

A new approach to teaching that encourages the development of positive character attributes, including respect for diversity, perseverance, collaboration and empathy, has been successfully piloted by the Church of England's Education Office.

Funded by the Department for Education and the Jerusalem Trust and rolled out across twenty schools in 14 subjects from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3, the *What If Learning* approach aims to support pupils in their character development and to learn to live well together with others as preparation for life in a diverse society.

James Townsend, from The Church of England Education Office, said: 'We are delighted with the results. Pupils made more positive assumptions about each other, increased their collaboration, empathy and respect for diversity and showed greater perseverance. Teachers found that, over time, the method of teaching became intuitive and they noticed the pupils' attributes of hospitality increased.'

The findings of the pilot project were revealed by Prof Trevor Cooling, Faculty Director of the National Institute for Christian Education Research at Canterbury Christ Church University, at a conference hosted by the Church of England Education Office on Monday, 26th September. Prof Cooling said: 'We found that, after a few weeks using the *What If Learning* scheme, children were more willing to make positive responses about other children and made fewer negative judgements.'

The *What If* approach crosses all subjects from Year 5 children working in an inclusive and empathetic way as part of a team formulating hypotheses and tests in a science experiment to Year 1 children using drama to imagine what they would feel like if they had been asked to leave behind everything they had ever known and start afresh in a new place. In another school, Year 6 pupils visited a Sikh Temple in Leicester to extend children's understanding of Remembrance of those who gave their lives in war from both Sikh and Christian perspectives.

At the conference, teachers described improving behaviour of a pupil who had otherwise felt to be not accepted by their cohort in a school in Chester. Year 5 and 6 pupils at a school in Derby organised a welcome tea for the cleaners and lunch supervisors which helped to express gratitude and appreciation for those who serve them. This led to a week in which the children could choose their own school lunches. A school in Exeter reported that parents new to the UK who had felt peripheral to the school had been brought into the school community through the initiative.

## Notes

The *What If Learning Character Development Project* was conducted in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University, the dioceses of Chester, Derby, Exeter and Peterborough, the University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth and GO Ministries Ltd.

Case studies:

Wybunbury Delves C of E Aided Primary School, Nantwich, Cheshire used *What If* in year 5 science lessons.

Braunston C of E Primary School, Northants, used *What If* in Year 6 Religious Education and History lessons.

St Marychurch C of E Primary and Nursery School, Torquay, Devon used *What If* for Years 3 and 4 to celebrate learning through holding a parent and friends event.

Christ Church C of E Primary School, Chesterfield, Derbyshire used *What If* in Year 4 and 5 Science and Literacy. Having researched the heart in science, the class welcomed a pupil who had received a heart transplant into class to interview her about her life.

[Download the Case Studies document.](#)

[Download the Report.](#)

[Watch a short film about \*What If Learning\*.](#)

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