



UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE OF CHRISTIANITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Céline Benoit, Aston University

c.benoit@aston.ac.uk

Context

- 1944 dual settlement
- 1988 ERA
 - compulsory weekly RE lessons (not RI)
 - daily acts of CW to be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character"
- High number of schools non-compliant with the legislation
- Calls to review RE and CW

Key questions

- What place does Christianity occupy in primary school education?
- What is its role and function?
- How are CofE schools distinctive from non-confessional schools?

Research design

- **18 primary schools** in the WM
 - 17 schools visited 2-3 times over one year
 - 1 school visited weekly over one year
- Non-participant **observations**
 - RE and CW/Assemblies
 - ...
- Semi-structured **interviews**
 - Senior management, teachers and pupils

Key findings

- **Christianity in CofE schools**
 - Ethos, CW and RE
 - Links with local CofE church
- **Christianity in non-confessional schools**
 - Ethos, CW and RE
 - Links with local CoE church
- **Construction of religion in RE**
 - World Religions Paradigm
 - Liberal Western Christian discourse
 - Christianity constructed as 'true' religion

Conclusions

- There can be little difference between VC CofE schools and non-confessional schools
- In some cases: paradoxes as some CofE schools eager to demonstrate inclusive ethos & some non-denominational eager to demonstrate compliance with law
- Non-confessional schools can remain 'Christianised' public spaces
 - Reproduction of latent forms of liberal Protestantism
 - Romanticised and moderate constructions of Christianity as a the norm against which other 'world religions' are compared
 - In-group cultural norms (vs. 'Others')