Education in Divided Contexts'. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 65 (1), 3-25
- Loader, R. and Hughes, J. (2017b) 'Joining together or pushing apart? Building relationships and exploring difference through shared education in Northern Ireland'. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 47 (1), 117-134
- Loader, R. and Hughes, J. (2017b) 'Joining together or pushing apart? Building relationships and exploring difference through shared education in Northern Ireland'. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 47 (1), 117-134
- MacMullen, I. (2007) *Faith in Schools? Autonomy, citizenship, and religious education in the liberal state*. Oxford: Princeton University Press
- Madge, N., Hemming, P. J. and Stenson, K. (2014) *Youth on Religion: The development, negotiation and impact of faith and non-faith identity*. Hove: Routledge

- McClure Watters (2014): *Evaluation of the Sharing Education Programme: Programme Level Summative Evaluation Report (Year 1 – 3) Final Report* [online] available from: <[http://www.sepni.org/resources/6287/6428\\_6287\\_77\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_the\\_Sharing\\_Education\\_Programme.pdf](http://www.sepni.org/resources/6287/6428_6287_77_Evaluation_of_the_Sharing_Education_Programme.pdf)> [2 September 2018]
- McGlynn, C., Niens, U., Cairns, E. and Hewstone, M. (2004) 'Moving out of conflict: the contribution of integrated schools in Northern Ireland to identity, attitudes, forgiveness and reconciliation'. *Journal of Peace Education* 1 (2), 147-163
- Mckenna, U. Ipgrave, I. and Jackson, R. (2008) *Inter Faith Dialogue by Email in Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the Building E-Bridges Project*. Münster: Waxmann
- Miller, H. (2001) 'Meeting the Challenge: The Jewish schooling phenomenon in the UK'. *Oxford Review of Education* 27 (4), 501-513
- Miller, N. (2002) 'Personalization and the Promise of Contact Theory'. *Journal of Social Issues* 58 (2), 387-410
- National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (2017) *The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England* [online] available from <<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/SOTN%202017%20Report%20web%20version%20FINAL.pdf>> [11 February 2018]
- Nesbitt, E. (2004) *Intercultural Education: Ethnographic and Religious Approaches*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press
- Noula, I. and Govaris, C. (2017) 'Neoliberalism and Pedagogical Practices of Alienation: A Case Study Research on the Integrated Curriculum in Greek Primary Education'. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 66 (2), 203-224
- Oldfield, E., Hartnett, L., and Bailey, E. (2013) More than an Educated Guess: Assessing the Evidence on Faith Schools [online] available from <<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/More%20than%20an%20educated%20guess.pdf>> [17th June 2017]
- Ouseley, H. (2001) *Community Pride Not Prejudice*. Bradford: Bradford Vision
- Parker-Jenkins, M. (2018) 'Problematising ethnography and case study: reflections on using ethnographic techniques and researcher positioning'. *Ethnography and Education* 31 (1), 18-33
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1997) 'Generalized Intergroup Contact Effects on Prejudice'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23 (2), 173-185
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2008) 'Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 32 (3), 187-189
- Pettigrew, T. F. and Tropp, L. R. (2006) 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (5), 751-783
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2009) 'Secondary transfer effect of contact: Do intergroup contact effects spread to noncontacted outgroups?'. *Social Psychology* 40 (2), 55–65

- Pettigrew, T. F. and Tropp, L. R. (2011) *When Groups Meet: The Dynamics of Intergroup Contact*. New York, NY: Psychology Press
- Raw, A. (2006) *Schools Linking Project 2005-06: Full Final Evaluation Report* [online] available from <<http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Bradford-Schools-Linking-Evaluation-2005-06.pdf>> [1 December 2016]
- Raw, A. (2009). *Schools Linking Network Final Evaluation Report, 2008-09* [online] available from <<https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/about/evaluation/>> [2 December 2016]
- Religious Education Council (2018) *REC statement on the final report of the Commission on RE* [online] available from <<https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/news/rec-statement-on-the-final-report-from-commission-on-re/>> [3 January 2019]
- Schubotz, D. and Robinson, G. (2006) 'Cross-community integration and mixing: does it make a difference?' *ARK Research Update* 43. Coleraine: ARK University of Ulster
- Shannahan, C. (2017) 'Zombie Multiculturalism Meets Liberative Difference: Searching for a New Discourse of Diversity'. *Culture and Religion* 17 (4), 409-430
- Shannahan, C. (2018) *Schools Linking and Social Cohesion: An Evaluation of The Linking Network's Schools Linking National Programme* [online] available from <<https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Chris-Shannahan-Schools-Linking-Report-Final-2019-v2.pdf>> [13 August 2018]
- Shelton, J. N. (2003) 'Interpersonal concerns in social encounters between majority and minority group members'. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 6 (2), 171-185
- Stathi, S., Cameron, L., Hartley, B. and Bradford, S. (2014) 'Imagined contact as a prejudice reduction intervention in schools: The underlying role of similarity and attitudes'. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44 (8), 536-546
- Strhan, A. and Shillitoe, R. (2019) 'The Stickiness of Non-Religion? Intergenerational Transmission and the Formation of Non-Religious Identities in Childhood'. *Sociology* 53 (6), 1094-1110
- Stringer, M., Irwing, P., Giles, M., McClenahan, C., Wilson, R. and Hunter, J. A. (2009) 'Intergroup contact, friendship quality and political attitudes in integrated and segregated schools in Northern Ireland'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 79 (2), 239-257
- Stringer, M., Wilson, R., Irwing, P., Giles, M., McClenahan, C. and Curtis, L. (2000) *The Impact of Schooling on the Social Attitudes of Children*. Belfast: Integrated Education Fund
- Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., Tausch, N., Maio, G. and Kenworthy, J. B. (2007) 'The impact of intergroup emotions on forgiveness in Northern Ireland'. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 10 (1), 119-135
- Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J. and Cairns, E. (2009) 'Intergroup trust in Northern Ireland'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 35 (1), 45-59

- Theos (2017) *The Future of Religious Education in England and Wales: Debating Reform* [online] available from <<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Reportfiles/The-Future-of-Religious-Education---Debating-Reform.pdf>> [3 January 2019]
- Theos (2020) *Worldviews in Religious Education* [online] available from <<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Worldview-in-Religious-Education---FINAL-PDF-merged.pdf>> [21 October 2020]
- Thijs, J. and Verkuyten, M. (2012) 'Ethnic attitudes of minority students and their contact with majority group teachers'. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 33 (5), 260-268
- Three Faiths Forum (2016) *Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2016* [online] available from <<https://faithbeliefforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Financial-statements-2015-2016.pdf>> [01 June 2017]
- Turner, R. N., Crisp, R. J. and Lambert, E. (2007) 'Imagining intergroup contact can improve intergroup attitudes'. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 10 (4), 427-441
- Turner, R. N., Hewstone, M., Voci, A., & Vonofakou, C. (2008) 'A test of the extended intergroup contact hypothesis: The mediating role of intergroup anxiety, perceived ingroup and outgroup norms, and inclusion of the outgroup in the self'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95 (4), 843-860
- Watson, J. (2008) 'Can children and young people learn from atheism for spiritual development? A response to the National Framework for Religious Education'. *British Journal of Religious Education* 30 (1), 49-58
- Watson, J. (2010) 'Including secular philosophies such as humanism in locally agreed syllabuses for religious education'. *British Journal of Religious Education* 32 (1), 5-18
- Weiss, C.H (1995) 'Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-Based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families'. in *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods and Contexts*. ed. by Connell, J., Kubisch, A., Schorr, L. and Weiss, C. New York: Aspen Institute, 65-92
- Woodhead, L. and Heelas, P. (2005) *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Wright, S. C., Arthur, A., McLaughlin-Volpe, T. and Ropp, S. (1997) 'The Extended Contact Effect: Knowledge of Cross-Group Friendships and Prejudice'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1), 73-90

# Endnotes

---

**i** The measure of ethnic diversity was represented by the percentage of students whose first language was anything other than English.

**ii** The measure of social deprivation was represented by the percentage of students who were eligible for free school meals at any time during 2010-2016.

**iii** The measure of academic performance was represented by the percentage of, at primary level, students assessed as 'working at expected standard', and at secondary level, the percentage of students who achieved grade 5 or above in the 2016-17 English and Maths GCSEs.

**iv** Community schools are defined by the UK government as "sometimes called local authority maintained schools [... which] are not influenced by business or religious groups and follow the national curriculum" (Gov.uk 2020).

**v** The Commission on Religious Education defines 'personal worldviews' as "an individual's own way of understanding and living in the world, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews". Institutional worldviews are defined as "organised worldviews shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions", including religions and atheism, humanism and secularism (CoRE 2018: 4).

**vi** Recognising that there is no such term as a 'faith school' in law (Oldfield, Hartnett and Bailey, 2013: 11), the research used the term 'faith schools' to represent schools of 'religious character' and which "have a faith-based ethos written into their instruments of government" (Ipgrave 2012: 30).

**vii** Chaired by Ted Cante and commissioned in 2001 by the then Home Office Minister, John Denham, the Independent Community Cohesion Review Team was called to establish the cause of disturbances and riots in the North West of England (including Bradford, Oldham and Burnley). The disturbances and the subsequent review took place a matter of months after the government launched its Green Paper, *Schools: Building on Success* (DfEE 2001: para 4. 19) which outlined an intention to increase the number of faith-based schools in England and Wales (Burtonwood 2006: 68).

**viii** In the word clouds, the larger the word, the more frequently it appeared in the students' responses.

**ix** These forms were circulated to students after individual Link Days. There were only given to a limited number of students and the selection criteria is unknown.

**x** When reporting on statistical significance, the 0.05 significance level (p) is used. This means that the researcher can be 95% confident that findings have not occurred by chance (standard in social science research).



---

**xi** Despite previous evaluations emphasising their significance, the variables of city, borough, gender, ethnic diversity and social deprivation were all found to have minimal influence over the survey data.

**xii** Represented by students picking the ‘worried’ or ‘confused’ face.

**xiii** An example of a well-managed and enjoyable competitive encounter was a donut eating competition that took place in the Link Day of two Focus Schools (see Key Terms). One student from each school was asked to volunteer to eat a donut without licking their lips. The students were asked to cheer on and applaud the student representing their Link School. At the end, the teachers announced a draw and all students celebrated.

**xiv** Selection bias is already evident in School Linking to an extent, depending on how students are selected to take part (see Section 4.4). Moreover, the research recognises that by virtue of *opting in* to School Linking, the schools on the programme can be described as ‘moderate’ (a term Burtonwood (2006) uses to describe a school where its culture and ethos predisposes the students to develop less prejudiced attitudes). This is a selection bias in itself.

**xv** There is an argument that instrumentalising the concept of at the start of a study risks excluding the reality of the lived nature of friendships.