

The impact of distinctively Christian Education. A project proposal from the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) at Canterbury Christ Church University.

The Proposal in Brief

The proposal is for a two-year, research-based programme in schools led by Professor Trevor Cooling that will build on his work with the *Transforming Lives* Project. This proposal focuses on supporting teacher training by developing evidence-based materials that can be used in schools. The two priorities will be (i) to generate the evidence that demonstrates the impact of a Christian approach to teaching and learning and (ii) to create a training toolkit for use with teachers and student teachers in schools and academies with a Christian ethos. The project is designed to build on the current opportunities offered by government support for schools with Christian sponsors. It will impact teachers, policy makers and those involved in teacher training.

The *Transforming Lives* Approach

In the last three years, one of the key priorities of *Transforming Lives* has been to develop a Christian approach to teaching and learning that works in all subjects and with pupils of all ages from a variety of backgrounds. The approach enables teachers to identify key Christian virtues and ways of thinking that are relevant to their subject and incorporate these into the teaching methods used. The intention is to show that a Christian school is distinctive not just because of its Religious Education, but because of the way all subjects are taught. The rationale for this approach was presented at the Watson Symposium on October 20th.

The Background to the Proposal

1. The *Transforming Lives* programme has, over the last six years, challenged the misconception that working from a Christian perspective is either irrelevant to or an impairment to being a professional teacher and has offered practical support to Christian teachers in integrating their faith and their work. It has done this by developing a credible theology of education, influencing teacher training and producing practical resources and then promoting these through print, public speaking, DVDs and websites.
2. *Transforming Lives* has been opportune in that it has existed at a time when there has been a growing interest in the contribution that Christian faith makes to the education system. For example, the Church of England is actively encouraging its schools to develop their ethos as distinctively Christian schools. Furthermore, the Coalition Government is promoting the setting up of schools with a distinctive ethos in the form of academies and free schools and giving them the freedom to design their own curriculum. Besides the Church of England, there are several active groups sponsoring the creation of Christian schools, including the Roman Catholic Church, Oasis Community Learning, Grace Academies and the United Learning Trust. In addition there are many other schools in both the public and private sectors that work from a broadly Christian values base without direct sponsorship from Christian organizations.

3. However our survey of the research evidence indicates that there is a significant gap between the stated commitment to a distinctively Christian contribution in education and the practice of teachers in classrooms¹. It seems that the aspiration to be distinctively Christian is widespread but the understanding of what that means in practice is limited.
4. Early in 2012, *Transforming Lives* will launch an innovative website that will support teachers in developing approaches to teaching and learning that are distinctively Christian. This fulfils a significant need since the evidence is that this is an area where much help is needed². This website has, through its ongoing promotion, the potential to influence thousands of schools and academies.
5. Of contemporary relevance is that the *Transforming Lives* approach to teaching and learning is designed to promote the development of Christian character through classroom teaching. The Bishop of Manchester highlighted the importance of this in his Radio 4 Sunday Service sermon on 14th August following the civil disturbances in the preceding week.
6. The other new opportunity is the significant change about to take place in teacher education, whereby responsibility will shift from universities to schools. There are very few experienced specialists in training teachers for work in Christian schools. With the responsibility for teacher training devolved to schools, there will be an even greater need for informed support that ensures that trainee teachers receive the necessary preparation for contributing to a school with a distinctively Christian ethos.
7. However a very effective, political lobby group exists, which campaigns against schools with a Christian ethos and other 'faith' schools. This has published a 40-page dossier of research which, it is claimed, provides the evidence to show that faith-based approaches are harmful to community cohesion and do not benefit the wider population. At the annual conference of the Association of Anglican Directors of Education in June this year the question asked was 'what is the evidence for the positive impact that a distinctively Christian approach to teaching and learning has?' In these days of evidence-based policy, this key group highlighted the urgent need for robust evidence that demonstrates the impact of a Christian approach to teaching and learning. Without this evidence of impact, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue for the value of a distinctively Christian contribution.
8. Canterbury Christ Church University is well-placed to provide the home for this project with its original foundation as a Church of England teacher training college fifty years ago and its current commitment to this foundation ethos being restated in the recent University Strategic Plan. The Faculty of Education has a distinguished reputation with

¹ Elizabeth Green and Trevor Cooling, *Mapping the Field: a review of the current research evidence on the impact of schools with a Christian ethos* Theos, 2009.

² See, for example, John Cox's book *More than Caring and Sharing: Making a church school distinctive*, published by Kevin Mayhew in 2011. John is a recently retired diocesan director of education.

its teacher education programme rated as outstanding by Ofsted. It was also the original partner university with Teach First and continues to work closely with them. NICER is a specialist research centre based in the Faculty of Education (see Appendix 1).

The Proposal in Detail

1. The proposal is to run a two-year, research-based development programme with the aim of supporting the implementation and enhancing the impact of the distinctively Christian approach to teaching and learning pioneered by *Transforming Lives* in schools in the UK over the next ten years.
2. The objectives of the programme are:
 - To provide, and disseminate widely, robust evidence demonstrating the impact of a distinctively Christian approach to teaching and learning.
 - To provide Christian schools with practical support in implementing their Christian ethos.
 - To determine the needs of student teachers preparing to work in Christian schools.
 - To offer practical and effective guidance to those who will be responsible for training student teachers for working in Christian schools.
3. The work of the programme will include:
 - Intensive ethnographic research with up to five case-study schools over two years. Ethnographic research methods have been chosen since these provide detailed evidence of the impact of classroom interventions. The team will utilise established qualitative research methods including interviews, observation and focus groups. The research process will test the impact of introducing a distinctively Christian approach to teaching and learning within each school community. This will involve training selected teachers in the use of the *Transforming Lives* approach followed by observing classroom work and interviews with teachers, students and parents and other stakeholders to gather evidence on the impact of the approach.
 - Participation by the teachers involved in an accredited programme contributing to an MA to add value to their involvement in the research.
 - Interviews with Christian student teachers and with teacher trainers to investigate the training needs of students.
 - Analysis of evidence collected.
 - Writing of reports, articles and book chapters to disseminate the results of the research.
 - Development of web-based training materials for use with teachers in initial teacher education and continuing professional development
 - Dissemination of the results and promotion of the resources produced through active networking and speaking engagements undertaken by Trevor Cooling and team, using his extensive contacts built up over many years.
 - Regular reporting to a project steering group.

4. The planned outputs from the programme are:
 - The promotion of the evidence gathered through research reports, peer-reviewed articles in academic journals and presentations at major academic conferences.
 - A toolkit of ideas for Christian schools for implementing Christian approaches to teaching and learning and for training teachers.
 - A programme of dissemination events for teachers

5. The project will achieve national impact through:
 - The national reputation enjoyed by NICER
 - The extensive networking activities of Professor Trevor Cooling.
 - Publication in a range of journals, reports, periodicals and books.
 - Speaking engagements undertaken by the team, particularly Professor Trevor Cooling
 - Partnerships with key organizations including the Anglican Association of Directors of Education, The Church of England, Oasis Community Learning and other academy sponsors.

6. The proposed team for the project is:

Professor Trevor Cooling ó Professor of Christian Education, Canterbury Christ Church University (principal investigator and project director).

As team leader, Trevor will be responsible for the research design, school liaison, developing the theoretical rationale, relationships with participating schools, reporting to the steering group and funders, some data collection, writing reports, articles and chapters. He will devote about 90 days per year to the project.

Dr Lynn Revell - Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Lynn will be responsible for interviews with student teachers and teacher trainers. She will devote about 50 days per year to the research.

Dr Elizabeth Green, Research Fellow, Liverpool Hope University.

Elizabeth will be responsible for data collection in the participating schools. She will devote about 135 days per year to the research.

Elizabeth Melville will be responsible for the administration of the project including practical support of the team, visits to schools, data entry, event organization and financial record keeping. She will devote about 100 days per year to the project.

7. The proposed starting date for the research project is 1st January 2012, finishing on 31st December 2013 with subsequent dissemination through networking, speaking engagements and publications.

Budget

The total cost of this proposal over two years is £244,216. This is made up as follows:

Item	2012	2013
Employment costs	£100,104	£103,712
Steering Group ó travel & subsistence	£2,590	£2,590
Researchers ó travel & subsistence	£3,250	£3,250
Interview transcription	£5,510	£5,510
Stationery, materials etc	£500	£500
Gifts to schools for participation	£2,500	£2,500
MA fees for 15 participating teachers	£9,900	
Dissemination		£1,800
Total	£124,354	£119,862

This proposal is being presented to a number of funding bodies in the expectation that the total cost will be met from two or three grants.

Appendix 1: Information on NICER

1. The National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) is part of the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). It exists to undertake research and knowledge exchange work that develops understanding of the contribution of Christian faith to the public education system. Its goal is to improve and enhance the quality of education offered by Christian teachers and by Christian schools.
2. NICER was launched in 2005 under the part-time leadership of Professor James Arthur at the time when Christ Church became a full university. At this stage it was a collaborative venture between Canterbury Christ Church, St Martin's College (Lancaster), the University of Gloucestershire and the National Society. A number of successful research projects were undertaken, although increasingly the main player in the partnership was Canterbury Christ Church.
3. On the appointment of James Arthur to be Head of the School of Education at Birmingham University in 2009 and to mark Christ Church's success in the Research Assessment Exercise and its achievement of research degree awarding powers, NICER was reconfigured as a research centre in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. The Vice-Chancellor's aim was to raise the profile of the University's work in Christian Education. In January 2010, Trevor Cooling was appointed full-time Director taking up his post on 1st May 2010. In September 2010 Trevor was awarded a personal chair as Professor of Christian Education.
4. NICER is currently working in partnership with *Transforming Lives*, with Trevor leading the current projects to completion at the end of 2011.