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Title Page

What is the extent to which a locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area with a high prevalence of far-right wing extremism?

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University of Glasgow

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Abstract

Far-right extremism is a growing threat in England, and teachers of RE are encountering the impact of this in the classroom, with pupils bringing up related topics in RE lessons. This research set out to consider how a locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys living in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism. Considering the policy basis and role of RE, it suggests a unique role for RE in countering extremist narratives and the building of resilience to radical extremism.

In agreement with the theory of moral development proposed by Michael Hand (2014), and using a framing of policy analysis based on Basil Bernstein's recontextualization (Singh et al., 2013) this research used focus groups with secondary school pupils in a Rochdale school and RE professionals to build a picture of what is needed and what is possible in RE classrooms in England. It focussed on how to support the moral development of white British working-class boys. Within the pupil focus groups, nominal group technique was adopted to give a structured approach to the research. The RE Professionals engaged in a 'hot topic discussion' at a national conference.

The research findings show that pupils want support in understanding what they encounter outside of school, including online. This is important as they feel what they engage with online adds to their sense of identity. They are not naïve to the risks of misinformation and disinformation, but do not know what to trust. They feel that RE teachers have a role in helping with this, and this thesis suggests that directive moral inquiry has a key place. This links to the ability of RE teachers to create a safe space for discussion and having the expertise to engage pupils in critical RE and debate. The subject content of RE also directly connects to countering the religious narratives that far-right extremism adopts. RE has a place for teaching about far-right extremism, teachers just need to use it. This will then help address the vulnerabilities white British working-class boys have to radicalisation from far-right extremism and build their moral development.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

I have used content from the following publications in this thesis:

Hunting, T., Kinchin-Frost, H., Lowe, F., McPherson, M., Waker, G., Wingfield, J., & Fancourt, N. (2024). Argument in religious studies at GCSE: A collaborative developmental research project. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 0(0), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2024.2372904>

Lowe, F. (2024, Summer). Including far-right extremism as a topic in secondary RE: is it 'allowed'? *REToday Magazine*, 41(3).

Lowe, F. (2024). Identity and influence—RE professional's views on the inclusion of far-right extremism as a topic within Religious Education lessons. *Journal of Religious Education*, 72(3), 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-024-00241-4>

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Lowe, F. (2024). Identity and Influence- Focus group research about the role of Religious Education in teaching about far-right extremism. *RE Futures? Parallel Papers Group 8*. AREIAC and AULRE Joint Annual Conference, Birmingham.

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Definitions/Abbreviations

APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Groups
ASC	Agreed Syllabus Conference
BNP	British National Party
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department of Education
DLUHC	Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EDL	English Defence League
FBV	Fundamental British Values
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
ISCP	The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament
LA	Local Authority
NGT	Nominal Group Technique
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ORF	Official Recontextualisation Field
PRF	Pedagogic Recontextualisation Field
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Council of England and Wales
SACRE	Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SMSC	Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural
UAF	Unite Against Fascism
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

1 Introduction and Research Context

I trained as a Religious Education (RE) teacher in 2006 and was employed as a teacher of RE and Citizenship at a school in Bolton in 2007. For an RE teacher, it was an engaging place to work due to the diverse nature of the pupils.

Approximately 60% of the pupils were Muslim and 30% Christian. The majority of pupils were Asian, many from Pakistani and Indian heritage. There were some racial tensions in the area between some of the diverse communities and this had an impact on relationships between the pupils in school.

In 2008, I was appointed to the role of Community Cohesion Co-ordinator.

Promoting Community Cohesion became a statutory duty for schools in 2006 (DfE, 2006) and part of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Framework in 2008 (Ofsted, 2009). My role was to use newly available funding to run some projects in school which would support community cohesion. An example of a project I ran was the British Council 'Connecting Classrooms' project. A partnership was made with a school in Pakistan and joint classroom-based projects were designed to allow pupils to 'improve their knowledge and understanding of other cultures' (Prime Minister's Office, 2012). This role was short-lived as in 2011, when I was promoted to Head of Faculty, my role as Community cohesion coordinator was not replaced. The new Coalition government had shifted the focus from Community Cohesion to Fundamental British Values (FBV) and Prevent (Thomas, 2014). As a result, funding was harder to access for the school's Community Cohesion projects, and for someone to take over my role as coordinator.

Within this time however, an event occurred which started my initial interest in preventing far-right extremism and the radicalisation of pupils in school. It became known that an English Defence League (EDL) march was taking place in Bolton on the 20th March 2010, and that other groups would be participating in a protest against this, including Unite Against Fascism (UAF) (BBC, 2010). Staff from the school were called to a meeting and told by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) not to engage in any conversation about the event with pupils. We were to shut discussions down. I remember feeling frustrated by this as both a Religious Education teacher and a Citizenship teacher. I felt that there was a purposeful conversation to be had here about the marches, the views expressed,

the damage such events can have on the community and the resulting religious and racial tensions which could arise. My role and training meant I had the skills and knowledge to do this appropriately, but I was forbidden to hold these conversations.

The marches took place and many pupils from the school attended. There was unrest and people were injured. Some participants were arrested, and others were seen on CCTV. I remember being called to the SLT office and asked if I could identify pupils on some of the CCTV footage. This had been sent to the school by the police, as the school was identifiable on some of their clothing and possessions. I found great irony in this; I had not been allowed to talk to pupils about the events beforehand, maybe even preventing their involvement, but I was expected to identify them afterwards. I never knew if I was asked because I was the Community Cohesion Coordinator, or whether it was simply because I taught so many pupils in the school, as often happens with teachers of RE.

I resolved that day that I would not shy away from such discussions again, that I would actively ensure that my curriculum engaged pupils about events of relevance such as this, and that I would look for ways to ensure that Religious Studies and Citizenship could best support our pupils in navigating a world with intolerance, disrespect and sometimes violent extremism. I never have ‘gotten into trouble’ for it.

In 2018, I started working in a school in Rochdale as a Head of Religious Studies. During the handover meeting with my predecessor, I asked what challenges I would face when teaching Religious Studies, I was told that I could expect to be questioned about far-right extremist narratives, events and views prevalent in the area. I would need to know how to handle this. Within the first two weeks of working in the school, a white, male pupil asked me about Tommy Robinson “He is a pretty intelligent guy though isn’t he Miss, what do you think about him?”. This question lies at the very heart of this research.

Far-right extremism has been a growing threat in the UK (Ali, 2021; ISCP, 2022; Skoczylis & Andrews, 2022) and came to real prominence in July 2024, with the riots following the murder of three girls in Southport. When this pupil asked me about Tommy Robinson, there was a far-right influence in the area through

marches, leafletting campaigns and violent activities including attacks on mosques. These shall be explored in more depth later. There was also evidence that far-right groups had an influence in the area, through political campaigns, as shown in vote results. When I first came to this research, I wanted to find out what could be done to support white British working-class boys through local RE, in light of this ‘street-level’ activity. However, as my research progressed the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, and this changed the nature of the threat from far-right extremism, to having more prevalence online. This had an impact on the results and outcomes of this research, as shall be shown more fully in what follows.

Education against violent extremism has been recognised as a factor in preventing far-right extremism (Ghosh et al., 2017; Hand, 2022; Niemi et al., 2018; Sajjad, 2022), but guidance is often general and not subject-specific, leaving schools to decide when and how it is delivered. This research aims to address this, by showing what the role of RE is, in contributing to this whole school issue. However, the nature of RE has been changing over the course of this research, with a movement away from a world religions approach to a worldviews approach to the subject. There is also a widely accepted call for RE to become part of the national curriculum (DfE, 2025a) or to at least have a national content standard (REC, 2023a). This would move RE away from a locally determined approach, again a change which will be considered in more depth as the broader context of the research is given.

1.1 Research Questions

This section outlines the questions which this research aims to answer. It sets these within the theoretical framework through which this research was carried out. In doing this, the relevance of the research is highlighted. I also address the positionality of the research and myself within the wider context. Finally, an overview of the layout of this thesis is given with a timeline of the research.

The research undertaken here aimed to identify how an RE syllabus can support pupils (particularly white British working-class boys), in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism (in this case the area of Rochdale).

A literature review was carried out to consider current thinking around far-right extremism, pupils' identity, moral education and the role of RE. From this literature review the following questions were developed:

The overarching research question is:

How can an RE syllabus meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys, living in an area with a high prevalence of far-right extremism?

The sub-questions were:

- What do pupils see as the main influences on their own identity?
- Where do pupils get their perceptions of religions, cultures, and communities?
- Whether pupils think far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- To what extent do pupils use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school?
- Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

In order to answer these questions, I needed to understand pupils' perspectives on the topics, including their own view of their identity development in comparison to the view of the literature. I needed to understand where pupils were accessing materials and the extent to which these overlap with the recruitment strategies of the far-right. I also needed to see if or how pupils implement what they learn in school, outside of school, particularly relating to the skills recommended to build resilience against far-right extremism. I had to

understand the views of pupil and RE Professionals (teachers, advisors, SACRE members, national bodies) on the teaching about far-right extremism. I also needed to understand the role of teacher agency in being able to address these issues. This would then confirm my position of RE having a unique role in supporting schools, in teaching about far-right extremism. Finally, I needed to know if or how it might be included within the RE curriculum and individual lessons.

This research was split into two phases. The first phase involved focus groups with local secondary school pupils. The second phase involved focus groups with national RE professionals, giving the opportunity to reflect on the findings from the pupil focus groups and triangulate the data, giving an insight to the practical implementation of the findings and what might be achievable in the classroom. There is also a future opportunity flagged in the conclusion which could involve a community of practice for local RE teachers, considering the available resources and how teachers choose resources for use in the classroom.

1.2 Relevance of this Research for English Secondary Schools and Pupils

Teaching about far-right extremism is ultimately a moral issue. When faced with far-right narratives, a person has a moral choice to make, about what they do with that information. They can either reject it in its entirety and lack an understanding of why, they can analyse and evaluate the information in light of prior knowledge, research and validation, making an informed decision about it, or they can accept it unquestioningly. This research aims to consider how, through a locally agreed syllabus and framed by the pedagogic device of Basil Bernstein (Bernstein, 2000), RE can teach about far-right extremism. This is so that pupils, and particularly white British working-class boys, can make a moral choice around such information, allowing them to be empowered citizens, making decisions for the betterment of their communities and wider society.

Currently, there are a number of gaps within understanding and literature relating to teaching about far-right extremism in schools and particularly in RE. The first relates to the position of the topic within the overall school curriculum. Guidance on building resilience and preventing radicalisation is often left as a

cross-curricular approach with little consensus on what should be taught where and why. This does allow schools the freedom to fit the delivery around their curriculum and teacher agency will be shown as a considerable benefit here, but I suggest this may lead to ‘patchy coverage’ without a clear overview of what is being contributed and by whom.

This lack of curriculum guidance leads to a second gap which relates to what RE’s unique contribution might be to teaching about far-right extremism. Whilst there is often reference to RE within guidance and a recognition that RE has something important to contribute, as shall be seen this is not articulated clearly, and with the confusion around aims and purpose within RE anyway, could mean that RE ends up contributing nothing of worth.

Finally, a gap surrounds which teaching methods and pedagogic tools might be the most beneficial in RE lessons to meet the end goal of building resilience and preventing radicalisation to far-right extremist narratives. This gap is not considered fully in this research, but the possible teaching methods and pedagogic tools which could be utilised are identified, and a suggestion of future research given to address this gap.

This research aimed to address some of these gaps through the research questions above and in doing so provide a more definitive view of how schools, RE curricula and more specifically, the locally agreed syllabus, RE teachers and wider RE Professionals can offer to support pupils. In doing this, the research will make an important theoretical contribution, as it will offer a response to Bernstein’s work and show how the structure of RE in England blurs the lines between the power and policy relations proposed by Bernstein (2000) and instead offers a unique field in which policy and pedagogic practices can be recontextualised.

Overall this research will be important in areas where there is a prevalence of far-right extremism, and for supporting the moral development needs of white British working-class boys.

1.3 Positionality of the Research and the Researcher

My role as a teacher-researcher (practitioner-researcher) has already been highlighted. I came to this research as a teacher wanting to know what is best for my pupils in light of personal experience, with the view to sharing this with the wider RE community. Whilst I will address some of this further within the methodology section (specific to carrying out focus groups with pupils), it was important before I carried out any research, including a review of literature, that I considered my own research bias and presumptions.

In the past there have been criticisms about the use of practitioner research, including complaints of it lacking scientific integrity (McWilliam, 2004), However, there are real benefits to its use, including the access to authentic data as a result of the researcher's valuable insight, coming from insider knowledge and experience not available in other methods of research.

To alleviate some of the concerns around practitioner research and to collect reliable and usable data, I engaged in a series of reflective and reflexive writing around the topics, to come to the research informed and attentive to my views and experiences. Similar to research carried out by Anne Arber (2006) when she was a practitioner researcher within hospice care, it took into account the feelings of being an 'insider' as a teacher with my own pupils and a member of the RE community, but also as an 'outsider' researcher looking into the world of RE with the view to identify and develop current practice around teaching about far-right extremism.

Reflective writing as outlined by Gillie Bolton and Russell Delderfield (2018) allows you to enquire into:

What you know but do not know you know

What you do not know and want to know

What you think, feel, believe, value, understand about your role and boundaries.

How your actions match up with what you believe

How to value and take into account personal feelings

(Bolton & Delderfield, 2018, p. 4)

This is important as it allows you to consider what can be changed, what has value, how you or things are perceived and what social, cultural and political structures are at play in a situation. Reflective writing may be carried out through diaries, journalling and blogs. This writing is a self-illuminatory and exploratory process.

Barbara K. Hofer (2017) however says that reflection does not always lead to change or informed action. It can simply be a mindful introspection. For Florian C. Feucht et. al. (2017), 'Reflection becomes reflexivity when informed and intentional internal dialogue leads to changes in educational, expectations, and beliefs.' (Feucht et al., 2017, p. 234). Reflexivity is when you reflect on your values and actions, examining critically the underlying assumptions and hold your beliefs in the same way as the beliefs of others for the benefit of the research (Arber, 2006; Cunliffe, 2016).

Feucht et al.(2017), discuss personal epistemologies referring to the nature of knowledge and the processes of knowing. As part of this, they cite Brownlee et al. who state that teachers with subjectivist personal epistemologies are likely to conceive of knowledge as being based on personal opinions. Teachers like this are therefore more likely to support children to develop their own opinions too; knowledge is personally constructed. This personally constructed knowledge may however require judgments to be made on knowledge claims requiring evaluation and adjudicating on multiple perspectives. Also, within this research they consider how personal epistemologies can be changed and conclude that it is through reflecting on your own beliefs about knowing and knowledge (constructivist beliefs). With this in mind, for this research the reflexive writing I carried out aimed to identify my knowledge of the local area, my experiences of teaching about far-right extremism, my own views on the policies surrounding this, and also my own personal political and religious beliefs around the issues considered and their impact on white British working-class boys. This would mean that I could then fairly evaluate my data and findings and change my understanding and beliefs accordingly if required. I integrated some of the

themes and insider knowledge from my reflexive writing into the coding framework used during the pupil and RE professional focus group analysis which will be considered fully in the methodology chapter.

1.4 Overview of the research

This research considers the current research and practice relating to the teaching about far-right extremism and the unique role which Religious Education can play in the moral development of white working-class pupils when encountering far-right extremist narratives, particularly looking at the local area of Rochdale which has been the focus of far-right recruitment in recent years.

This chapter has outlined the background of the research, the rationale and some initial thoughts and discussions around the topic. It has shown my experience and positionality within the research and considers why this research is important, along with the gaps in current knowledge.

Chapter Two considers the context of the research, further establishing the meaning of key definitions relating to far-right extremism, it considers a theoretical framework for understanding the far-right using Michael Freeden's (1996) conceptual approach.

It also outlines the threat from far-right extremism and what this means for schools in England. An outline of the influence of far-right extremism in the area of Rochdale is given, along with information about key events which feed far-right narratives in the area.

It also covers aspects of identity, including white British working-class male identity and moral identity which feed into the discussions around a vulnerability to radicalisation from far-right extremism. This links to an important academic contribution of this research in addressing areas of identity and identity development. A theoretical framework of moral education proposed by Michael Hand (2014) is outlined as a way of understanding how moral education can be delivered in schools.

Additionally, it looks at the current role of RE in moral development and the delivery of teaching about far-right extremism, recognising the theoretical contribution this research makes. It considers the aims and purposes of RE and an in-depth look into RE and moral development is given. The policies involved in RE and the wider policies linked to teaching about far-right extremism are considered through the framing of Bernstein's pedagogic device and particularly the field of recontextualization. This includes current curriculum arrangements, the locally agreed syllabus, the GCSE syllabus and teacher agency around these. The policies of Prevent, FBV and political impartiality are also outlined.

Finally, it considers current research around content, pedagogy and teaching approaches to teaching about far-right extremism generally and within RE specifically. It shows the important role of teacher agency and the unique position of teachers of RE within the recontextualisation fields of Bernstein (2000).

Chapters three and four consider the two research projects that have been carried out to address the research questions. The first project involved pupil focus groups carried out using nominal group technique. The aim of this project was to find out pupil opinion on issues relating to teaching about far-right extremism. It outlines the coding framework devised as a result of reflexive writing which was applied to the transcribed data from the focus groups. An in-depth analysis of the results is given, along with a discussion of the key categories and themes drawn from the results.

The second project involved focus groups at a national RE conference gathering the views of RE professionals on teaching about far-right extremism. The views of the pupils were shared with the focus group allowing further analysis of the pupil data, this then fed into the discussions of the RE Professionals, showing if and how teaching about far-right extremism can be implemented with the RE curriculum. The results are again presented and analysed using an 'added to' coding framework based on inductive codes. Further discussion is given about the most important points and their relation to the research questions. This allows for a triangulation of the data from the pupil focus groups, assessing the practicality and relevance of the implementation of their suggestions in line with teacher agency and experience.

Chapter five gives an overall discussion based on the literature review, the two projects and the application of the coding framework, allowing a thorough examination of the research questions. Key themes arose, the first is that there is a role for RE in moral development and this can counter far-right extremist narratives, building up skills and resilience for white working-class boys. The locally agreed syllabus is considered showing that teaching about far-right extremism can meet the aims of the syllabus and therefore support the moral development of white working-class boys.

Pupils' identity development is a further theme with consideration given to impact of influencers, working-class identity and heritage. Pupils see influencers as having the biggest impact on their identity. They do not refer to their local identity or a class identity. They also question the influence of older generations because of outdated views. This brings a further academic contribution of this work to understanding pupil identity and identity development.

How pupils understand religions, cultures and communities through online sources is considered alongside the themes of debate, transferable skills and critical thinking. These show a need for pupils to be taught about far-right extremism explicitly and to be directed towards moral understandings of far-right narratives.

Further themes relate to the teaching about far-right extremism and teacher agency, ability and confidence, alongside opportunity. It is shown that there is the opportunity to teach about far-right extremism. Definitions of this however are confusing and teachers need further support. Teachers also need the reassurance that they can teach against far-right extremist narratives. Using visits and visitors, and providing opportunities as mentioned above to develop digital literacy and critical thinking will allow pupils to bring their experiences outside the classroom inside and then be better prepared for future encounters.

Chapter six draws conclusions. In reflecting on the research questions, it shows RE's unique role in teaching about far-right extremism. It shows RE's role in moral development. It also shows that RE has a place in teaching about far-right extremism due to the religious focus of the narratives.

In summarising the key findings, there is a consensus between the pupils and teachers that RE can teach about political issues and this might include far-right extremism. RE is key to discussions of politics as it can give pupils powerful knowledge to bring change. Critical RE is core to supporting pupils to engage in discussions around political issues and central to their moral development. Politics and far-right extremism is relevant in RE, but teachers need reassurance that they are allowed to directively teach against far-right extremist narratives. This again, is where the theoretical contribution of this study is important as it demonstrates the role RE teachers can have in the power and control structures of the curriculum.

Limitations and innovations of the research is shown, including the smaller scale of the research, the time during which the research took place where COVID-19 had an impact, and also the inability to focus solely on white British working-class boys in the focus group, due to ethical and categorisation constraints. The nominal group technique however is shown as an innovative way of engaging young people in focus group research.

Finally, the implications of the study are given including a future opportunity for an additional phase of research and a need to identify suitable resources for use in the classroom. Far-right extremism should be something covered within the RE curriculum and syllabuses should be altered to do this. The role of RE within moral development is also something to be maintained and flagged within teacher training and syllabus documents. There is also a need for RE to retain a local element and be responsive to the communities around schools. Finally, RE has an important role in the moral development of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism.

1.4.1 Timeline of the Research

This research has taken place between 2020 and 2025, which is of importance to the positionality of this research due to the changes that have occurred during this time. This project had initially started out as a reflection on the development of a locally agreed syllabus, in light of the localised presence of

far-right groups in Rochdale, however, major events were to have an impact on the increasing relevance of carrying out this research. Two of the most significant include the impact of COVID-19 on the nature of the far-right and changing perceptions on the value of the locally agreed syllabus. The timeline (Figure 1) maps some of these events and they will be discussed in depth throughout this dissertation.



Figure 1 Key Dates

1.5 Conclusion

This section has outlined the context of the research giving my own rationale for research and the wider need for the research to take place. It has briefly shown that pupils in RE lessons in schools encounter far-right extremist narratives and that there is a need to consider what RE teachers can do when this happens. As a moral issue, the research considers how RE can support the moral development of white British working-class boys who may be seen as the most vulnerable to radicalisation. In the area where the research takes place, the RE locally agreed syllabus is used, so this research looks at how an RE locally agreed syllabus can meet their needs. It suggests a place for RE to explicitly teach about far-right extremist narratives and the ability of RE to equip pupils with the skills needed to understand information presented to them about religions, cultures and communities countering far-right extremist narratives. This shows the unique pedagogical contribution of this research.

The research questions have been outlined and the relevance of this research for English secondary schools has been considered including reducing the risk of radicalisation of school pupils and preventing violent extremism. Gaps in understanding have been highlighted, including what RE's unique contribution to preventing radicalisation and countering extremist attitudes might be. It also acknowledges that how RE might teach about far-right extremism lacks guidance, gaps this research aims to address. The theoretical contribution of the research, in reimagining Bernstein's work for the RE curriculum has been introduced.

The positionality of the researcher has been given, highlighting the teacher-researcher role. Reflexive writing has been introduced as a method for ensuring that existing knowledge and experience is mapped, so that insider knowledge can be used in the best way and that analysis can be fairer, and any researcher bias identified.

Finally, an overview of the research was given showing the two stages of research which took place, including focus groups with pupils and RE professionals. A timeline has also been used to show the development of the research and how changes have occurred over the research period, which had an important impact on the interpretations of the findings. This includes the Covid-19 pandemic, the war between Russia and Ukraine and the changing opinion on the locally agreed syllabus by RE professionals.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will give an overview of the political and educational contexts within which this research is set. It will define the key terminology used, particularly regarding far-right extremism, identity and moral development. It will also outline research about teaching about terrorism, extremism and violent extremism. The current role of RE in teaching about far-right extremism is highlighted, including insight into the locally agreed syllabus, GCSE expectations and teacher agency. It is split into four sections 2.2 Far-right Extremism, 2.3 Identity, 2.4 Religious Education, 2.5 Resources for teaching about far-right extremism.

2.2 Far-Right Extremism

This section considers the definitions of far-right extremism. These include those in common usage in education policy and wider documentation impacting education, for example government reports and safeguarding policies, including Prevent. It will also consider other definitions which may be encountered including for example the usage in the media. These are considered in light of Freeden's (1996) conceptual approach to the understanding of ideologies and in this case far-right extremism. This brings greater clarity to what is being discussed in this thesis regarding teaching about far-right extremism.

2.2.1 Defining the key terms

Defining what far-right extremism is, is not an easy task. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISCP) published a report on Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism using information from the seven Agencies and Departments which form the UK Intelligence community (2022). In this, it describes far-right extremism as an ever-shifting landscape with correct terms and definitions changing frequently. Some of this is due to the variations between far-right extremist groups themselves, some is due to the nature of how extremism and terrorism are monitored and countered and by whom, in the UK today.

A broad definition from the report is as follows:

As a belief system it [Far Right movement] encompasses a wide range of individuals and organisations whose political outlook is more extreme than those at the centre right of the political spectrum, primarily on issues such as race and immigration, many of whom espouse violence (ISCP, 2022, p. 2).

This definition is important as it will influence the usage of the term in successive government documentation, including new education policy documents and updates to existing ones.

The definition of far-right extremism is termed extreme right-wing terrorism within the Prevent Duty (2024) which will be discussed later:

...those involved in Extreme Right-Wing activity who use violence in furtherance of their ideology. These ideologies can be broadly characterised as Cultural Nationalism, White Nationalism and White Supremacism. Individuals and groups may subscribe to ideological tenets and ideas from more than one category.

(Home Office, 2024a)

The inclusion of the term terrorism here emphasises the use of violent actions, not just expressing extremist beliefs.

Extremism has recently been redefined for use by government departments as:

1. the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, which aims to:
 2. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or
 3. undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or
- intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2).

(DLUHC, 2024)

This definition was updated in response to the changing nature of extremist ideologists and aims to be more specific, including around the behaviour and harms caused by extremism (DLUHC, 2024). This definition has been criticised by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) think tank as imprecise and will potentially stifle legitimate activism (Sharp et al., 2024). The chief executive of Amnesty International has also raised concerns about the 'sweeping approach' and labelling of groups and individuals, which potentially will 'stigmatize legitimate, peaceful political activity' (Deshmukh, 2024, paras 3-4). It is however, a useful definition to know here as it demonstrates the government's

understanding, which will underpin education guidance and documentation for schools and teachers.

There is a difficulty in providing one definition for far-right extremism. This is something highlighted by Freeden (1996), who in considering a conceptual approach to ideologies (like those of far-right extremism) suggests that it is not possible. He suggests that 'the ready-made fixed ideological structure, displaying a high degree of internal coherence and systematization, is vanishing' (Freeden, 2019, p. 7). This builds on his work, stating that ideologies need to be understood as pliable:

The awareness of ideological pliability is related to the internal structure of ideologies...The nature of those concepts whose linkages form ideologies is to contain both long-standing and short-term elements—cores on the one hand, and adjacent and peripheral components on the other. Ideologies replicate that structure in a more complex way. When perceived as a cluster, our attention shifts immediately to the relationships among the concepts that mark out an ideology.
(Freeden, 2006, p. 16)

This means that within far-right extremism, while there may be particular core concepts which allow the grouping of instances under one heading, there is a pliability or flexibility required. The example used compares ideologies to a kitchen and the core elements which would make something a kitchen. The removal of a sink from a kitchen may take away from its identity as a kitchen; if a cooker is also removed, its identity is destroyed. However, not all these core elements need to be the same and they do not need to stay the same, the example given here is the varying types of cooker which may be the cooker in a kitchen. For the far-right ideology, beliefs may change and be influenced by social and cultural concepts.

There are also the peripheral components which add further variance to ideologies:

An appreciation of ideologies as multi-conceptual constructs, and as loose composites of decontested concepts with a variety of internal combinations, provides the clue to understanding the linkage between political concepts and the many forms ideologies embrace.

(Freedden, 1996, p. 88)

These peripheral elements can have a localised impact as they can adapt to the community and be reactive to events and apparent need in the area. This is useful in this research, which looks at a particular group of people (white British working-class boys), in a specific area (Rochdale). The nuanced application of far-right extremist ideology, for this group in this area will be considered more shortly.

This conceptual approach as a whole is beneficial in this research as there are so many aspects of education bringing their definitions of far-right extremism (policies, schools, teachers) and the varying nature of far-right extremist groups themselves. Adopting this conceptual approach allows far-right extremism to be understood as diverse, multifaceted, and changing and therefore brings an important understanding to the multiple definitions of far-right extremism available. It also allows for localised variations of far-right extremism which is key to this research which considers the far-right groups within Rochdale and the impact on white British working-class boys.

There are many overviews of what the core elements of far-right extremism may be (Guervos, 2023; P. Jackson, 2022; Saull, 2015). When considering Fascist concepts of the far-right Roger Eatwell (2013), in his overview, suggests there are three overlapping core themes. The first is 'new man' as a symbol of dynamic, risk-taking leadership, inspiring change, achieved through violent action. The second is nationalism which is shown as a cultural nationalism (in contrast to the biological racism of Nazism), though divergences on this split exist. The final is the 'quest for a Third Way state which would reconcile classes and ensure prosperity' (Eatwell, 2013, p. 475). He however, is clear to state, in line with Freedden's (1996) approach that having such core concepts does not mean a playing down of differences, which for him exist in all the main ideologies and their concrete political forms. He suggests that fascist ideology is seen as a matrix demonstrating the diachronic and synchronic variations and the necessity to move beyond simply highlighting keywords, but also considering how fascists conceived such terms and what they are defined against (Eatwell, 2013, p. 475). The same matrix approach could be applied to far-right extremism more

broadly and particularly in this research where there are a range of influencing factors.

The ISCP recognises that it is important that the definitions given for far-right extremism do not stigmatise those who have mainstream right-wing views, and others too have recognised this need. Brown et. al. (2021) considers this notion of extreme and mainstream in more detail. She uses the examples of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, stating that though not far-right victories in themselves, they legitimised many of the far-right concepts connected with them (Brown et al., 2021, p. 2). She proposes a framework which builds an understanding of the mainstreaming of the far-right. In defining mainstream and extreme right, note is given to how the two are dependent on each other to have meaning. There is also a fluidity in that something that is classed as mainstream or extreme may change over time in line with Freedman's (1996) conceptual approach.

Mainstreaming is considered as 'the process by which parties/actors, discourses and/or attitudes move from marginal positions on the political spectrum of the public sphere to more central ones, shifting what is deemed to be acceptable or legitimate in political media and public circles and contexts' (Brown et al., 2021, p. 8). The proposed framework states that mainstreaming is not necessarily good, rational, and moderate in and of itself. This is important for this research in that whilst the ISCP want to ensure that people are still able to hold right-wing views, it can be recognised that a mainstream view need not be regarded as good. This will be of particular importance in this research where teachers are required to uphold British values (Department for Education, 2014), and ensure their teaching is impartial (DFE, 2022) whilst also enforcing the Prevent strategy (Department for Education, 2015). With the type of topics taught about in RE and the proposed inclusion of far-right extremism within this, these duties are particularly pertinent for teachers of RE. As shall be further discussed later, with the focus on the moral development of pupils in light of far-right extremist influence, whether it is 'good' to hold extremist views, mainstream views or far-right views is pertinent to the overall discussion.

2.2.2 Distinctions with Far-Right Extremism

In connection with the above consideration of mainstreaming, Paul Jackson (2022) draws on Cas Mudde's framework of distinguishing between radical right and extreme right. Still, he again recognises that this is not a neat distinction. The radical right are 'those whose politics remain within the bounds of the legal system; and the extreme right who ultimately do not want to retain the existing political system, and who often are willing to overstep legal boundaries in one way or another to achieve their aims' (Jackson, 2022, p. 4).

The distinction between fascism and the broader extreme right has already been considered. Eatwell (2013) suggests that whilst no regime has termed itself fascist since 1945, there are still elements of the extreme right which may share links with fascism's nationalism. He used the example of the French National Front which instead has a celebration of a silent majority and lacks overt support for violence. He also suggests that the far right 'Europeanism' has at its core a growing emphasis on opposing immigration, the right of retention of culture- which became more common through anti-Muslim sentiment. Antisemitism remains central to many extreme right groups, but for some, it is not a hatred of Jews, but Jewish power. Conspiracy theories exist around holocaust denial (Eatwell, 2013, p. 488).

The ISCP (2022), make their distinction between extreme right and extreme right-wing terrorism, and both will be the focus of this research. Extreme right-wing terrorism refers to the 'small minority at the extremist end of the movement who have engaged in radically and politically motivated violence, which has increasingly morphed into terrorism' (ISCP, 2022, p. 2). In this definition, extremists may share the same beliefs as terrorists, but terrorists potentially pursue the use of terrorist violence to further their ideology. (ISCP, 2022, p. 5).

The ideologies fit into several different categories, but often with overlap between them. Again, defining them is difficult and the ISCP refers to it as a confusing 'alphabet soup' (ISCP, 2022, p. 6) of terminology. However, they

suggest considering the ideologies as White Supremacists and White Nationalists, Cultural Nationalists, and Identitarians:

‘Cultural Nationalism’ is a belief that ‘Western Culture’ is under threat from mass migration into Europe and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. The ideology tends to focus on the rejection of cultural practices such as the wearing of the burqa or the perceived rise of the use of sharia law. In the UK this has been closely associated with anti-Islam groups.

‘White Nationalism’ is a belief that mass migration from the ‘non-white’ world, and demographic change, poses an existential threat to the ‘White Race’ and ‘Western Culture’. Advocates for some sort of ‘White’ homeland, either through the partition of already existing countries or by the (if necessary, forced) repatriation of ethnic minorities. Much of this rhetoric is present in the ‘Identitarian’ movement.

‘White Supremacism’ is a belief that the ‘White Race’ has certain inalienable physical and mental characteristics that make it superior (with some variation) to other races. Often associated with conspiracy theories that explain the decline in ‘white’ political and social status over the last hundred years. This can also encapsulate a belief in the spiritual superiority of the ‘White Race’, often describing racial differences in quasi-religious terms (such as the ‘Aryan soul’) (ISCP, 2022, p. 5)

Identitarians seek to normalise a combination of White Nationalists and Cultural Nationalist principles behind an intellectual façade. It actively distances itself from a violent ideology, attracting a movement of highly educated, middle-class members and has been branded ‘hipster fascists’ as a result. (ISCP, 2022, p. 24).

These categories suggested by the ISCP fit in with Freeden's (1996) account as it allows for pliability within these ideologies. There can be cross-over, borrowing and incorporation of concepts between and within ideologies. It can also explain how these four ideologies (and others) have emerged.

As this research is looking at the role of Religious Education (RE) in the moral development of white British working-class boys in relation to far-right extremism, it is the religious elements of these ideologies which will be of most relevance and will be considered in more detail below. It is also recognised that extreme right-wing terrorists 'are more likely to target faith communities than terrorists of other ideologies, and the threat is the greatest for Jewish and Muslim communities' (ISCP, 2022, p. 65). RE is a broad subject and particularly with the movement towards a worldviews approach to RE which will be discussed later, other aspects of these far-right extremist ideologies, for example, anti-immigration will be relevant within the curriculum.

This section has given an overview of the challenges of defining far-right extremism, proposing Freeden's (1996) conceptual approach as a way of managing this through a recognition of the multi-faceted and changing nature of ideologies. This has been supported through an example of its application to fascism particularly, and to the concept of mainstreaming. This approach allows for the varying definitions that arise, as a result of the different authorities and agencies involved in monitoring and countering extremism and their particular focus. For this research, this importantly includes the education focus. It also allows for the different contexts of the extremist groups themselves, including the local context and the changing situations over time. As this research gives a place for the teaching about far-right extremism in the locally agreed syllabus, and importantly to assist with the moral development of white British working-class boys, such an understanding of far-right extremism supports this.

2.2.3 Far-Right Extremist Narratives

There are far-right extremist narratives which focus on religion, and it is these narratives that this research argues pupils should be taught about explicitly, where necessary in RE. Antisemitism is a major theme within extreme right-wing narratives, drawing on a number of conspiracy theories relating to the belief that Jews are in control of global affairs. Key drivers of this message include the book *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* describing a Jewish plan for global domination. Whilst written in 1903, it is easily purchased (Zipperstein, 2020) and has been heavily circulated by far-right groups in recent

times, including on fascist web forums and on gaming servers through the chat facilities. This has given the book a lasting impact on extreme right-wing narratives. The extended narrative situates Jews at the centre of society's problems, with Jews controlling law enforcement (and therefore the blame for extreme right-wing arrests), Jews controlling the media and Jews as behind harmful immigration policies. Associated with terms such as ZOG (Zionist Occupied Government), Kike, 6 million and symbols such as the Totenkopf (skull and cross bones) such narratives can be identified across social media platforms and within far-right extremist group publications.

Associated with the above is the Kalergi plan, a conspiracy theory which suggests that Richard Bon Coudenhove-Kalergi came up with a plot to use immigration policies to weaken the purity of white Europeans (Clark, 2020). This would then allow easier control of the white European race. Related to this is the more general 'Great Replacement Theory' which is based on a book by Renaud Camus *Le Grand Remplacement* in which Camus postulated that black and brown immigrants were reverse-colonizing native white Europeans (Counter Extremism Project, 2025). This is driven by a Jewish-created multi-culturalism aimed at depurifying and weakening the identity of white Europeans. For many extremist groups, a sense of urgency is created by demonstrating that the threat of replacement is already here, and action is therefore necessary to stop it. An example of far-right groups acting as a result of this is related to the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, where online far-right trolls are shown to have had a negative impact on the receipt of this pact (Cerulis & Schaart, 2019; Guhl, 2019) as it could be perceived to be part of this replacement conspiracy. Common terms and symbols relating to this narrative include the Norse Sonnenrad (Black Sun) symbol and '14 words' Referring to the phrase 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' (ADL, n.d.)

For far-right groups the notion of white traitors is crucial. This would include those who support minorities, for example, through the provision of asylum. It also includes those who have relationships with non-white people. A high-profile example of this has been from a neo-Nazi group who branded Prince Harry a "race traitor" after his marriage to Megan Markle (Ford, 2020). This attribution of traitor has been applied across many aspects of society, including for politicians, the police and the media. Examples of the government passing laws,

the police making particular arrests and the media running certain stories are used as illustrations of how they are acting as traitors directly or through their actions, covering up or distracting from what is really going on. An example would be the media printing stories about Islamophobia, when the real issue is the Muslim grooming gangs (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

In addition to the Antisemitic narrative outlined above, anti-Islam is also a feature of many extreme right-wing narratives drawing on supposed underlying fears of Islam. This is not a new idea with the historic battle with Islam a key element of the far-right's narrative (Koch, 2017), but recent Islamist terror attacks have been used by far-right groups to reinforce their portrayal of a cultural threat from Islam. The extreme far-right also suggests a threat from Shariah law, as a system white people cannot speak out against.

There has however, been a reluctant respect from far-right groups for Islamist extremists, with those trying to raise a call to action, using the example of those Islamist extremists who are willing to die for the cause, something which is not so common within the extreme right. References to 'Valhalla' (again co-opting Norse symbolism) are also made as an idyllic afterlife, where warriors live after they have been slain in battle. Some far-right groups have used terms such as 'White Jihad' (Raymond, 2021) to encourage acts of violence as part of a race war. This encouragement to violence is often known as accelerationism whereby, due to the corruption of the government, violence should be used to achieve goals and destabilise the system. In doing so it would bring about revolutionary change and re-establish a white ethno-state (Beauchamp, 2019).

A further narrative linked with religion is to do with Christianity. As highlighted by Hannah Strømmen & Ulrich Schmiedel, (2020) for the far-right, Christianity is opposed to Islam and Islam is opposed to Christianity. 'Far-right forces claim Christianity as the common cultural inheritance and the common cultural identity of Europe, a Europe that must be safeguarded against the invasion of Islam' (Strømmen & Schmiedel, 2020). Far-right extremists will use Christian themes, theology and rhetoric to justify their cause. Helen Paynter (2024) editor of a book about the far right and Christianity, states that this has included Christian crusades where mosques were invaded by far-right extremists handing

out Bibles and a Christian manifesto during the 2015 elections produced by UKIP entitled *Valuing our Christian Heritage* (Paynter, 2024).

The last narrative to be considered here, is that of eco-fascism. This is about using the public concern surrounding the treatment of the environment as a platform for promoting far-right ideologies and arguing that a violent response is necessary to make a difference. Mirroring Nazi environmentalism, far-right groups will associate the strength of the 'land' with the strength of its people (Bove, 2021). Some groups will also use environmentalism as a requirement to a race-war whereby the white race will need to be self-sufficient in order to outlast the required societal collapse, which the race war will bring. While this is not a religious narrative, caring for the environment is a common theme within Religious Studies teaching, for example, it is included in the DfE Subject Content for GCSE (DfE, 2015b). This makes it an important narrative to be aware of.

These narratives fit in with the ideologies outlined earlier, including nationalist and white supremacist principles. How these narratives are used within far-right extremist recruitment varies in line with the changing nature of the far-right extremist groups themselves. For the white British working-class boys, these will often be used to add to feelings of being left behind, as shall be considered in more depth later in this chapter. It is therefore important that the locally agreed syllabus can incorporate teaching against these narratives and something this thesis argues it is able to do.

2.2.4 Threat from Far-Right Extremism and Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

This research is based on there being a threat from far-right extremism for pupils in secondary schools in England. Assessing the level of threat from extreme right-wing terrorism is discussed within the ISCP report and shows the changes that have happened between 2012 and 2019. It indicates that a rise in online material promoting far-right ideology has amplified the radicalisation process (ISCP, 2022, p. 13). There is no longer a necessity for 'real-life contact', where previously meetings were normal and key to recruitment. As identified by

the organisation Hope Not Hate, there is now a younger demographic, which is significant to this research with secondary school pupils (Hermansson, 2022). Those involved in extreme right-wing terrorism are more reactive to external events, including changes in anti-immigration policies and terror attacks and this shall be discussed more fully later concerning events affecting the Rochdale area, as a focus of this research. The ISCP report (2022), suggests that there is currently an absence of prominent charismatic leadership, stating that this is less relevant due to the increasing influence of online platforms. It does not mention those who will be prominent on the platforms as Vloggers, regular posters, and other forms of influencers, which may still mean that an online leader-type personality is present.

2.2.4.1 Lone Actors

The threat from the online focus of far-right extremist groups is that these sites can allow people to self-radicalise, find like-minded individuals easily and then be encouraged with guidance for terrorist attacks. It is therefore easy to see why organisations within the intelligence community suggest that the current terror threat is the greatest from Self-Initiated Terrorists, referred to also as Lone Actors (ISCP, 2022, p. 36). These are defined as:

Persons who mobilise to threaten or use violence, without material support or personal direction from a terrorist organisation; but who may still be influenced or encouraged by the rhetoric or ideology of a group. (ISCP, 2022, p. 29)

One of the issues with outlining the ideologies as above is that lone actors may 'develop a hybrid of the ideologues rather than a strictly defined set of principles' (ISCP, 2022, p. 30). This lack of constraints can make lone actors a higher risk as they may move from 'theoretical inspiration to real-world action in a short space of time' (ISCP, 2022, p. 30). In a systematic literature review on lone-actor terrorism Jonathan Kenyon et. al. (2021), suggest that the perceived risk from lone actors may be overemphasised, but the lack of primary and high-quality data-driven research on this particular type of terrorism means more primary research is needed to fully understand the threat.

2.2.4.2 Mental Health

Within this risk assessment and of relevance to this research is the influence of mental health and developmental disorders being a factor in recruitment to far-right groups, and in the conducting of a terror attack (Grierson, 2021; ISCP, 2022). Asperger's or autism spectrum disorder is sometimes associated with this. Whilst this connection has been debated (Palermo, 2013), it is something to consider within the latter stages of this research when looking at how far-right extremism should be taught in school.

2.2.4.3 Demographic Make-up of Far-Right Extremism

Connected with this discussion is the demographic profile of those involved in far-right extremism. This shall be considered fully in the section about identity. Historically, those who have been involved in violence have been males with criminal backgrounds (ISCP, 2022). MI5 (ISCP, 2022) suggests that there has been a movement from this towards younger males who are well-educated and have good technical knowledge. There are however females involved (Pai, 2016), and their involvement could potentially grow (ISCP, 2022). The cause of this change is a result of 'the pessimistic prospects of this younger generation which has led to enhanced anxiety and victim culture' (ISCP, 2022, p. 33). Whether this is enough to lead to the violent actions associated with far-right extremism is not clear. It could be seen more as a way to bolster status, and this has been termed 'edgy boi' - someone who espouses views which are broadly considered on the margins of acceptable speech or hate speech.

An analogy has been drawn with punks in the 70s; they take on deliberately extreme positions to shock, and the use of the internet provides an echo chamber which can encourage these views to come out more (ISCP, 2022). Jackson (2022) reiterates this, suggesting that 'the internet presence of the extreme right has a powerful effect on the thinking of a younger generation looking for political agendas that shock and radically alternate sense of identity to give meaning' (Jackson, 2022, p. 7). This can be seen as particularly pertinent in schools, where a constraint is placed on what can be said or done in so many

aspects of a pupil's life, that some will take on a deliberate extreme stance against this. This does not diminish or undermine the threat of holding these views, but it is a position which may need to be considered or managed differently.

2.2.5 Local

One of the key aspects of far-right recruitment is through its response to real-world events (ISCP, 2022) including local, national and global and in the past decade, this has been true in Rochdale. This section will consider several of these events which demonstrate such a response and will be in the lifetime of current secondary school pupils, therefore being of more direct influence on the pupils and their families. A locally agreed syllabus could be more responsive to these events.

2.2.5.1 The Murder of Lee Rigby

In 2013, Rochdale-born and educated Lee Rigby was murdered in a terror attack in London and far-right groups have frequently used his murder to promote anti-Muslim sentiment (Pai, 2016). This has been included on social media (Duffy, 2015) and at 'unofficial memorial walks' (M. Collins, 2014). This has happened despite calls from the family not to do this. Many working-class boys will identify with Lee Rigby and his background. A permanent Lee Rigby memorial is in Middleton, Rochdale and memorial events here, have been leafleted by far-right extremist groups and stickers left in the surrounding area. On the same day as Lee Rigby's death, four years later in 2017, a terror attack took place at the Manchester Arena at the end of a concert. Far-right extremist groups again used the event to further their anti-Islam message (Goodwin, 2023). An attack on a mosque in Oldham was believed to be a revenge attack for what happened at the arena (Ravesz, 2017). Pupils in local schools are aware of both events, and some may have been personally affected by the Manchester Arena attack. Terrorist activities have had a direct impact on their lives and pupils will be more sensitive to information circulated about these events.

2.2.5.2 Child Sexual Exploitation

A further event which has received high-profile targeting by far-right extremist groups has been the case regarding child sexual exploitation in the area. Six girls suffered sexual abuse in Heywood, Rochdale. In 2012, Nine men were convicted of the charges of sexual abuse, eight of whom were British Pakistani and one was an Afghan asylum seeker. Far-right groups active in the area were quick to use this case within their anti-Islam targeting. This and similar cases were branded the 'Muslim Grooming Gangs'. It has generated its own narrative, which has been given much consideration by Ella Cockbain and Waqas Tufail (2020) who researched the harm caused. They suggest that 'claims that Muslim culture and faith supposedly perpetuate sexual abuse have helped collectively demonise British Muslim communities, especially young Muslim men' (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020, p. np). The danger highlighted is that whilst this was a narrative driven by far-right groups, it was also later used by liberal and feminist actors allowing the far-right narrative to become more mainstream. Within the community of Rochdale itself, far-right extremist groups held marches with slogans, banners and chants referencing Muslim involvement in the 'grooming gangs' (Jones, 2017).

The negative impact on the Muslim community within Rochdale and other areas was far-reaching, with an increase in hate crimes. The narrative was also seen to be highly effective in recruiting people to far-right extremist groups (Chakelian, 2018). Right-wing populist party UKIP also benefited securing 38.7% of the vote in a by-election in 2014 (UK Parliament, 2014) with the candidate John Bickley citing that people voted for them, as they felt let down over the grooming scandal with the local council failing to prevent the abuse of the girls (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Ten years on from the convictions has only added to the narrative. The length of time it has taken for some of those involved to be deported and the appeal to Human Rights of one of the men to try and reduce his sentence, became controversial topics for the far-right extremist groups to use.

2.2.5.3 COVID-19

Whilst the above events will be known about and understood by some of the pupils in local secondary schools, they would have been very young when the events happened. However, the most recent event which has been used by the far-right for their recruitment and promotion of key narratives, has affected them in a much more direct way and that is the global pandemic of COVID-19. In a literature review of hateful extremism during the COVID-19 pandemic by Kate Cox et. al (2021), Far-right groups have blamed migration, globalisation or the government for the virus, and young people, as a result of the increased time spent online, are more likely to have been exposed to hateful extremist recruitment than before the pandemic (Cox et al., 2021, p. vii). Key aspects relating to religious minorities included ‘false narratives including disinformation that link COVID-19 to a fabricated Jewish plot to initiate a new world war...and accuses Muslims of flouting social distancing rules (Cox et al., 2021, p. 1). Later, it was recognised that antisemitic discourse drew on assertions that the:

Jewish community holds excessive financial resources, political power and influence over media institutions, during the pandemic there has been more messaging of this type, in some cases depicting the pandemic as a Jewish hoax, a plot to depopulate the world or a scheme to start a new world war
(Cox et al., 2021, p. 17).

The narratives are seen as a particular threat as they appeal to people who are struggling from a lack of prospects because of the pandemic.

The Greater Manchester area spent more time with some form of restrictions than many other areas of the country (GC Business Growth Hub, 2020).

Throughout the pandemic, local government made complaints about the lack of financial support for northern regions and Greater Manchester (Nurse, 2020).

Whilst this intervention was strongly supported by local residents, for some it highlighted the vulnerabilities and may have led to them looking elsewhere for solutions. A report by Hope Not Hate about the impact of the pandemic recognised Rochdale as an area which may have an increased risk of being susceptible to far-right overtures (Carter & Clarke, 2021).

2.2.5.4 Riots in 2024

On the 29th of July, three children were killed in Southport as a result of an attack at a children's dance party in Southport. In the following days, misinformation around the identity of the attacker spread rapidly online through a network of far-right extremists and high-profile individuals, leading to concerns about the Online Safety Act (Elgot & Courea, 2024) . This led to an attack on a mosque in Southport, by a group of far-right extremists. There were calls for attacks on migrants, on social media channels. The riots spread over the coming weeks, including in major cities throughout the UK and notably for this research in nearby Bolton and Manchester. These protests included outside hotels deemed to be housing asylum seekers, street demonstrations and further attacks on mosques. Police were able to make dispersal orders, including in Bolton, where far-right and anti-fascist protestors gathered.

Joseph Choonara (2024) writing for the *International Socialism* journal suggests that 'had anti-racists not mobilised in force, we would likely now be seeing pogroms direct against Muslim and refugees across Britain' (Choonara, 2024, p. 6), whilst this is speculation about the outcome, a key element of the unrest was that anti-fascist and anti-racist groups far outnumbered those of the far-right extremists. Choonara states that this was in the 'thousands outside the headquarters of Reform UK, and 15,000 at a Unite Against Racism gathering in Belfast' Choonara, 2024, p.6). Whilst this is positive, Choonara also warns against complacency giving examples of far-right growth across Europe to which Britain is not immune.

2.2.5.5 Localised Campaigns

All the above involve the far-right groups reacting to an external event. However, there are examples of far-right extremist groups active in the area engaging in more general recruitment activities linked to key narratives. In recent years, pupils from the Royton area of Oldham may have received leaflets from local groups through their door (ITV News, 2022b). Pupils will have heard about or even witnessed the banner flown above a Manchester City football game, which promoted an anti-immigration message and was claimed by a far-

right extremist group (Halle-Richards, 2022). There have also been several marches within the area by groups (Stevens, 2019). These real-life events, although less common with the increase in online engagement as outlined above, add to the risk of pupils being drawn into such groups.

2.2.5.6 Antisemitism

Whilst much of this discussion has involved the focus of far-right extremist groups on an anti-Islam message, there have been issues relating to antisemitism. Rochdale borders one of the biggest Jewish communities in Britain, with 30,000 Jews living locally in nearby Salford and Bury, also in Greater Manchester. Data shows that in these areas, there has been a decrease in antisemitic incidents in 2022 from 2021, but the Community Security Trust is still recording high numbers of incidents in recent years (P. Britton, 2022). Some of these incidents included those classed as assault. Many of the incidents also reference current world events, again showing this far-right use of events to drive recruitment. This included during COVID-19 when ‘Zoombombing’ became an issue for the Jewish community. This is when online communal events were targeted, wishing to bring antisemitic abuse (ITV News, 2022a).

Conspiracy theories are also mentioned particularly about the Ukraine war, where Jewish people are accused of ‘causing or bankrolling the war; attacks on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky[y] for his Jewish identity; and pro-Russian sentiment expressed in anti-Semitic terms’ (Britton, 2022, p. np). As stated in the article, ‘these incidents reflect how some anti-Semitic perpetrators will shape their anti-Jewish invective to fit with whatever is prominent in wider public discourse’ (Britton, 2022, p. np). Julia Ebner in her book about the vicious cycle of right-wing and Islamist extremism, states that ‘far-right groups have strategically blended their violent views into everyday discourse to normalise their views and minimise disapproval’ (Ebner, 2020, p. 145) and the same can be seen here with antisemitism. Whilst it is not always known if these incidents were carried out by far-right extremists, the incidents show how far-right themes and narratives are involved. In 2021, a man from the Middleton area of Rochdale was convicted of inciting racial hatred through his far-right antisemitic video streaming and sentenced to six years in prison (Rochdale Online, 2021).

2.2.6 The Rise of the Online Threat

One of the key elements of change in this research has been the role of information available online about religions, cultures and communities. This section will outline some of this change, the implications it had for this research and how the threat of radicalisation and violent extremism has increased for white British working-class boys as a result of this.

In considering the online threat of far-right extremism, we can see that online, there is a reduction in physical barriers for example, police presence at marches or travel logistics to meetings (ISCP, 2022, p. 53). There is also an ease of recruitment with people being able to research in their own homes and join closed groups on messaging apps and forums. It also means the groups are harder to track as they start up and close quickly, can be easily renamed or move to an alternative platform. Platforms include social media sites, online forums, websites, secure messaging applications and gaming platforms (ISCP, 2022, p. 56). There has also been use of podcasts, online radio and dating platforms (Peucker, 2024)

When it comes to extreme right-wing terrorism, the types of content which can be accessed, highlighted in the ISCP report (ISCP, 2022), include performative propaganda, including videos of people carrying out terrorist actions, attack manifestos showing the ideology behind attacks, memes which can also become competitive or directive towards stimulating responses or signposting other content. Discourses and online literature are also available. Videos are a way of promoting far-right extremist narratives, particularly by influencers. An example of this is video logs using handheld devices to create an 'image of authenticity and an illusion of proximity between influencers and their audiences' (ISCP, 2022, p. 55).

This use of video logs is particularly used within the recruitment of women to far-right groups. In an article by Eviane Leidig (Leidig, 2021), writing for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, an outline of the role of women in far-right extremism is given. It shows women being social media influencers on mainstream platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, using gendered narratives to recruit and radicalise through community building and showing a

sense of belonging within the far-right. The video logs used by these influencers try to create a casual and informal conversational approach, again bringing the level of intimacy, authenticity and lived experience. This idea of authentic voice will be considered further later.

The variety of platforms and quantity of information means that even if platforms agreed to regulation, it would be logistically difficult to monitor each and every post. Tactics used on moderated sites, such as Instagram, to share narratives also make it difficult to detect (Peucker, 2024)

2.2.7 The impact of COVID-19

A further element of change in this research has been the impact of COVID-19 on the online threat from far-right extremism. There have been a number of studies into the use of COVID-19 to spread far-right narratives. One carried out by Jonathan Collins (2023) looks at the mobilisation of the far right through a study of far-right content posted in the UK during the pandemic. The research identifies the political dissent, job losses, lockdowns and vaccine concerns as a driver of far-right discourse. The public became more reliant on social media during this time and participants on fringe sites increased.

Using Michael Hogg's uncertainty-identity theory, the research shows that there are 'connections between societal security, toxic online communications, and far-right mobilisation. Narratives during the pandemic included the origins of COVID-19, blaming outgroups for the spread, and vaccine concerns. Groups targeted included the left, LGBT communities, migrants and Muslims' (J. Collins, 2023, p. 372). By demonstrating the inability of the political parties to get it right and reduce anxiety, some people become more interested in alternative pathways of political participation. Far-right groups look more appealing for being able to give answers and create a group identity, removing insecurity and generating a sense of purpose.

The research concludes by suggesting a solution of increased monitoring and blocking of toxic narratives, but recognising that this is not feasible, it instead suggests building community resilience:

Emerging studies suggest that constructing resilience online must focus on stimulating an alternative mode of connectivity which promotes community bridging, cultural identity, and trust (J. Collins, 2023)

Through this, Collins believes that an environment can be created which would hinder far-right mobilisation and the spread of toxic narratives. This thesis builds on this research and considers how pupils, including white British working-class boys are accessing material online and which platforms they interact with. From these findings, this research states that moral development in RE, can guide them in their online participation, through the opportunities lessons can give and the skills they can acquire.

2.3 Identity

This section will consider the role of identity for this research. Whilst there is no ‘type’ when it comes to who may become radicalised. It has already been outlined the increased risk someone has to radicalisation because of a lack of identity, or an identity that is made to feel deficient for example the white working class. When referring to identity this research is not referencing a particular construct of identity, but simply the definition of identity as ‘the fact of being, or feeling that you are a particular type of person’ (Cambridge University Press, 2025). When I was called to the Senior Leader’s office to help identify pupils involved in the marches in Bolton, I knew it was going to be our White British boys who I would be identifying. When I was asked the question in my RE lesson about Tommy Robinson, it was by a White British boy. I do not know whether these pupils would identify as working class, but the demographics of the areas would suggest they are likely to be. This section will highlight the relevance of white British working-class boys to the wider research through an investigation of the key terms, educational disadvantage and issues of identity.

2.3.1 Working Class

Traditionally, the working class have been associated with left-wing politics, but as Houtman et. al. in their book *Farewell to the Leftist Working Class* states:

Although large parts of the social-scientific community still consider it the natural support base for the leftist political agendas, the working class has increasingly come to support rightist parties, even the populist ones that harshly critique the welfare state, the institutional flagship of the left (Houtman et al., 2009, p. 1)

The reason they give for this support for the right is an increase in cultural voting since the Second World War. This is further summarised by Rhonda F. Levine (2009) in their review of the work who states ‘It is not that the working class does not vote its economic interest, it merely votes more aligned to its cultural capital’ and in this case ‘cultural capital-based authoritarianism which emphasizes obligations of work and deservedness’ (Levine, 2009, p. 344). This suggests that the working-class may vote according to who they think best reflects or meets their identity and values, which may not be left-wing parties.

Further to this, Daniel Oesch (2008) when considering Western European workers' support for Right-Wing Populist parties, examines three different reasons for this move from the expected class voting. These include economic conflict, cultural conflict and alienation. It is therefore not as big a leap as might be first imagined for the working classes to support far-right groups, with an explicable move in support of more right-wing policies for some members of the working class.

Matthew Goodwin and Jocelyn Evans (n.d.) give an overview of the far-right appeal to the Working Classes. In the UK, they suggest that 'far right-wing politics is recruiting most heavily amongst young working-class men, who experience unemployment and are deeply anxious about immigration, Islam and settled Muslim communities' (Goodwin & Evans, n.d., p. 10). This is mirrored across Europe, where in some countries, far-right parties are emerging as the most popular political opinion among the working classes (Saull, 2015). Despite differences between far-right groups, there is often a working-class presence. UKIP 'rallied a working-class wing that is deeply hostile towards immigrants' (Goodwin & Evans, n.d., p. 13). Goodwin and Evans suggest that EDL 'Claims to recruit from all races, faiths, political persuasions, and lifestyle choices. But many are young men, pessimistic about prospects and more likely than average to experience unemployment' (Goodwin & Evans, n.d., p. 13).

There is also a notion of the white working class being the 'left behind' communities. Research by James Rhodes et al. (2019) states that being 'left behind' is about how the white working class have been disproportionately impacted by globalisation and deindustrialisation through rising deprivation and an inability to meet the demands of a post-industrial economy. It also suggests that immigration, multiculturalism and social values, alongside a parliamentary political shift towards the middle class, has alienated much of the white working class. Rhodes et al.'s research contests this view, showing the white working class are not uniquely disadvantaged or the sole victims of the processes of decline, and that their political views are complex (Rhodes et al., 2019, p. 3). This image of the white working-class and 'left-behind', however is beneficial to far-right groups, as sustaining this idea is useful to recruitment.

From this evidence, a focus on the working classes as a group could be justified, especially given the demographic of the area within which this research is being carried out.

The title of working-class is one which is complex in and of itself. There are many different understandings of what makes a person working-class, including from a political, social and in the case of this research, an educational context. D. G. Paz (1981) outlines that English workers developed a sense of class consciousness/class conflict between 1780 and 1932. Words like lower order and the poor were replaced with the term working classes (appreciating that there were more than one group of working class and the cultural differences within this). In more recent usage, within education contexts, working-class is frequently used in economic terms, those from low-income backgrounds (Ofsted, 2008), those entitled to free school meals (Mongon & Chapman, 2008), those who have parents who are dependent on the welfare state (Baars et al., 2016). Working class is connected with economic disadvantage and the impact that has on educational opportunity- access to resources, experiences and social stability (Lewis & Demie, 2015; Reay, 2018).

However, in some educational research, it is recognised that social class can be '(re)formed through identities and historic cultural practices, rather than a simple reflection of economic capital and occupations' (Stahl, 2016, p. 2). This adds more complexity in identifying this group, as then it is not necessarily measurable based on available data e.g. entitlement to free school meals. In research carried out into men and lifelong learning, Burke (2006) allowed the men to define their social class themselves, as recognition was given to the discursive nature of such identifications and therefore the idea that 'aspirations are continually re/fashioned through changing identifications and contexts' (Burke, 2006, p. 720).

The overlap between the definitions of working-class above and those used within literature concerning far-right extremism is frequently the economic factors and particularly the frustrations associated with lower income, leading to disenfranchisement, pessimism about prospects and seeking out an answer to misfortunes. A further aspect which narrows the broad group, is a focus on white British boys. The definitions of working class above, would include pupils of all

ethnicities and genders, but in recent years it has become recognised that it is particularly white British working-class boys who are underachieving in education (Baars et al., 2016; Lewis & Demie, 2015; Ofsted, 2008). As a result of this, it is these pupils who are more likely to identify with the disenfranchisement, pessimism and misfortune highlighted above, which is drawing working classes to far-right groups.

2.3.2 Boys

The rationale for this research is mainly focussed on boys, as a result of the statistics relating to the higher number of men involved in far-right extremism (Guervos, 2023) and the underachievement of boys in school (Reay, 2018). However, that is not to say that women are not involved in far-right extremism and that girls are not vulnerable to becoming involved. As Dauber (2017) outlines, there needs to be far more attention given to women's participation in far-right extremism, but due to the lack of research, little is currently known about their involvement. Additionally, it is not that girls do not underachieve in education. Fisher (2017), states that there is an achievement gap between white British girls on free school meals and all other white British girls. It is however, the masculine aspect which is of most relevance to this research, as shall be explained more below.

Penny Jane Burke (2006) quoting Martino states that 'within different social contexts such as schools and colleges men are 'incited to adopt certain practices of "masculinity" and, hence to display themselves as incumbents of certain categories of masculinity on particular occasions' (Burke, 2006, p. 721). Similarly, McDowell (2000) reflecting on research by Frost and Dixon highlights that 'in circumstances of high youth unemployment and low-paid, casualized work, young men may cling even more firmly to outmoded versions of hegemonic masculine identity' (McDowell, 2000).

Conversely, Garth Stahl's research (2016) on aspiration and education of white working-class boys, recognises a process of average-ness within working-class boys whereby 'boys balance their working class masculine identity with a prevailing neoliberal learner identity' (Stahl, 2016, p. 674). As summarised by Roberts (2016) 'rather than subscribing to typical forms of othering or engaging

in hypermasculine versions of problematic, protest masculinity, the boys distance themselves from the identities and behaviours they see as excessive' (Roberts, 2016, p. 123).

Valerie Walkerdine (2011) in agreement with Starl's research shows that

'Neoliberalism poses a problem for working-class communities as the neo-liberal ideals of motivation, aspiration and personality (and the associated necessity to refashion yourself to increase employability), means a disloyalty to the traditions of masculinity associated with being working-class young men' (Walkerdine, 2011, pg. 256).

Whether it is a pull towards more dominant male traits or a balancing act to 'fit in' rather than stand out" (Skeggs in Stahl, 2016, p. 674), there are clear identity issues for working-class boys in determining what it means to be male and working-class.

2.3.3 White

When considering what is meant by 'white' Anoop Nayak's (2007) outline of critical whiteness studies is useful. He highlights that 'those people designated as 'white' tend to be defined and define themselves not by the colour of their skin but by nationality, occupation or sex' (Nayak, 2007, pp. 737-738). Colour of skin is not necessarily what is meant by white and by adopting more of a critical account of whiteness, whiteness could be seen as an organising principle which is linked to social privilege and the 'fun, free and flexible lifestyles of neo-liberalism' (Bonnett in Nayak, 2007, p. 741).

However, of interest to this research is the acknowledgement that if whiteness is considered a social and cultural construct rather than a fact based purely on the pigmentation of skin, there are some who '...do not make the grade? Recent studies include accounts of so-called 'white trash' populations in Southern America and Northern England to reveal how these communities are cast historically and culturally as 'not-quite-white'' (Nayak, 2007, p. 741). So, whilst this research identifies that it is white British working-class boys who are particularly at risk from recruitment to far-right extremism, it is not necessarily the 'white' which may conjure up those images of social privilege and particular

white qualities. For this research, it could even be considered a label that contributes further to a confusion or lack of identity. This is key to understanding the draw of far-right extremist groups for this group.

2.3.4 White British

Within an education context, many pupils' ethnicity is identified from what has been selected by their parents on their school application forms. But, as with the notion of 'white' as outlined above, there can be more to it than simply where someone was born. When considering ethnicity and its relation to far-right extremism, Tahir Abbas (2017) outlines how it is the direct competition between the 'left behind' groups (such as the working classes) that is key to understanding violent extremism. In the context of Islamist extremism and the far-right, there is competition of 'the racialised and the alienated and the other marginalised and alienated' (Abbas, 2017, p. 58). This leads far-right groups to present British identity as at risk, because 'other' groups in society are somehow diluting or taking it away. For Abbas, 'race is the signifier here, but an imagined race, as is perennially the case when it comes to ethnic nationalism' (Abbas, 2017, p. 58). When discussing the designation of 'British' within the research, qualifiers need to be given as to whether this is purely a tick box identifier, or whether boys classifying themselves as British, is suggesting something more.

2.3.5 White English

The empirical research itself will take place within England, and as Abbas (2017) notes in his research considering identity and Englishness, 'In an effort to sustain their existence, working-class groups enhance their identity formations through an allusion to a pure Englishness' (Abbas, 2017, p. 59). This is something drawn on by right-wing groups who suggest that they are trying to protect English society from dilution.

The focus on protecting English society relates to research by William Allchorn (2019) who looks specifically at the EDL and what is meant by Englishness within the defence league. He outlines that whilst the focus of the EDL is anti-Islam, the love of England is central. Quoting from an EDL banner he highlights the phrase "British by birth, English by the grace of God" (EDL News in Allchorn,

2019) as an example of this. He suggests that British is often referred to as a formal or 'sterile' sense of national identity and belonging, whereas English is used as a more 'substantive sense of national belonging' (Allchorn, 2019, p. 535). He suggests a 'hybrid Englishness that balances a conservative national understanding drawing on the past and traditions with a championing of individual rights and freedoms, however whether this is actually achieved is debated with EDL's expectation that 'foreign cultures should adapt and integrate' (Allchorn, 2019, p. 535).

As recognised within the designation of boys and a loyalty to masculinity, loyalty also plays a role here with a loyalty to Englishness. This is something that may have been increased as a result of events including the Scottish Independence Referendum and continuing calls for the independence of Scotland, the European Union membership referendum and the related Brexit fallout, and also the use of devolved powers during the Covid pandemic. Within far-right groups, such a loyalty can be used to further champion the necessity for an English identity and a need to counter any outsider influence.

This focus on Englishness is not the case for all far-right groups, with groups like Britain First and Patriotic Alternative drawing on a broader British identity. However, within this research discussions of what it means to be British or what it means to be English can play a key role in understanding the identity development of the pupils involved.

2.3.6 White British Working-Class Boy's Identity

It is therefore not white British working-class boys' identity, which is key in this research, but a lack of, or confusion of identity which can result from being working-class. Within the research outlined above and within wider research (C. Brown, 2018; Connell, 2013; Reay, 2018; Stahl, 2015; Walkerdine, 2011) this lack of identity directly links to a marginalisation which can come from life within a neo-liberal society. Neo-liberalism refers to the ideology and associated government policies which favour a free-market expansion based on competition, economic growth, and reduced state intervention in business. The education system can be seen to mirror this, with the introduction of league tables, school targets, performance-related pay for teachers and the

introduction of academies and free schools, which can be more in control of their own policies and curriculum than Local Authority schools. However, such a system has been shown to fail working-class children (C. Brown, 2018), and feed this crisis of identity.

Within an education context, this crisis of identity for the working classes has been played out in the underachievement of white British working-class boys and their inability to place themselves in the education system. Diane Reay (Reay, 2017), in her book *Miseducation*, outlining her view of education and the working classes, suggests that one of the issues is that for working-class pupils, it is 'not their education system. It does not belong to them' Particularly for 'white, working class boys there is a sense of futility to formal, school-based learning'. (Reay, 2017, p. 76).

In addition to not being able to see themselves in the education system, white British working-class boys are not able to see themselves in the solutions either. Much of working-class underachievement has related to a lack of aspiration and therefore the solution is to raise aspirations (Lewis & Demie, 2015). Roberts (2016), in his summary of Stahl's work, suggests that working-class boys do have aspirations, but they are not 'sufficiently middle-class, or legitimate to be labelled as aspirational in a neoliberal Britain' (Roberts, 2016, p. 263). Teachers can also be seen to make assumptions about what working-class pupils can or cannot achieve (Baars et al., 2016) or there is an accusation that pupils do not necessarily see education as 'a way out' (Lewis & Demie, 2015).

Ceri Brown (2018) in her work looking at education policy and aspiration, demonstrates how the neo-liberal policy-making framework used in education has made academic achievement inaccessible for some. Considering the impact of material hardship, the 'alien culture' of schooling and an inability of the working class to navigate the competitive education market to allow attendance at the best schools, she also challenges this idea of a lack of aspiration. She suggests 'A redirection of the locus of current strategies for tackling education underachievement away from the behaviours ascribed to those in poverty by neo-liberal policy makers, and towards a more sympathetic and imaginative understanding of the binds that prevent success.' (Brown, 2018, p. 59)

The idea of raising aspirations, whilst it remains a part of educational policy discourse will feed the lack of identity of the working-class pupils. If pupils' aspirations are not acceptable, if their social identity is something to be dropped, if their teachers have already decided what they can or cannot do, on what do they build any identity? N. Geoffrey Bright (2011) in his study of aspiration of pupils in former coal mining communities, outlines a resistant aspiration whereby working-classes become resistant to compulsory schooling and imposed values by 'outsider teachers' in a way which is protective of their roots and what identity they do have. This lack of understanding of the needs of these pupils and the ineffective solutions, can only be seen to exacerbate this lack of place within the education system, reducing engagement with it.

2.3.7 Identity and Far-right Extremism

It is a lack of identity which can be seen to feed into attraction to far-right extremism, particularly for white British working-class boys. Julia Ebner (2020), in her book *The Rage*, which analyses the interaction between far-right and Islamist extremism, frequently considers the role of identity and particularly identity politics with those involved in far-right extremism. For Ebner (2020), whilst she recognises that the far right has its appeal for younger, educated people online, she also recognises how 'economic woes and frustration over politicians' reluctance to reform have been catalysts for the far right' (Ebner, 2020, p. 97). Appealing to groups of people who are feeling disenfranchisement, being left out and not able to make a difference, 'the forgotten', and feeding this sense of socio-economic injustice, has led to the success of many right-wing groups. Supporting this, Ebner outlines the global identity crisis. Highlighting research by Hilarion Petzold about five pillars on which a person's identity stands '(1) body and health; (2) social network and social interaction; (3) work and performance; (4) material security; and (5) values' (Petzold in Ebner, 2020, p. 117). She connects these pillars with events across the world and specifically in Europe which have destabilised them including the financial crisis and perceptions around migration. For her:

the falling pillars that have uprooted our collective identities have resulted in a desire for 'radical' change and this a higher vulnerability to radicalisation...caught within these dilemmas of conflicting

identities, many people fall prey to groups with ideologies that offer them a return to their alleged roots. (Ebner, 2020, p. 120)

Julia Ebner's research agrees with that of Tahir Abbas (2017), who also recognises the role of identity conflict in vulnerability to radicalisation and ultimately violence. Whilst Abbas does focus on gender and socio-economic factors leading to identity issues, he also gives a full account of the role of ethnicity and culture in this too. He demonstrates this through an analysis of the shooting in Munich by a male who was insecure about his own ethnic and cultural identity.

For the pupils in this study, an understanding of their views on their own identity was key to recognising how RE can meet their moral development needs. It also gives an insight into the wider role of RE in teaching about far-right extremism. This is why one of the research questions looked to identify what pupils think influences their own identity, allowing more general discussions around identity to take place. Linked to this were discussions around moral identity. For this research, moral identity is a specific aspect of resilience against radicalisation. A full exploration of moral identity will be outlined later, framed by Hand's (2014) theory of moral education shown in parallel to the moral framework suggested by Jacomijn van der Kooij et al., (2013).

When it comes to understanding someone's identity, getting an authentic voice is an important aspect. What this research defines as authentic voice will now be highlighted and the connections to identity and moral identity explained.

2.3.8 Authentic Voice and Identity

Trying to capture an authentic voice is a difficult task, trying to capture an authentic voice which is representative of the truth is potentially impossible. However, when trying to counter far-right narratives and particularly those around perceptions of faith, belief and religion, alongside the additional elements of culture and communities, knowing what is 'authentic' and 'true' is a key element.

Authentic voice for this research refers to a genuine expression of a person's identity, including the ability to express thoughts, feelings and experiences.

This is required here from the participants in the research, to ensure that this research is capturing a reliable reflection of the participants' ideas and insights. This shall be discussed further within the methodology. It is also needed in the research topic itself, where an authentic voice from religions, cultures and communities is essential to countering narratives which can lead to violent extremism which shall be considered here.

Creating a space to capture an authentic voice is complex. One of the ways of doing this when considering religion is through the concept of lived religion, something which has moved to the fore of Religious Studies in recent years. Lived religion is a much-studied field (Ammerman, 2013; McGuire, 2008) and depending on the core study (history, sociology, theology) can be interpreted in different ways.

A useful definition here is that lived religion enquires into how religion is encountered and experienced—how it comes into play—in different environments: public and private, official and informal, sacred, secular, and religiously 'neutral' (e.g. Ammerman 2013; Bender 2003). In response to the crisis of definition, the lived religion approach has promoted the abandoning of pre-defined understandings of religion as a starting point of analysis in favor of an emphasis on the activities and interpretations of individuals.
(Knibbe & Kupari, 2020, p. 159)

Within RE curriculum documentation (REC, 2023a), lived religion is referred to and supported by the movement towards a religion and worldviews approach to RE. Lived religion recognises that there can be differences between the doctrinal and institutional practices of a religion and how it is lived by adherents. It is in answer to the core concerns around the prior teaching of RE:

A critique levelled at religious education over past decades has been its over-emphasis on what is known as the 'world religions paradigm' - the idea that there are six major world religions, and lots of minor ones, and that they have a comparable set of core beliefs and practices that we can neatly package up and present in lessons. This approach is seen as distorting by imposing a particular model (deriving from Protestant Christianity) onto diverse traditions. Academic study has largely moved on from this paradigm, and now studies not only the formal/doctrinal aspects of religion and non-religion but also the fluid lived reality of adherents within these traditions, as well as the interplay between orthodoxy and lived experience. The study of religion and worldviews in schools needs to catch up with these

academic developments
(REC, 2023a, p. 6)

To get a more authentic understanding of religions, a religion and worldview approach can be adopted.

A religion and worldviews approach to RE is contrasted to a World religions paradigm by the RE Council who state that a religion and worldviews approach:

Reflects the complex, diverse, changing and plural nature of worldviews. It recognises diversity within and between organised worldview traditions, as well as influences upon personal worldviews.
(REC, n.d.)

It builds on the key concept that all people have a worldview; this allows RE to be more inclusive in the classroom. It also gives room for the development of a pupil's own worldview, something clearly connected with identity and moral development.

There are a range of methods within the field of Religious Studies for understanding lived religion and therefore lived worldviews.

Ethnographic study is often used when researching lived religion, but is also a standard method within educational research too. Ethnography generally refers to the process of joining a group in order to 'gain an insider's perspective of the group and to have experiences similar to the group members' (Kramer & Adams, 2017, para. 1).

The purpose of ethnographic study is to give an insight into the creation and maintenance of a group (culture, religion etc.) through communication and social interaction. (Kramer & Adams, 2017) Jenny Berglund (2014) gives an overview of why this is useful for the study of religion and the teaching of RE, stating that the 'ethnographic approach entails gaining a deeper understanding of human thoughts, feelings and actions, as they relate to religion and philosophies of life' (Berglund, 2014, p. 41).

The appeal of this approach is that it allows an insight into the variations within a religion. It also requires a reflexive approach which means that the researcher and in an educational context, a teacher, needs to reflect on their own ideas, motivations and perceptions before making decisions on how to present a particular group or religion.

A similar approach to ethnography is interpretive phenomenology. Both are exploratory research methods looking to interpret the narratives collected through engagement with the group. However, in ethnography, the ethnographer is an observer or commentator, in interpretive phenomenology the researcher is an interpreter (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). As a method within RE teaching, it came to the fore through work by Ninian Smart (1973). This has been developed since, and despite criticisms (Barnes, 2001) has become a key way of understanding religions and worldviews, influencing RE curricula and teaching in the classroom.

The work by Robert Jackson (1997) on the interpretive approach draws on the criticisms of a phenomenological approach to RE, and builds on ethnographic approaches, encouraging a comparison and contrast approach to the religious symbols, concepts and experiences being studied to the nearest equivalent for the researcher or learner (R. Jackson, 2011). It allows for clarity of understanding and increases the potential for genuine empathy to be developed. How religions are represented is a core concern and works to move away from essentialising or stereotyping religions and simplistic representations of religions. Instead, it 'encourages an exploration of the relationship between individuals, in the context of religio-cultural groups with which they are associated, and the wider religious tradition.

These approaches show how academics access lived religion. With a focus on disciplinary approaches within RE, it leads to questions over how often pupils are able to engage with such approaches in their own study of religion. Case studies, interviews, and real-life narratives become an essential part of an RE curriculum in order for pupils to understand the 'truth' behind what it means to have a religion and worldview. If examining lived religion in this way is not a part of the curriculum, then pupils will not have this access. When they

encounter far-right narratives, the testing ground for these is not available, making them more likely to be believed.

This thesis builds on this, by showing how white British working-class boys who are potentially struggling with their own identity development (knowing who they are), will benefit from engaging with the 'authentic voice' of religions. This will enable them to counter far-right extremist narratives. Locally agreed syllabi should and sometimes do, incorporate opportunities for this to happen.

2.4 Religious Education

This section outlines the educational background and context of the research. It considers different ideas about the aims and purposes of RE. It also looks at policy enactment, considering a framework for understanding policy enactment based on the work of Bernstein (2000). From this, several policies are analysed, including the locally agreed syllabus, the GCSE syllabus, community cohesion, Prevent and Fundamental British values. The impact these have on schools, and curriculum design is shown, to allow for the context of RE and the locally agreed syllabus to be understood. A framework for understanding of moral development is given based on the work by Hand (2014). This is connected to the worldviews approach to teaching RE, which as suggested previously, is useful in this research due to its comparability to Freeden's (1996) approach to understanding ideologies. Finally, the existing role of RE in teaching about far-right extremism is considered. Alongside this, some existing teaching materials and guidance about far-right extremism are highlighted to show what is already available. This supports the claim in this thesis that RE already has a place for delivering about far-right extremism and that this can support the moral development of white British working-class boys.

2.4.1 Aims and Purpose of RE

When considering how a RE teacher might answer a question relating to far-right extremist attitudes, actions or prominent figures, the context of the subject needs to be explored. RE holds a unique place within the English Schools' Curriculum. It is not part of the national curriculum but a core subject that should be taught in all schools, protected by legislation. How we have arrived at the RE we have in classrooms today has a long and complex history (Fancourt, 2022; Mogra, 2022; Revell, 2008). Imran Mogra (2022) gives an overview of the history and considers some of the critiques of religious education as it is today in his guide for teachers of RE. Some of this will be considered later when we look at the role of the locally agreed syllabus in Rochdale. Of interest here, whilst introducing the context of this research, is the content and purpose of RE. Mogra suggests that the aims of RE are not just about 'understanding the nature of religion, understanding and interpreting religion and acquiring the skills of

analysis and insights from religious studies’ (Mogra, 2022, p. 60). It can also be about moral education and the challenge of prejudice and intolerance.

The content and purpose of RE has been much debated (Conroy et al., 2012). As a result, there are different interpretations and framing of RE across the country, as determined by each locally agreed syllabus. Mark Chater condenses the potential aims into five areas:

- An academic study of religion in one tradition or group of traditions (theology).
- An academic study of religion in general (religious studies).
- An ethical study of philosophical and ethical problems with reference to some religions and philosophical systems.
- An instrumental project to promote attitudes of respect, tolerance, community cohesion or British values.
- A personal development program to explore spirituality, personal beliefs, ethical issues and (sometimes) personal, social and health education.

(Chater in Mogra, 2022, p. 59)

Mogra states in light of these various aims, that RE is ‘well known for taking on board governmental, political and social agendas...RE tries to appease everyone’ (Mogra, 2022, p. 59). As Larkin et al. (2019) agree, this has led to incoherence within the curriculum with a lack of articulation of the aims of RE in line with the general aims of schooling.

When I chose to train as a teacher of Religious Education, it was because I wanted to give pupils an academic study of religion in general. Having attended a church school myself, my knowledge of religions other than Christianity was limited. At A Level however, I had the opportunity to study Buddhism, and this was the start of an interest in world religions. I studied Religious Studies at university and enjoyed exploring the vibrant, diverse rituals, traditions and festivals. I discovered the unique ways of engaging with the spiritual through ceremonies, practices and mystical elements. I wanted pupils to have the opportunity to learn about this too, something that was becoming more common

in an inclusive religious education following new statutory guidance in 2003 (Kay, 2005) It was only when I started training and teaching religious education that I began to see the potential of the subject as ‘an instrumental project’ promoting key attitudes and values. It is this aspect of RE which I believe supports the teaching about far-right extremism within the classroom. This however does not come without its issues and teaching RE in this way can be criticised. When looking at RE history, this is demonstrated:

Religious education has always been controversial, but the reasons for this have changed over time. In 1870 comparatively few would have disputed that Britain was a Christian country. Also, the Christian churches were instrumental in bringing about compulsory education. It made sense that if you were intending to educate all young people for the first time, education in their religious heritage was essential. But what sort of Christianity should be taught? There was no love lost between the Church of England (the Established Church) and influential non-conformist groups such as the Methodists. The latter were instrumental in seeking the education of the poor and increasing literacy among the working classes, which was an important aspect of their seeking rights within an exploitative industrialised society. The right of children to be educated, rather than simply used as a cheap form of labour in factories, provides the backdrop within which religious education formed a part of state education. Education in religion, as part of providing literacy to the population, was controversial because it was highly politically charged. The wider social context was one in which radical reformists such as Robert Owen, and new democratic ideals were pitted against the traditional hierarchical ordering of society. If you taught children religion in elementary (primary) schools, to what purpose were you doing it? Was it to produce orderly and compliant citizens who knew both their catechism and their place, or to empower young people through making them literate and aware of the powerful teachings to be found in scripture? The former dominated, but many feared the latter being a result.

(Erricker et al. in Mogra, 2022, p. 10)

When teaching an RE which builds tolerance, respect, community cohesion and an engagement with British values, it needs to be considered why this is being done, mirroring the question in the quotation above, is it to create compliant citizens or empowered young people?

Janet Orchard (2015) suggests that RE has a distinct role in preparing pupils as future citizens in a religiously and culturally diverse society. However, this

takes into consideration criticism from Dan Moulin that RE should not be reduced to the aim of promoting tolerance and a civic function (the compliant citizens). Instead, Orchard believes that there needs to be a balanced curriculum for RE that incorporates its various aims and correct pedagogy working alongside curriculum content. She also sees RE as one part of the wider educational goals of schools, including good community relations, rather than promoting good community relations being exclusively under the remit RE. This is important for this research, as RE is not being seen here as the only place where far-right extremism can be taught about. As Orchard states: 'The ideological beliefs of 'extremists' motivating them to commit to acts of terror may in part be influenced by distorted interpretations of religious ideology but may be influenced by other factors too, including perceived social disadvantage' (Orchard, 2015, p. 43). For her these matters are not just for RE to address, and I agree that some may be better served by other aspects of school life. However, I do argue a unique role for RE within this, because of the content, pedagogy, and skill set of RE teachers.

Kevin O'Grady (2021) argues for an RE which empowers young people, in his book *Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School*. He states that RE has a role in creating democratic citizens with an active role in creating a fairer society. He uses Wilkinson and Pickett's ideals of schools having 'a determination to reduce inequality, promote personal wellbeing and the public good' (O'Grady, 2021, p. 141) and allowing education to transform society through the adoption of shared values. He argues that values and democracy should be fundamental to education, not just the acquisition of knowledge.

In the past Liam Gearon (2013) has outlined how political ideals of democratic citizenship have become equated with the aims and purposes of religious education. He is concerned about 'such easy correlations' (p. 131) and particularly how this has become part of securitization. He is critical of an over association of extremism and religion and suggests instead that 'most extremism in the past century has arisen from political, notably totalitarian sources' (p. 137). This integration of religion, education and security has occurred and this risks 'shifting the aims and purposes of political and security interest' (Gearon, 2013, p. 144). How this risk is managed is something to be considered.

2.4.2 Moral Identity and Development

Linked to the aims and purpose of RE, one of the key aspects of this research is how a white British working-class boy's moral identity can be developed to make them less susceptible to radicalisation from far-right extremist groups. It has been highlighted that what a pupil does when they encounter far-right extremist narratives, is ultimately a moral decision. Moral education, however, has its own controversies, as it is not clear what the role is of teachers when it comes to a pupils' moral development. This thesis argues that education generally and RE specifically has a role to play in developing a pupil's moral identity. This would fit in line with Chater's aims for RE to provide a personal development programme, including ethical issues (Chater in Mogra, 2022).

2.4.2.1 Theories of Moral Education

There are a number of theories of moral education which are worth considering here to understand how to the aims and purposes of RE fit with the moral development opportunity RE is seen to present in this thesis. The first to be presented is that from Michael Hand (2014), which has been adopted as a key framework for structuring moral development in the classroom and therefore used to support the analyse of the data collected. There are however two other frameworks useful for this research. There is the framework linked with a worldviews approach to RE presented by van de Kooij (2013, 2015) which is beneficial as it links with Freeden's conceptual approach to understanding ideologies, so comparisons can be drawn when analysing the data. There is also a framework from an alternative perspective where the author Phra Nicholas Thannisaro (2010), uses the terms of moral homeground and moral wasteland which may be linked with the lack of identity associated with white British working class boys and give a further rationale for the teaching about far-right extremism as part of a pupils moral development in RE.

2.4.2.2 Michael Hand's Theory of Moral Education

Hand (2014) offers a theory of moral education in response to a practical need of teachers which he outlines as the tension between the thought that morality must be learned and the thought that morality is controversial. Hand, in light of what he considers inadequate responses to this tension and the practical need

that teachers still have to address this issue, outlines a theoretical response to resolve this.

Hand (2014) suggests that a central task of moral education is education in, or about moral standards. He states that children, when they leave school, will be required to follow rules of conduct and so, need to be prepared for this. This is achieved through their understanding of the nature and operation of moral standards. This is even more important where moral standards are seen as desirable and rationally justified.

Moral standards are the standards to which peoples' subscription is universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing. This means that if something is deemed a moral standard, the person who has decided this believes others will want to and should comply with it. It also means that if the standard is not complied with, there will be some sort of negative consequence or punishment. However, Hand also outlines that:

This account of moral standards is content neutral, it readily accommodates the otherwise puzzling fact that the same standard can be moral for one person and non-moral for another. Moral and non-moral vegetarians alike comply with the standard 'don't eat meat': the difference between them is that the non-moral vegetarian does not mind about the non-compliance of others or feels it inappropriate to condemn them for it.
(Hand, 2014, p. 524)

Hand makes a distinction between moral formation and moral inquiry, whilst recognising that they are complementary of each other, and often considered together. Moral formation is when children are shaped into people of a certain kind, where they subscribe to certain moral standards. This may be done through praise, rule enforcement and habituation as examples. Moral inquiry is 'the investigation of whether and which moral standards are justified' (pg. 526). Pupils are invited to consider what the reasons behind holding the standards are and if they can justify them being held, in line with the definition of moral standards above.

He makes a further distinction of moral inquiry as directive or nondirective or a mix of the two. Directive moral inquiry is when the teacher has the aim of persuading children which standards are or are not justified. Whereas

nondirective moral inquiry is deliberately non-committal and the teacher does not promote or endorse a particular view. Hand suggests that some basic moral standards are robustly justified in their own right.

Hand also highlights thinking that some moral standards become justified in their ability to prevent the 'risk in human social groups, of breakdowns in cooperation and outbreaks of conflict' (Hand, 2014, p. 528). The risk of breakdown and conflict is reduced when those social groups adhere to certain standards of conduct. It is therefore in our best interest to promote such rules of conduct to sustain cooperation and peace. Schools should promote subscription to these through moral formation and directive moral inquiry.

When it comes to some moral standards however, there is debate around their justificatory status. In previous work by Hand (2008), he considers classifying things as controversial using the epistemic criterion. In introducing what is controversial, Hand suggests an emerging consensus that controversial issues are those where different views can be held, and that teaching about those views needs to be impartial. This is contrasted with settled or resolved issues whereby teachers will present a problem with a solution or a question with an answer (p. 213).

The issue raised by Hand, is how do educators decide what to teach as controversial and what to teach as settled. He suggests looking at the aims of education to decide, and an epistemic criterion which he develops from the work of Robert Dearden (1981 in Hand 2008). He states:

Where two or more conflicting views on a matter enjoy the support of corroborating evidence or credible arguments, teachers should present those views as impartially as they can. Where only one view enjoys such support, teachers can and should endorse it. The reason it is a mistake to teach bullying, prejudice, and racism nondirectively is that these are matters on which only one view is epistemically justifiable: namely, the view that they are morally bad or wrong. (Hand, 2008, p. 217)

Controversial issues are issues where all different views held, are justifiable with sound evidence and reasoning. He contrasts this with Dearden's outline of a behavioural criterion, which would mean teaching as controversial any matter about which people disagree. He however suggests that Dearden's arguments

against a behavioural criterion are not strong enough, but builds on his ideas to show how an epistemic criterion is a suitable decider of controversial issues, and the behavioural criterion is not. He says if the central aim of education is to encourage rational thought and action, then ‘by enabling young people to think and act rationally we optimize their prospects of leading flourishing lives’ (Hand, 2008, p. 218). He argues that the behavioural criterion does not allow teachers to endorse or engage in directive teaching about any view where there is controversy, even if it is epistemically justifiable. This then teaches pupils that ‘epistemic considerations are not decisive. The plain implication of teacher neutrality on all matters on which people are observed to disagree is that consensus, rather than evidence or argument is the proper warrant for belief.’ (Hand, 2008, p. 218). The behavioural criterion is therefore inadequate as it does not allow for the nurture of rational thought and action, whereas the epistemic criterion does.

Similarly, consideration is given to a political criterion, which is of clear relevance to this research and political morality. Hand summarises a political criterion as suggesting ‘a moral question should be taught as controversial when no answer to it is entailed by the public values of a liberal democratic state’ (Hand, 2008, p. 221). This research has already outlined the duty on teachers to promote British values. In applying this criterion, teachers should endorse attitudes in line with the state, and refrain from endorsing those attitudes the state itself would refrain from enforcing. Hand suggests that this simplifies matters as a teacher would just check whether the view is compatible with human rights and freedoms. If there are different views on an issue which are all compatible with human rights and freedoms, it is controversial, if they are not, it is settled. The debate about the duty to promote British values (as shall be explored), provides reason to disagree with the political criterion to decide controversy, as not everything a government endorses is in line with human rights and freedoms.

Hand’s work however, has been criticised on several fronts. For Bruce Maxwell (2019), there is concern that whilst aiming to give clarity to teachers and parents on what should be taught directly and non-directly, no detailed illustration is given of this. For one of the standards which is given some consideration, ‘Do not give offence’ it is shown that reasonable disagreement on

this, is acceptable. Maxwell worries that this leaves open other standards like do not steal, do not kill being left open to 'reasonable disagreement and therefore undoing the work, that Hand set out to do in providing a sound framework.

Andrew Copson (2000), agrees with Hand's work, but points out a key issue that not everyone agrees on what morality is. Of importance to this research, some instead of looking for a morality which comes from 'an organised attempt to reinforce our social impulses' (Copson, 2020, p. 229), see morality as coming from a source outside of humanity (maybe divine). He uses the example of how Hand suggests homophobia as an example of an unjustifiable moral standard that teachers are completely justified in countering, but then cites a case where parents campaigned against a programme teaching against homophobia as aggressive indoctrination and incompatible with the teachings of Islam. The example given is based around an Islamic construct of morality, but others could also include those based around inner virtue, natural order or social hierarchy, each bringing their own conflict with Hand's ideas.

Trevor Cooling's (2012) criticisms of Hand's work however, build on that of Copson and is specific to his use of the epistemic criterion and notions of controversy. He believes that other criterion do need to be used despite Hand's dismissal of them, in order to have a balanced and rational argument. This is particularly the case where religious controversies are concerned. Cooling proposes that through the sole use of the epistemic criterion, Hand 'dismiss[es] the legitimacy of any appeal to final scriptural authority in any religion' with the 'implication that in school classrooms, teachers must promote as settled the conclusion that final authority should not be ascribed to any Scripture. This for Cooling would not be the case if the other criterion were used.

It is with these criticisms in mind that this framework is used within this research. When considering the topic in this research, despite some of these concerns, the framework offers a structure for understanding teaching about far-right extremism in schools (and this research may answer the calls from Maxwell for a detailed illustration). Far-right narratives can be considered controversial from a behavioural criterion, in that they cause an unsettled, upsetting or fear-based response. This however, would be unhelpful in a classroom, as teachers

would then not teach directly against them, as they are an unsettled issue. This however is not the case in Hand's definitions, and through his use of the epistemic criterion alone. Within Hand's framework, I have interpreted that far-right narratives are wrong, they are a settled issue and therefore teachers can teach directly against them, but still utilise moral inquiry which is a core aspect of critical RE teaching. This will allow pupils to critique the narratives, and know why their teacher is leading them in this way.

2.4.2.3 Morality and Worldviews

The framework of moral development from van der Kooij et al. (2015), about morality and worldviews, provides further categories through which moral development can be framed and forms part of their more general research into the use of the term worldview within education (van der Kooij et al., 2013, 2017). It is of particular use to this research, as it demonstrates the direct connection between the teaching of worldviews and the teaching of morality and again reinforces the need for moral development to be an aim of Religious Education. It builds on the assertion by Barnes (2011b) that religion and morality are not necessarily philosophically independent and outlines the implications of their work for education, including its application in schools and classrooms. It also links with Freeden's (1996) approach to ideologies, as it recognises the changing complex nature of worldviews, requiring flexible criteria and a context-associated understanding of how they are structured.

Van der Kooij et al. (2017), propose that every human has ideas about what is right and wrong and that the source of these ideas is their worldview.

Worldview is defined 'as a view on life, the world and humanity' (van der Kooij et al., 2017, p. 173). It is seen as a term that broadens the scope of what may be included within RE curriculum. Worldviews are seen as being meaning-giving and offer responses to existential themes. Where this meaning giving is related to a coherent and established system of beliefs and traditions it can be seen as part of an organised worldview. This provides certain moral values and aims to provide meaning in people's lives, and in doing so influences their thinking and acting. All religions are seen as organised worldviews. However, this does not

work in reverse, as not all organised worldviews are religious. The example is given of Humanists.

Where this meaning giving is related to ‘someone’s personal meaning and outlook on the world, life and humanity.’ (van der Kooij et al., 2015, p. 81), it is seen as a personal worldview. Personal worldviews can be based on organised worldviews, but not necessarily. Personal worldviews may not be the only influencing factor in a person’s moral decision-making. Personal worldviews consist of (sometimes tentative answers to existential questions) and will influence their thinking and acting and meaning making in life. It is the personal worldview which would be receptive of Hand’s (2014) directive moral formation or moral inquiry.

In establishing what is meant by worldview, the research then goes on to consider what is meant by morality (van der Kooij et al., 2015). A summary of this shall now be given as a framework for understanding moral development in this thesis.

Ethics is seen as a category of existential questions which deal with value and ‘the good life’. Morality is a subcategory of ethics concerning the well-being of others. Conceptually, it involves the acts that are right and wrong to others alongside the avoidance of harmful acts. Morality itself is split into two categories. Narrow morality focusses on the basic rules and principles that make it possible for human beings to live and work together (e.g. ban on robbing or killing other people). It contains the values necessary for living together, so will be a part of education and school life. This can be explicit or as part of rules and ethos. It is conceptually independent of organised/personal worldview. Teachers can however want narrow morality to become part of a personal worldview; for pupils to act morally, as they value narrow morality.

Broad morality focusses on living a flourishing life and surpasses moral rules necessary to live together. It contains the body of ideals, principles and values that indicate someone’s most important aims in life, which influence their acts for realising those aims and give meaning in life. It may focus on others or the self. Broad morality can be spoken of without organised world views, but organised worldviews always contain broad moral views. It includes more than

ethics, as it is meaning-giving. It is part of a personal worldview, but not the only part.

When considering the role of worldviews in the justification of broad and narrow claims. It is highlighted that people can appeal to religious reasons for the justification of moral claims without requiring every other person to make this appeal in the same situation as well. So, sometimes moral claims are justified by referring to organised or personal worldviews, and that they are sometimes justified without any reference to organised or person worldviews.

The key recommendation that comes out of this analysis of worldviews and morality is that teachers need to be aware of the close relationship between personal worldview and broad morality. Teachers who believe that paying attention to moral development contributes to the flourishing of students, can through moral education in the broad sense, stimulate the personal worldview development of their students. This is how RE can impact the moral development of white British working-class boys in relation to far-right extremist narratives.

2.4.2.4 Moral Homeground

Finally, the framework suggested by Thanissaro (2010), although less developed than the two outlined above, considers moral education from the perspective of spirituality and values education. Suggesting that no education is valued free, but also proposing there is little guidance on values education, Thanissaro looks at a teacher's role (and particularly an RE teacher's role), in the development of good character in children. For Thanissaro, critical RE is central to this. This addresses concerns (as shall be considered more later) that spiritual and moral development can be used to 'muster in religious values by the backdoor' (Thanissaro, 2010, p. 178) and therefore bring a confessional approach to RE.

Central to the critical RE that Thanissaro suggests, is for pupils to have a *moral homeground* to refer back to when engaging in contrasting worldviews. This allows them to achieve a depth to their understanding, without falling into moral relativism. Moral relativism is undesirable here as it can leave pupils

instead in a moral wasteland, not knowing what is right. For Thanissaro, this moral homeground can come from teachers themselves, who whilst still learners themselves, are still the source of expertise within the space of learning. He states

teachers will always have to decide what is worth learning. Moral relativism is supposed to be “held in check by an awareness of shared values” (QCA 1998, 23), but where street culture can become the norm, teachers do need the leeway to make value judgements. Teachers need to be in a situation where they are able to challenge students whose moral homeground is a wasteland or whose assumptions are internally inconsistent. (Thanissaro, 2010, p. 183)

These ideas fit well with those of Hand and van der Kooij, as through Hand’s directive moral enquiry pupils can find a moral homeground, and through van der Kooij’s worldviews approach to morality this moral homeground, providing broad morality, can become part of their personal worldview.

It is with these moral frameworks in mind that consideration shall now be given to what moral development is within education generally and RE specifically and how this links to teaching about far-right extremism and the moral development of white British working-class boys.

2.4.2.5 What is Moral Development in RE?

According to OFSTED the moral development of pupils in school is shown by their:

- ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong and to readily apply this understanding in their own lives, recognise legal boundaries and, in so doing, respect the civil and criminal law of England
- understanding of the consequences of their behaviour and actions
- interest in investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues and ability to understand and

appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues.
(Ofsted, 2021a, p. 246)

There are a number of issues with this definition. Firstly, the association of morality as understanding right from wrong, leading to respect of the civil and criminal law, elevates the law within this country to a standard of morality. This could mean that there are no immoral laws, which many would hold to contention. Secondly, it also limits morality to what is covered by the law, when some things are immoral but not illegal (Barnes, 2011a).

These criticisms are similar to the arguments against the political criterion for controversial issues outlined above and again links to concerns around the promotion of British values in schools. This is however the definition that is implemented by schools in their delivery of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development (SMSC) and the one by which they are judged on moral development. It will therefore have a key role within this research.

The first of these aims of moral development fits in with Hand's moral formation whereby pupils are expected to obey the law as a result of the teaching they receive. However, the aim would also suggest that there is an expectation of directive moral inquiry from which pupils will come to respect the law. The second two relate to non-directive moral inquiry, allowing pupils to explore behaviour, actions and different moral views and as a result come to their own understanding of whether they are morally justifiable. This research will consider the impact these different methods of teaching have on pupil's moral development.

This OFSTED definition has been further developed to be specific to RE by the Rochdale locally agreed syllabus to state that 'Moral development is about exploring and developing pupils' own moral outlook and understanding of right and wrong. It is also about learning to navigate the fact of moral diversity in the world.' (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 103). Here also, the syllabus gives examples of the following:

1. Valuing others

This is defined as exploring the views of others, appreciating the moral value of humans and act accordingly e.g. welcoming speakers or visits to places of worship to learn from people of different backgrounds.

This would be achievable through directive moral inquiry. Teaching pupils that there is a right and wrong way to engage with those of different backgrounds.

2. Moral character development

This is expressed in terms of RE being a 'safe space where pupils can learn from their mistakes, appreciate ideas of right and wrong' (pg. 103). Particularly 'RE should present pupils with the challenge of responding in real and concrete ways to some of [the] moral questions they face' (pg. 103). E.g. involve pupils to establish appropriate moral codes for the classroom. It suggests participation in whole school activities e.g. school play, mentoring, school council.

This aim would suggest more of a non-directive moral inquiry-based aim to this aspect of the syllabus.

3. Moral diversity

Here pupils should feel confident to take part in debates about moral issues, be prepared to engage with those who disagree with them with a right to expression, but also a responsibility to listen e.g. debates on age-appropriate topics.

There is a clear distinction in the syllabus between moral development as a personal outlook linked to right and wrong, and social development which looks at how young people are 'shaped with an eye on the sort of society we wish to create in the future' (pg. 104). While it draws on issues of right and wrong, this is based around shared values and idealised concepts. This fits in with Biesta's (2009) three aims of education whereby socialisation is concerned with the ways in which education enables membership of particular social, cultural and political orders and subjectification is concerned with pupils becoming more autonomous and independent in their thinking, leading to action and responsibility.

Within the syllabus, whilst limited reference is made to the above explicitly, it is implicit in many of the activities (e.g. debates and study of values such as forgiveness etc. Within the end of key stage outcomes 'C3' makes reference to morality and the response to it.

Explore and express insights into significant moral and ethical questions posed by being human in ways that are well-informed and which invite personal response, using reasons which may draw on a range of examples from real life, fiction or other forms of media.

(Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 76)

This implies that pupils are to personally engage with what they are studying and again fits in with Hand's moral inquiry through non-directive teaching.

The syllabus does not define what is meant by moral and ethical questions, nor are they signposted within the units of study themselves. However, by searching for the C3 outcomes within the units of study, questions may include whether Christians have been radical enough (in comparison to the life of Jesus) (p. 76), commentaries on the types of happiness pursued by others (p. 82) and whether religion helps people to be good (p. 83).

This locally agreed syllabus only mentions moral development as outlined above, in relation to the duty of schools to promote SMSC, rather than as an aim of the RE provision itself. This may imply that RE only has a role in a pupil's moral development in light of this duty; there is nothing intrinsic within the subject which would retain an aim of moral development should the duty for SMSC be removed. Consideration shall now, therefore, be given to the motivations for including moral development in RE.

2.4.2.6 The Role of Moral Development in Religious Education

Philip Barnes (2011a, 2011b, 2019) argues that there should be an increased role and importance of religious morality within RE. His justification is that moral practice is central to religion, but also because 'religious moralities can make a positive contribution to both personal development and the creation of a just society' (Barnes, 2011b, p. 131). This idea is central to an understanding of the main research question of how a locally agreed syllabus can support the moral

development of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism.

He questions the assertion that moral education is a secular undertaking, with the study of ethics and the study of religion being separate and distinct academic disciplines. He instead says that this is a dated view and points out that philosophers like John Gray and Alasdair MacIntyre question the notion of a secular justification for morality.

Barnes (2011b) suggests that post-confessional RE assigned a diminished role to its contribution to moral education (but not separate from moral education). This view has been strongly contested (Moulin-Stožek & Metcalfe, 2020; O’Grady, 2021) as not taking into account existing beliefs about the value of multi-faith RE for moral education. He does take into consideration the fact that many educators see RE as having an important contribution to moral education, but he argues that this contribution is too narrowly focused and ‘doesn’t take advantage of the religious resources available for the purpose of moral education in schools’ (Barnes, 2011b, p. 135). He says this is also mirrored more broadly in education with a ‘rise of the notion that public education should not privilege any particular conception of ‘the good life’ assuming a form of neutrality’ (Barnes, 2011b, p. 135). Education does not provide answers of right and wrong behaviour, but rather provides pupils with the ability to choose their own morality, (their own conception of the good and to regulate their lives on this basis) (Barnes, 2011b, pp. 135-136). He recognises however, that it cannot be completely neutral as any system of education reflects a wider vision for society that encompasses beliefs, ideals and commitments. This is a point which is also raised by Thanissaro (2010) who when considering the role of the teacher in moral development, states that education cannot be value-free, as teachers have the role of deciding what is of value to learn.

The view of the importance of RE for moral development is one that is countered by John White (2004). He argues against the suggestion in the QCA 2000 Non-Statutory Framework for RE, that RE should be dealing with ethical learning more generally and that it should help pupils to develop a sense of identity, prepare them as citizens of a plural society and reflect on moral and

social issues as well as questions of meaning and purpose in life. He does not see the place for this within the RE curriculum, and even argues whether RE itself should have a compulsory place on the curriculum at all. His main concern is that by having moral education within RE, it reinforces the idea that morality is impossible without religion. He states that:

...religions as we know them are inconceivable without morality. This is true, and it is important that children know this. But this proposition is easily conflated with the statement that morality is inconceivable without religion. This is false, and it is important that children know this, too. It is not easy for most people to disentangle the two claims, to see that the logical dependence goes one way in the first statement and the other in the second. How much harder is it for young children to keep a clear head on this matter!
(White, 2004, p. 154)

White says that the most effective vehicle of moral education is the ethos of the school- through the way it is run, the rules, ideals, virtues and pedagogy. He also suggests other curriculum areas such as PHSE and Citizenship.

There are issues with the premises of White's argument. The extent to which religions are inconceivable without morality can be questioned as there are situations which show religions to be acting in an immoral way (Norenzayan, 2014), but they are still religions, and also there are religions which aim to transcend morality, such as Theravada Buddhism (Stout, 1978). Additionally, the assumption that RE teaches morality is inconceivable without religion because young pupils get confused, or cannot disentangle the notions, should not lead to moral education being removed from the RE curriculum. The solution should be that teachers take care and responsibility in teaching that this is not the case.

Barnes (2011a) makes several recommendations for the 'remoralising of RE'- the rebirth of moral education in RE. Firstly, he suggests that by identifying the central aim of RE as understanding the nature of religions, RE needs to enable an appreciation that:

Each of the religions has a vision of the good both for the individual and for society; each of the religions has a historically evolving body of moral teachings; and each of the religions has made important responses to contemporary moral issues.

(Barnes, 2011a, p. 66)

In connection with Hand's (2014) work, this suggests an important role of RE within moral inquiry.

In addition to this, Barnes wants it to be recognised that the view that morality and religion are separate can be questioned philosophically which is something that has already been considered through van der Kooij's (2015) understanding of morality and worldviews.

Finally, Barnes also wants it to be 'recognised that there are educational advantages from a rediscovered focus on religious morality and religious responses to moral issues in religion' (Barnes, 2011a, p. 67), including increasing its relevance to young people. This is important when considering how to support the moral development of white British working-class boys. However, it should not be reduced to being solely instrumental to secular moral aims. Barnes recommends the Birmingham 2007 syllabus as a promising example for the future direction of religious education.

This overview of moral development and RE forwarded by Barnes, indicates a much more important role for moral development in RE than simply compliance with the statutory requirement to promote SMSC. The ability of teachers to impact the moral development of pupils through the intrinsic nature of RE, policies and pedagogy shall be considered further below through an understanding of teacher agency.

2.4.3 Teacher Agency and Policy Enactment

This research proposes that through teachers' agency within RE, there is a unique ability of RE teachers, to respond to classroom need (such as the threat from far-right extremism), as a result of the power and control relationships that exist within the complex organisation of RE. This is in contrast to some national curriculum subjects. This section will show how this is the case and the practical and pedagogical implications this has for teaching about far-right extremism in RE. The content and purpose of RE outlined in the previous

section, is just one aspect of policy enactment in schools. Working in parallel to RE curriculum policies, there are policies relating to the teaching about far-right extremism in schools. Each shall be considered here in more depth, but initially, a framework of understanding policy enactment in schools shall be considered, along with the impact this has on teacher agency in RE.

Parlo Singh, Sue Thomas and Jessica Harris (2013) outline a *Bernsteinian perspective on policy interpretation, translation and enactment*. By considering Bernstein's pedagogic device and particularly the field of recontextualisation, they aim to theorise the meaning-making work of mid-level policy actors to better understand the process of policy enactment.

An overview of the pedagogic device is given in the following diagram, adapted from a version used by Ilse Lubbe (2013) to show a professional development programme, but here fitted to the world of RE:

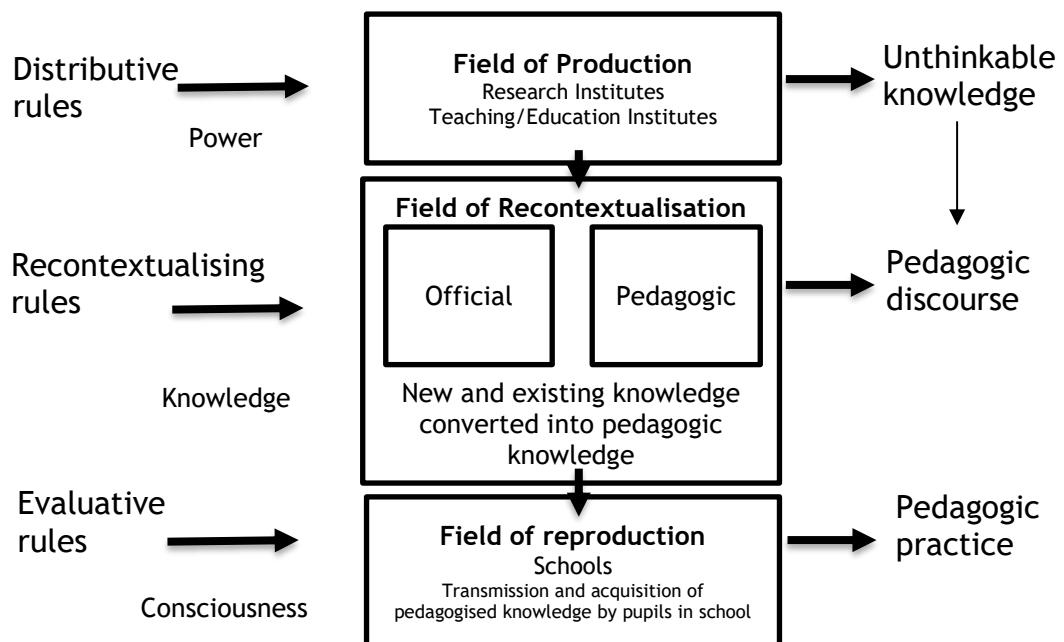


Figure 2- Bernstein's Pedagogic Device adapted from Lubbe (2013)

The research by Singh et al. (2013) suggests that public policies are those made on behalf of the state (in this case by the Department of Education), to order the conduct of teachers, schools and wider educational bodies (for example, the Religious Education Council (REC)). Daniel Alvunger (2018) states that 'the

distributive rules shape the social and moral order, that is, who has the power to decide what counts as knowledge' (Alvunger, 2018, p. 484)

Singh et al.'s (2013) work recognises that the policy process is not just about developing rules but is more multi-dimensional and value-laden. This means that policies are not simply documents, but part of a complex process. Policy is shaped by interpretations and a range of contexts within an education system. Again Alvunger (2018), shows this through his understanding of the recontextualising rules which include regulative discourse which justifies the values of the pedagogic discourse and the instructional discourse which is about the knowledge and skills to be produced.

Interpretation is about reading and making sense of a policy, also termed *decoding*. Translation, is putting texts into action, also termed *recoding*. The term is summarised as the 'creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation - that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstraction of texts into contextualised practices' (Singh et al., 2013, p. 2). Enactment is a term taken from the work by Braun, Maguire and Ball to 'reflect the understanding that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in the making meaning of official texts for specific contexts and practices' (Singh et al., 2013, p. 2).

In England, education policy including that relating to RE is developed by the DfE and distributed to local authorities, academy trusts and other educational bodies. The policies are then interpreted and translated in a process of policy enactment, for example, made into curriculum documents such as the locally agreed syllabus, subject-level guidance such as that produced by the REC or commercial curriculum designers (e.g. REToday), before being passed to schools for further interpretation and translation.

The research by Singh et al. (2013), used the work of Bernstein about the field of recontextualization, to understand the power and control relations within the policy process. The pedagogic device in Bernstein's work is 'the ensemble of rules or procedures by which policy knowledge is selectively translated into what is taught to who, when, when, where, why and how it is evaluated or deemed as acquired' (Singh et al., 2013, p. 4). This is then moved to the school and

classroom level where the policies are enacted ‘very often after complex processes of pressure, advice seeking and consultation’ (Fitz et. al 2006 in Singh et al. 2003 p. 4).

For Bernstein, there are recontextualising fields/arenas with agents. Two are considered in more detail by Singh et al. (2013), these are the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF) and the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF). The ORF as the policy producers, will be considered in more detail below by looking at the individual policies themselves including those relating to Prevent, FBV and political impartiality. However, the PRF is of most relevance to the research here, as it is made up of professional bodies developing guidance, curriculum materials, and resources. It also includes the schools and teachers themselves, with the school-based policies, curriculum documents, teachers and the processes around the monitoring and evaluation of the enacting of the policies. The role of the ORF and the PRF within the unique context of RE is far more blurred than in other subjects, with those typically making up the ORF having far more agency in the policies themselves and recontextualization more broadly. This shall also be considered in depth when the locally agreed syllabus is considered below.

Within the research carried out by Singh et al. (2013), the recontextualising rules allowed for an analysis of the enactment of policy in practice moving from the ORF to the PRF. My research offers a response to that as the analysis focuses more on how the PRF interprets the policy from the ORF to translate it for their purposes. The PRF identifies what is happening on the ground, in local pedagogic practice, in schools and classrooms and what the teachers and pupils require, and translates and interprets the policy to fit with what is needed. The movement in this sense is from the PRF to the ORF showing the power and control differences in the world of RE. This is of particular importance in this research, where it is considering how best to meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys which requires RE teachers to identify the risks and translate and interpret the policy to match, often impacting on the policies themselves through a process of recontextualisation.

This recontextualisation process is best explained by considering the power and control relations which Bernstein examines through the concept of pedagogic

discourses. As summarised by Singh et al. ‘the pedagogic process of decoding and recoding entails various forms of interactional engagement between mid-level policy actors with teachers’ (Singh et al., 2013, p. 7). The degree of autonomy of the PRF, will have an effect on the power relations and control it has over pedagogic discourse and practice (Chen & Harris, 2008; Singh, 2002). Within RE, the autonomy of RE teachers is more due to the unique make-up of the ORF within the complex organisation of RE. This will be considered in more depth below concerning the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus. However, it can be seen here that schools and teachers can hold power and control which can ‘limit or constrain which texts are selected and how they are re-organised and packaged for specific contexts’ (Singh et al., 2013, p. 7). To this end, schools and teachers can make policies work for them and maybe in ways the ORF never considered through their own ‘imagined’ teacher analysis and potentially possessing more power and control than anticipated.

Of further relevance to this research and based on Singh’s earlier work (Singh, 2002), the recontextualising field of the school and classroom are considered. Teachers in constructing modes of classroom knowledge (transforming schemes of work, curriculum textbooks and lesson plans), will also be

‘recontextualis[ing] discourse from the family/community/peer groups of students for the purpose of social control, in order to make the regulative and moral discourses of the school/classroom more effective. “Conversely, the family/community/peer relations can exert their own influence upon the recontextualizing field of the school, and in this way affect the latter’s practice” (Bernstein in Singh, 2002, pp. 577-578)

This suggests that pupils will have an influence on the choices and decisions teachers make in constructing modes of classroom knowledge and therefore will be given a role within this research too. It also suggests that what is taught in schools is also a method of social control, linking in with the previously mentioned theories of moral development. In this research, I am considering how to counter far-right extremist narratives and develop white British working-class boys’ morality, both of which might be achieved through constructing modes of classroom knowledge.

2.4.4 Curriculum and the Locally Agreed Syllabus

In a special edition of *The Curriculum Journal*, Michael Young (2014) in his introduction to what a curriculum is and what it can do, shows how understanding the term curriculum is not straightforward and different curricula theorists have opposing views. He suggests that curricula are ‘social facts’ in that it limits the activities of those involved, it makes learning possible, but constrains what is possible to learn. Curricula organise the transmission of knowledge.

When considering what makes a good school curriculum, in a report from UNESCO International Bureau of Education, the curriculum is seen as a description of ‘what, why and how students should learn’ (Stabback, 2016, p. 8). The success of a curriculum is dependent on the ‘quality of the learning achieved by students and whether and how students use that learning for their personal development and to bring about positive social change’ (Stabback, 2016, p. 8). The curriculum should be inclusive, future-oriented, adaptable and allow teachers to facilitate good learning. The personal development and positive social change desired in this research are related to meeting the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism. The curriculum (locally agreed syllabus) can therefore be considered important.

Countries often create a ‘national curriculum’ which can be knowledge-based, skills-oriented or learner-oriented, with all three types showing relative success (Selezniov & Czerniawski, 2020). In England, this is a knowledge-based curriculum. For Young, the purpose of the curricula is to ‘offer opportunities for pupils at all ages to move beyond the experience they bring to school and to acquire knowledge that is not tied to that experience’ (Young, 2014, pp. 8-9). Later in this thesis consideration is given to powerful knowledge as highlighted by one of the RE professionals. Young sees this context-free knowledge as powerful knowledge.

When curricula are viewed in this way, the aims of a curriculum and the assumptions about knowledge, alongside questions of how decisions are made and who makes the decisions, can be framed. This links in with the earlier

consideration of policy enactment, which considers the power relationships between the ORF and the PRF, and the unique structure this has within the world of RE. Within RE, the PRF has more agency and control over the curriculum than perhaps other subjects do. This is partly because of the locally agreed syllabus.

One of the key ways a school RE curriculum is determined is through the Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS). The locally agreed syllabus is a curriculum document unique to Religious Education in England (and Wales). Its origins, as outlined by Parker & Freathy (2011), lie in the legal requirement for the teaching of Religious Instruction (RI) later known as Religious Education (RE) following the Second World War and its importance to post-war national life. The 1944 Education Act required Local Education Authorities (LEAs), later Local Authorities (LA) to produce their own syllabus for the teaching of RE. This was to be done through a 'conference' involving representatives of local religious denominations of the area, the Church of England, teacher associations and the LEA. Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE), whilst permitted as above in 1944, became a legal requirement in the 1988 Education Reform Act (Queen's Printer of Acts of Parliament, n.d.) and their role was to advise the LA concerning Religious Education, and was made up of the same four representative groups as above (Plater, 2020). It is the inclusion of 'teacher association' representatives on the standing advisory council which is of importance in this research as it gives teachers a role in what may be seen as the ORF, therefore influencing policy at a higher level than the school or classroom.

Revell (2008) adds to this overview of the LAS by emphasising the key role the Church of England has had in RE:

In England a consistent determinant of the nature and scope of RE has been the established national church, the Church of England. This is partly because the Church of England has often played a pivotal role in the development of English education from its foundations to the present day (Jones 1977), but also because the Church of England has often identified the education of the nation's children as part of its "Christian duty" (Chadwick 2001:475) and has sought to retain control over education for its own interests (Alexander 2000). (Revell, 2008)

Some battles ensued with other denominations, including over the Church of England's role in the development of the universal system of education and particularly its monopolising role over early education initiatives (Revell 2008). There were also issues with the Church being unwilling to relinquish its control of education (Jones in Revell 2008). This caused the government to distance itself from RE, handing decisions to Local Authorities.

The above sets out a confusion in the original purpose of the locally agreed syllabus - was it to meet the needs of post-war national life, or was it to pacify the demands of the Church of England in meeting its assumed role in education? The latter possibility is further highlighted by the content of the original syllabuses; 'The first agreed syllabi rarely covered religions other than Christianity, and many explicitly outline their intention that RE should not only be about instruction in Christianity but hopefully conversion as well' (Cox in Revell, 2008, p. 225). There was a perceived move from this form of Christian confessionalism in the 1960s and 1970s (Doney et al., 2017) brought by the changing religious make-up of British society post-war (Parker & Freathy, 2011). The RE developing was 'post confessional, phenomenological and multi-faith meeting the aim of enabling pupils to 'gain an authentic understanding of religion and to increase tolerance and understanding, the widening of pupil's horizons as well as deepening his understanding of man [sic.] and the world' (Schools Council in Doney et al., 2017, p. 436)

The 1988 Education Reform Act, reinforced and protected the teaching of Christianity (as the main religious tradition in Great Britain), but it also built on these existing foundations of a multi-faith RE in its support of including the teaching and practices of other principal religions represented in Great Britain (Bates, 1996; Poulter, 1990). In addition, the inclusion of the legal obligations of the LA to constitute a SACRE and details of the members of the conference, also established a standard practice with the regard to the development, implementation and review of the syllabus which still stands today.

There was however continued confusion over the purpose of including RE in the curriculum with a variety of options being debated including understanding and social cohesion, and religious literacy as just two of the suggestions (Plater,

2020). In the present, a SACRE is a permanent body which must be established by each LA (approximately 150 in total) with the same four groups represented as previously (an issue of contention amongst some unrepresented groups such as Humanists (Watson, 2010). The LA will also organise an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review, revise or rewrite a syllabus.

In a bid to ensure high quality RE and to reduce variance in quality of the syllabuses, the Department for Education issued a Non-Statutory guidance document (DCSF, 2010) a Framework document (QCA, 2004) and illustrative RE programmes of study (2007, 2010) to act as a basis for local syllabuses (Smalley, 2020). The ASC will develop a syllabus, to be reviewed every five years and work with schools, governors, and teachers in ensuring its implementation. The SACRE (which includes teacher representatives), can provide further advice, guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the syllabus. The locally agreed syllabus is only for local authority-maintained schools in England, academies and free schools with a non-religious designation can design their own curriculum in line with their funding agreement. Schools with a religious designation may also have their own curriculum.

As outlined by Paul Smalley (2020) there have been accusations that the system of developing locally agreed syllabus and the locally agreed syllabus themselves are no longer fit for purpose. The non-statutory guidance documents demonstrate this as they aim to bring a consistency to the content and quality of the syllabus which would not be necessary if they were functioning properly. The fact that there is noticeable variance in quality of the syllabuses, demanding such an input, shows issues with the system.

There are also concerns that SACREs and ASCs were/are not functioning as they should be, with under-funding and under-resourcing limiting what a SACRE or ASC is able to achieve. Smalley's (2020) research in considering this, shows that locally agreed syllabus are being reviewed in line with statutory duties (suggesting SACREs and ASCs are functioning), but recognises that many issues with syllabuses may lie further down the line, with the lack of understanding by schools of the locally agreed syllabus as a statutory document. Other concerns include the lack of specialist RE teachers teaching the locally agreed syllabus, and schools not making discrete provision for RE for all pupils. The lack of

thorough subject inspection of RE by OFSTED, has lead to continued flouting of the legal status of the subject.

In response to some of these concerns, organisations such as NATRE (which includes an elected board, often including teachers), REC, NASACRE and Culham St Gabriel's have been involved in syllabus writing, research and supplementary materials. This is to ensure that resources are available to support the development of high-quality RE, despite some of these challenges. This intervention again demonstrates the blurred lines of the PRF and ORF within the complex organisation of RE, and the possibilities for increased teacher agency in policy production and implementation.

In recent years, and one of the key things which has brought an element of change to the outcomes of this thesis, has been the push towards a national entitlement for RE, aiming to reduce the negative impact of the above concerns. In 2018, the Commission on Religious Education suggested a national plan for RE with eleven recommendations giving a way forward for RE (Religious Education Council, 2018). Of relevance to this research, the first was that the subject name should be changed to Religion and Worldviews and the second recommendation stated that there should be a statutory national entitlement for all publicly funded schools. The third stated that non-statutory programmes of study should be developed similar to those for History and Geography in the national curriculum. Recommendation five would see the GCSE and A-Level specifications reviewed. A new role was suggested in recommendation eight for SACRE, including a renaming to the Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews. This body would be made up of different groups and their role would be to support the implementation of the National Entitlement. This might include developing programmes of study, providing support for learning outside the classroom and promoting good community relations within and outside schools. Funding would be required from Local Authorities for this.

Since this report, the REC and other RE bodies have encouraged a religion and worldview approach to RE and a National Content Standard has been produced to give a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers, alongside a National Statement of Entitlement (REC, 2023a). These have been exemplified through a handbook for curriculum writers and frameworks to show how this might look in

different contexts (Pett, 2024). Most recently, the curriculum review carried out by the Labour Government has highlighted the disparities in RE provision as a result of the variance in syllabus quality due to a lack of national agreed content standard (DfE, 2025b). This may mean that in the near future the locally agreed syllabus may be replaced or supplemented by a standardised or national curriculum. This thesis however, considers the role the locally agreed syllabus can play in the moral development of white British working-class boys, as the current provision in place for RE in many schools.

2.4.4.1 Teaching about far-right extremism in the locally agreed syllabus

When it comes to teaching about far-right extremism, for it to be justifiable in local authority-maintained schools and those others adopting the locally agreed syllabus, it would need to fit with the aims and content of RE within the locally agreed syllabus. For other schools, it would depend on the local arrangement, for example, an academy syllabus or a diocesan syllabus.

The Rochdale locally agreed syllabus does not mention far-right extremism specifically. There is mention of Islamist extremism in an instruction to teachers when teaching about Islamophobia to: ‘be prepared to address the question of violent fundamentalist groups commandeering Islam. Such as IS and Boko Haram, etc. Be prepared to discuss mainstream rejection of their actions’ (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 81). There is further reference to this in a unit of work considering if ‘religion is a power for peace or a cause of conflict in the world today?’ (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 85). Within the learning outcomes there is also a reference that pupils should ‘Examine and evaluate British society’s treatment of immigrant religious groups’ (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 81). The implication here through the usage of ‘British society’ would suggest more mainstream attitude, but marginal groups such as the far-right may also be implied. Within a unit of work on whether religion helps people to be good there is mention of historic religious intolerance including church hypocrisy through collusion with the Nazis in WW2.

These are small instances of where far-right extremism are identified, but other opportunities could be made in response to the needs of the local area and for this research white British working-class boys. The learning outcomes which are

at the core of the locally agreed syllabus, can be adapted to meet any newly created opportunities as suggested in the syllabus (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019, p. 72).

2.4.5 GCSE Syllabus

What is taught at Key Stage 3 however, is often restricted by the need to prepare pupils for a GCSE exam. Whilst schools are discouraged from teaching the GCSE content within Key Stage 3 (Staufenberg, 2019), many schools also recognise that there will be a building up of skills and knowledge as the foundations for GCSE knowledge to be built on. The GCSE exam syllabi are determined by the Subject Content issued by the DfE for RE (DfE, 2015b). This includes the subject aims and learning outcomes, subject content for the study of religions, and also for textual studies and religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world. Exam boards will take this document and use it to design and develop their exam syllabus, which is submitted to the DfE for approval. Whilst there can be some difference between the exam boards in terms of course structure, question style and allocation of marks, the subject content will be broadly the same.

2.4.5.1 Teaching about far-right extremism in the GCSE syllabus

Within the GCSE subject content as with the locally agreed syllabus, there is no explicit mention of far-right extremism but as shall be shown in the results section of the RE professionals discussion later in the thesis it is possible for teachers to identify areas where its teaching could be justified. This includes within the religion, peace and conflict section which mentions violence and terrorism, the section on dialogue within and between religions and non-religious beliefs. There is also a relevant section on religion, human rights and social justice which includes issues of equality, freedom of religion or belief and prejudice and discrimination. These sections would allow the consideration of far-right extremist narratives and actions, but there is no explicit mention. Whilst any updates or changes to the GCSE syllabus might consider the explicit inclusion of far-right extremism in relation to religion and belief, if teachers want to include it now, it will need to be added in to enhance critical reflection on religion in wider society. This is similar to research by David Horrell et al.

(2018b). They recognise an issue with the most recent GCSE syllabus for removing topics of religion and the media, a key component of the previous exam syllabus. This is something they argue is valuable, so they suggest a framework for using media depictions of religion and society to enhance students' religious literacy, using the Charlie Hebdo attack as an example.

2.4.6 RE Teacher Agency

At a recent presentation by the Ofsted lead for RE, Hazel Henson (2025) flagged that a syllabus is not a curriculum. The terms syllabus and curriculum are often used interchangeably, causing confusion. In Henson's usage the syllabus is seen as the external policy document of what should be taught in a school's RE curriculum (forming part of the wider school's curriculum). In this case the syllabus is the locally agreed syllabus, or the GCSE syllabus. With this in mind, Henson was stating that teachers in school need to take the syllabus they are using, whether it is a locally agreed syllabus or a GCSE syllabus and recontextualise it for use within their school as the RE curriculum. It is this application of the locally agreed syllabus which gives the opportunity to meet the needs of white British working-class boys. It is this type of teacher agency which shall now be considered in more depth.

In theory it should be the case that once a syllabus is produced whether for KS3 or GCSE, it is sent to schools and the RE curriculum is developed and taught using its contents. However, in practice the application is not so simple. When considering again the recontextualisation rule from the work of Bernstein as understood by Singh et. al. (2013), enactment refers to the understanding that 'policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in making meaning of official texts for specific contexts and practices' (Braun, Maguire and Ball in Singh et al., 2013, p. 267). The processes work together with interpretation as an initial reading; a making sense of the policy, and translation as putting those texts into action in the setting (Singh et al., 2013).

Bernstein describes these policy processes as the pedagogic device. 'The pedagogic device is the ensemble of rules or procedures by which policy knowledge is selectively translated into what is taught to whom, when, where, why, and how it is evaluated or deemed as acquired' (Bernstein in Singh et al.,

2013, p. 467). The process of recontextualization (fleshing out, given substance) may occur at many different levels even before a policy is introduced to schools.

Within RE this is unique, for as has been seen, there is very limited guidance from the official recontextualisation field (ORF) if that is considered to be the DfE alone. The DfE provides the requirement that RE is taught and monitors the provision through OFSTED and agrees on applications of the GCSE content by exam boards. However, in RE, aspects of the Pedagogic recontextualization field (PRF) take on the role of the ORF, taking the instruction that RE must be taught and producing the guidance and policies themselves. This can be seen most recently in the production of the National Content Standard (REC, 2023a) and the Handbook for curriculum writers (REC, 2023b) developed by the REC and local RE professional groups made up of teachers, advisors and academics. The GCSE exam boards, or the SACRE and the ASC also have a role to play in producing syllabi, guidance and providing training. These are however, often made up of classroom teachers, taking on additional responsibilities, bringing their experience of what pupils are asking for and need into these impacting again the policies at a higher level than the school or the classroom.

When a syllabus arrives in schools, schools as part of the PRF generate their own schools' policies and enactments, ensuring evaluation processes exist to monitor implementation, therefore entering a further recontextualization process. Teachers must undertake their own interpretation and translation process in order to have something teachable at the end. This illustrates how the 'processes of decoding and recoding (recontextualization) are constituted by power and control relations, which limit or constrain what texts are selected [in this case the RE lessons] and how they are re-organised and packaged for specific contexts' (Singh et al., 2013, p. 468). It is in this process where the issues outlined by Smalley (2020) with regard to the locally agreed syllabus can really be problematic and shall be considered in more depth below.

One of the key aspects of policy enactment is teacher agency. Teacher agency, taking the definition of Biesta (2015) is '[teachers'] active contribution to shaping their work and its conditions' (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 624), and acknowledges more recent acceptance of the importance of this for the overall

quality of education. For Auli Toom et. al.(2015), it ‘describe[s] teachers’ active efforts to make choices and intentional action in a way that makes a significant difference’ (Toom et al., 2015, p. 615). Whilst it is often equated with classroom teaching, it can have a wider impact on educational change beyond a teachers’ own classroom and school.

In common practice, a school receives a locally agreed syllabus or an exam specification, this is passed to the Head of Religious Education who will interpret and translate the policy, recontextualising it for their department, producing their own policy documents and schemes of work. Teachers will then interpret the school policies to produce lesson plans for their own pupils in a further recontextualization process. It is this process which can be seen as a ‘messy and unpredictable process’ (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 193). It can be dependent on teachers’ own experience. Research with student teachers (Soini et al., 2015), shows that becoming an active professional agent and therefore being able to ‘act intentionally, make decisions and thoroughly reflect on the impact of ones actions’ (Soini et al., 2015, p. 641), is something that is brought about through its active promotion, a strong student teacher learning environment and opportunities and confidence to reformulate pedagogic practice.

Complementing the language of Bernstein (2000), Mark Priestley outlines work by Supovitz and Weinbaum (Priestley, 2016) which discusses a process called iterative refraction highlighting the tendency for policy to mutate as a result of the recontextualisation process

‘Iterative refraction occurs across multiple levels and within multiple contexts—indeed wherever the curriculum is reinterpreted...The result of multiple recontextualization is often practice that bears little relation to the original policy.’(Priestley, 2016, para. 2)

Within RE iterative refraction is further exacerbated by competing policy agendas; the academic aims of RS, the personal development aims of RS, and the various policies that have already been outlined. Priestley, drawing on research by Reeves highlights that ‘policy intentions may be confused by the pressures exerted by competing policy agendas’ (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015, p. 193), leading often to unintended consequences (i.e., change but not

that intended by the architects of policy) (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 193). Whilst teacher agency has been frequently associated with the positive aspects of change, including the successful implementation of policies, it can also be associated with the negative where it is used for non-beneficial purposes (Campbell, 2012; Priestley et al., 2012).

Priestley et al. (2015) highlight that this has particularly been the case in recent years where although there has been more autonomy within teaching as a result of a move away from a prescriptive curriculum, 'this has been matched by an increase in the frequency and extent of output regulation, for example through school inspections and the evaluative use of attainment data' (Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, et al., 2015, p. 188). This increase has lead teachers to 'distance themselves from their personal values in order to 'play the game' (Gleeson and Gunter in Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, et al., 2015, p. 188) This can be for the fabrication of the school image, including impression management and discourses of excellence and this 'putting on a front' can happen at senior management level, through to main-scale teaching staff where ethical and professional practices lose out to performative pressures' (Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, et al., 2015, p. 188).

This is explored further in research by Alvunger (2018) who considers the recontextualisation of a standards-based curriculum in Sweden. It states that agency should 'taking into account the interaction between individual capacities and conditions in the environment. In this respect it is something that is 'achieved' rather than being an individually embedded quality' (Alvunger, 2018, p. 483) This reiterates that teachers will be influenced by their experiences and respond to policy and curriculum changes accordingly.

However, research by Nataša Pantić (2015), looks in more depth at teachers as agents of change, though it accepts that there is still little empirical analyse of how teacher agency operates, partly down to inconsistencies of the nature and purpose of teacher agency and change. The research considers what type of change teachers are expected to bring, with a focus on social justice. Taking theories of human agency and applying it to teacher agency, the work suggests that teachers can be agents of social justice:

Developing teachers as agents of social justice might involve cultivation of *purpose* and commitment to social justice; expanding the scope of teachers' *competence* by bringing their practical, relational, tacit knowledge to the level of explicit professional capital; helping teachers understand the full transformative potential of their actions and interactions within the given *autonomy* and considering the constraints of the structural and cultural environments; and promoting broader understanding, critical *reflection* and engagement with education policies (Pantić, 2015)

This shows that with the right input, teacher agency can be used for the outcomes desired in this research, where teachers are using moral values to directly give pupils a moral homeground on which to base their decision-making, particularly when it comes to encountering far-right extremist narratives.

When thinking about the implementation of a locally agreed syllabus, if it is to survive this process of recontextualisation, then it is highly dependent on the teacher's own commitment to professional practice, what their values are, what their beliefs about teaching and learning are (Campbell, 2012). If a teacher can understand the purposes and demands of the locally agreed syllabus, and find it aligns broadly with their values and aspirations, then it is far more likely to be enacted in a way which maintains the original intentions. It might be for this reason that SACRES are keen to use other syllabuses for guidance (Robinson, Jill et al., 2017) or why syllabuses from organisations held in esteem by RE teachers, like REToday, are used in either an advisory capacity or to actually write or provide the syllabuses themselves. This is a challenge for any locally agreed syllabus and one that isn't easy to overcome without robust support and monitoring processes, which currently for many SACREs, are not available.

In relation to the research questions, if teachers are aware of the potential of the locally agreed syllabus to meet the needs of white British working-class boys in their moral development, it may further fit with the values and aspirations of the teacher. This will empower them to enact the locally agreed syllabus in an intentioned way, meeting the purposes and demands of the locally agreed syllabus. This shows there are benefits for the pupils and the syllabus itself.

For the GCSE the process is less affected as ultimately a teacher has to follow a syllabus or risk the pupils not achieving the exam grades they should. There is more support and monitoring available due to the input from the exam boards themselves, and there is less likely to be distortion from other demands as the GCSE specification takes precedence. This means that opportunities to meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in the GCSE course are more likely to happen.

2.4.7 Policies relating to far-right extremism

There are several key policies related to teaching about far-right extremism in schools which come from the ORF (the DfE in this case). These policies are taken by the mid-level actors in the PRF such as curriculum developers (the SACRE for examples) and subject associations and organisations (such as REToday) to assist with the production of syllabi, lesson plans, materials and resources. The policies will, however be looked to by schools and teachers themselves when faced with an issue on the ground, to see how they can be used to support identified need. For this research, this includes that white British working-class boys (and other pupils) are encountering far-right extremist narratives, and schools need to consider how to best address this.

2.4.7.1 Community Cohesion

The first policy to be considered is the duty to promote community cohesion. Community cohesion as a school policy was introduced as a recommendation in the aftermath of the 2001 Riots in Northern England including the Greater Manchester area of Oldham.

Community cohesion as defined in the OFSTED guidance on its promotion said it is:

Working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community

(Ofsted, 2009, p. 3)

The Cantle Report (2001) which was a government-commissioned report following the riots, recognised the good work some schools were doing in cross-cultural development. However, it also identified that a community cohesion strategy was needed and one that should embrace the school citizenship curriculum. There was criticism of mono-cultural schools, including where this was the case in faith schools. Where schools could not address this through admission policies, it was encouraged that school twinning, joint programmes and community links were useful in addressing the problems of mono-cultural schools. The ultimate recommendation was that there should be 'a statutory duty to promote respect for, and an understanding of, the cultures in the school and neighbouring areas, through a programme of cross-cultural contact,' (Cantle, 2001, p. 49). This also included the requirement for schools to be inspected to this effect. Many aspects of this influential report were implemented and in changes to the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (DfE, 2006), a statutory duty for the promotion of community cohesion in schools was put in place.

In 2008, community cohesion became a part of the Ofsted inspections with guidance requiring inspectors to report on how well the school contributed to community cohesion, this included that they had considered the context in all three strands of faith, ethnicity and culture and also socio-economic factors (Ofsted, 2009). They needed a plan in place for the promotion of community cohesion including actions for outreach based on the analysis of the school's context. Schools also needed to show the impact of their actions, including faith, ethnicity, culture and socio-economic cohesion.

There has been much research into the effectiveness of this duty (Abbas, 2019; Engel et al., 2013; Francis et al., 2017; Gill & Worley, 2013; Ratcliffe, 2012; Thomas, 2014). Santokh Singh Gill and Claire Worley (2013) highlight in their research that the agenda is flawed as it suggests that contact between those of different ethnic backgrounds would lead to more positive levels of community relations. They argue this is not necessarily true. This is in agreement with the work of Barnes who states that 'offering young people information about diversity, does not serve to promote harmony and cohesion' (Barnes, 2019, p. 36). Gill and Worsley (2013) also state that the community cohesion duty, leaves

out issues of gender and show how in their research gender is significant in spaces of social contact and integration.

Others criticised the community cohesion duty where it overlapped with the Prevent duty (to be considered shortly) as it causes the conflation of cohesion with counterterrorism. Tahir Abbas (2019), states that a lack of cohesion in the 'Northern Disturbances' (including the above mentioned in Oldham), is 'an outcome of wider processes in society such as failed multicultural, integration and social mobility policy', rather than 'the cause of factors perceived as the foundation of radicalism and later terrorism' (Abbas, 2019, p. 404).

Andrew B. Morris et al. (2011) in their study of the Ofsted inspections of schools in the first year following the introduction of the duty, consider that Community Cohesion in the initial bill was a faith school-only policy, with the implication that faith schools needed to do this more than other schools. However, their research showed that Roman Catholic schools were overall rated higher than others in their promotion of community cohesion (Morris et al., 2011). The suggested reasons for this include the prominence of Religious Education in these schools and also the intake of the schools being based on faith grounds, as opposed to from the local neighbourhood.

These few examples on their own, show the complexities of the policy itself and what is involved in evaluating the policy.

My promotion to community cohesion coordinator was because of my background in Religious Studies and my role as RE and Citizenship teacher. As an RE teacher, there was once again the frustration that the purpose of the subject was being commandeered as a government agenda. As Leslie Francis et al. (2017) highlight however, there was a newfound support for the subject in its ability to promote community cohesion. An example of this is that GCSE entries were at the highest for RE and Citizenship during this time, particularly with the availability of the short course GCSE (NATRE, 2023). My role in school was boosted in importance, as I was required to write a section of the School Evaluation Form in preparation for OFSTED. This opportunity allowed for RE to shine. It gave a rare opportunity for discussions with senior leaders about the role and value of RE. Alan Brine who was the HMI subject lead at the time wrote

with great passion and conviction of the good and outstanding contribution RE makes towards community cohesion and how this contribution became a distinctive strength of the subject (Brine, 2012).

The requirement for community cohesion to be inspected as its own category was removed from OFSTED in 2011. The new Coalition government in 2010 moved the focus from community cohesion to Prevent and British Values. Community Cohesion remained in the Education Act with schools having a duty to promote it, but this is not integrated as part of the wider duties of the school (Francis et al., 2017). Recently, Ted Cante, Chair of the Community Cohesion Review team in 2001, has again called for the duty to promote community cohesion to be reinstated in the OFSTED inspection in light of the recent riots following the incident in Southport (Cante, 2024). This research comes from a position of support for the duty to promote community cohesion to hold more prominence in schools. It is however recognised that this is not currently the case in schools and that there were flaws in the previous community cohesion policies which would need development and reframing. What I will however remember from that role is that whilst the duty itself may have suffered criticism as outlined above, the projects I was able to do, allowed pupils from many backgrounds and cultures to come together, share, laugh, create and explore. The money and opportunities to do that would not have been there without the duty. This also fits in with the previously mentioned research about teacher agency and social justice (Pantić, 2015), whereby with the right input teachers will see it as part of their role to implement teaching pedagogy and practices which promote social justice with or without a written policy.

2.4.7.2 Prevent

A second policy which relates to the teaching about far-right extremism in schools is the Prevent Strategy. Prevent is the government's guidance designed to help prevent people from becoming terrorists or from supporting terrorism (Home Office, 2024b). The aim is to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism. It is based on the idea of early intervention to support those susceptible to radicalisation and to disengage and rehabilitate those who have already become involved in terrorism. It is a multi-agency duty involving those in education, healthcare, local authorities, police and criminal justice agencies for example

the prison and probation services. Sector-specific guidance is given to each area, along with training.

Within education, the Prevent duty (DfE, 2023) sits within the wider safeguarding and welfare responsibilities of the school. All staff are seen to have a responsibility with regard to the prevent duty and policies in place should mean that any concerns are reflected to the designated safeguarding lead who will follow the Prevent referral process. Curriculum leads within schools should also consider how they are supporting pupils by building resilience to radicalisation through their curriculum. Resources and guidance for doing this are also suggested.

Far-right extremism is now a core aspect of Prevent and is termed Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT):

Describes those involved in Extreme Right-Wing activity who use violence in the furtherance of their ideology. These ideologies can be broadly characterised as Cultural nationalism, White Nationalism, White Supremacism. Individuals and groups may subscribe to ideological tenets and ideas from more than one category.

(Home Office, 2024a)

It is therefore within the remit of members of school staff to be aware of far-right extremism and to build resilience against it and to report any concerns about the attitudes and actions of learners or staff.

One of the key roles within the Prevent duty for schools, is to build resilience to radicalisation. A government report released in May 2011 (Bonnell et al., 2011) outlined teaching approaches that help to build resilience based on research which took place in a general classroom setting. Whilst the teaching approaches themselves will be considered in more depth later, the context and definitions of the research will be considered here to demonstrate what was originally meant by resilience. The research for this report was carried out during a review of the Prevent Policy which took place from 2010. Recognising that schools would still have a role in this, the research continued, trying to provide practical advice to schools. One of the key elements of the research is the expectation that young people should be 'encouraged to be inquisitive, explore

their identities and express their views' (Bonnell et al., 2011, p. 7). However, this needs to be balanced with the vulnerabilities and risk young people face as they transition into adulthood. It is stated that

There is a need to ensure that as they mature and begin to make sense of the world, young people have a full understand [-ing of] British democratic values such as mutual tolerance and respect for the law and are equipped with the skills and capabilities to resist extremist arguments that run counter to these values (Bonnell et al., 2011, p. 7)

To do this, strategies for building resilience were to be identified with resilience being defined as:

the ability to bounce back from adversity'. It is used by educationalists, mental health professionals (among others) to describe the process in which people can overcome or resist negative influences that block (for instance) emotional well-being and/ or achievement. (Bonnell et al., 2011, p. 10)

This document was circulated to schools as a suggestion of principles which may be used in schools (as opposed to specific interventions).

The government also has a website called *Educate against Hate*. This website is to support classroom teachers in building resilience and preventing radicalisation. On this website resilience is based on the premise that:

Schools should be a safe space where students can discuss social and political issues, including extremism and terrorism. Building their resilience will put them in a stronger position to reject extremist views.

(DfE, 2015a)

Within some government definitions, resilience is based around the overcoming, resisting and rejection of extremist views.

Radicalisation is defined in the report as

The process by which people adopt an extreme position in terms of politics and religion; a violent extremist ideology, or move to violent action in support of their beliefs. The radicalisation process does not follow a single process or pathway and there are no specific stages or steps involved. Radicalisation is often a social process involving interaction with others, however, there are reported cases of individuals self-radicalising. The rate at which a person becomes radicalised can vary greatly...Radicalisation doesn't necessarily result in violence being committed or even supported.

(Bonnell et al., 2011, p. 9)

This shows that radicalisation is a complicated process with multiple routes, timeframes and warning signs. On the Educate Against Hate website, there is a cautionary warning when applying this to teenagers specifically.

The teenage years are a time of great change and young people often want to be on their own, easily become angry and often mistrust authority. This makes it hard to differentiate between normal teenage behaviour and attitude that indicates one of your students may have been exposed to radicalising influences.

(DfE, 2017)

It is these concerns, among others which have led to concern about teachers having to take on this duty. As a result, much research has been carried out into Prevent in schools (Abbas, 2019; Beighton & Revell, 2020; Davies, 2016; Ghosh et al., 2017; Hardes & Revell, 2017; Lowe, 2017; D. C. Lundie, 2019; Sajjad, 2022; Stephens et al., 2019). There is a wide range of views regarding its reception by schools and teachers, whether it is a good thing, whether it is a duty schools should have and discussions around its implementation.

D. Lowe (2017) in his research into the problems with defining extremism outlines that within early European, including the UK Prevent strategies, there was a focus on violent extremism linked to Islamist ideology. This was contrary to European Union Commission guidance that there should not be a focus on one religion and should also include non-violent extremism. The focus on Islam within the 2008 Prevent Strategy led to Muslims feeling alienated and caused division within communities, with Muslims rejecting the legitimacy of the strategy. Lowe (2017), states that there was a preoccupation from the UK government with a theological basis for radicalisation, this along with other concerns led to clumsy definitions around extremism.

In agreement with this, Joel Busher (2019) highlights initial concerns around the stigmatisation of Muslim Communities (Busher et al., 2019) and if Muslims are feeling alienated and questioning the strategy, it will lead to difficulties with its implementation, for example, if there is a Muslim teacher working in a school who is expected to follow it. More recent research, however shows that there may have been a softening of criticism of the policy, as amendments have been made, training has been given, and implementation has been considered (Busher et al., 2019). This highlights some of the power and control aspects of policy enactment mentioned previously, showing that when a policy is enacted the power of those in the PRF including pupils themselves, can have an impact on the policy itself when it does not meet the need in the classroom (Quartermaine, 2016).

This research is predicated on the basis that Prevent is in place in schools, and therefore that school curricula need to support preventing radicalisation and the building of resilience and therefore that RE has a role to play. This is key to meeting the moral development needs of white British working-class boys.

2.4.7.3 Fundamental British Values

Related to this is the duty to promote Fundamental British Values (FBV). Called Prevent's bedfellow by Christine Winter and China Mills (2020), this has again been a contentious duty given to schools (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017; Farrell, 2016; Jerome et al., 2021; Panjwani, 2016; Starkey, 2018), but a duty which is important to this research. Winter and Mills (2020), give a history of the duty with its origins within the wider Prevent Duty and its enforcement within the teacher standards in 2012 and SMSC documents in 2014 and later within Ofsted in 2015. Teachers are expected to actively promote FBV as laid out in the government's document (DfE, 2014a). This includes democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance of different faiths. The duty is a cross-curricular aspect of school life, and it is down to each school to decide how best to promote the values.

Highlighted by the research from Winter and Mills (2020), one of the key concerns raised by this duty, however, is teachers' knowledge and ability to

engage with the values in lessons. Concluding their research, Winter and Mills state that ‘teachers need time and guidance to engage in research by others and for themselves, to discuss critically how to teach controversial issues such as race, ethnicity, religion, identities and values’ (Winter & Mills, 2020, p. 61). A further concern is how it can cause the marginalisation of teachers who promote them, as a result of the security-focused and narrowly nationalistic FBV agenda (Starkey, 2018).

As a cross-curricular duty, RE has a role in promoting fundamental British values and more specific research has been undertaken considering RE’s role (Farrell, 2016). Jane McDonnell (2021) considered the question ‘How do you promote ‘British Values when values education is your profession’ referring to the policy enactment of FBV among specific subject teachers including those of Religious Education. The research tries to move away from the nationalistic and securitising elements of the policy which are so often considered in research, and instead looks at how teachers who are engaged in values education already, implement the policy. Setting the research in the context of broader values education including moral, political, character and virtues education it looks at how RE teachers have engaged with these and the implications of this for FBV.

The research looked at ‘the possibility of teachers working creatively with FBV, informed by older pedagogic traditions and commitments’ (McDonnell, 2021, p. 380). It showed how building in FBV to their practice came more easily to some RE teachers, they had an existing commitment to values education, and they appreciated the ‘greater power’ FBV gave them as values educators. There remained concerns around the policy (and more of these may have been missed due to the ethnic and religious identity of the teachers), but despite this critical responses to FBV were developed as a result of the pluralistic RE, teachers were creative, drew on their personal and professional commitments and made FBV work fitting with their own educational commitments (McDonnell, 2021, p. 391).

This research has been developed into a reflective resource for teachers of RE (McDonnell et al., 2020) aiming to be a starting point for critical reflection and conversation around values education and RE. Of relevance to this thesis, this includes addressing human rights, social inequality, and stereotypes of religious adherents some of which is linked into the GCSE RE syllabus.

As with the previously mentioned policies, there are areas of contention with this too, however again, it also has benefits for the RE community of giving a higher profile role to RE within schools (McDonnell, 2021) and reinforcing the skills of critical analysis (Farrell, 2016) and building tolerance (Jerome et al., 2021). It is however worth noting here that at the time of writing a private, member's bill (Winchester, 2024) seeks to amend the existing duty renaming 'Fundamental British Values' to 'Values of British Citizenship' and changes the list of values to democracy, the rule of law, freedom, individual worth and respect for the environment. This comes amidst calls to improve Citizenship education and aims to better equip young people for the future (Devall, 2024).

As stated, these policies show that there is a key role within schools to prevent violent extremism and build resilience to radicalisation. Different aspects of the three policies considered complement this. With the Prevent Duty offering a framework to work in, particularly with regard to white British working-class boys who may be vulnerable to or have been radicalised. In the promotion of community cohesion, the pupils are offered a way to feel a part of something. In the promotion of British values, extremism is outlined as contrary to the values and support the implementation of strategies to prevent radicalisation and build resilience. Finally, the political impartiality guidance offers support to teachers in challenging beliefs and narratives contrary to British democracy.

2.5 Resources for teaching about far-right extremism

This thesis argues that there is a unique role within RE for the teaching about far-right extremism to support the moral development needs of white British working-class boys, and that there already exists a place for this to be done. This has been shown as true within the Rochdale locally agreed syllabus and in the GCSE syllabus. It is also further evidenced by the existence of materials relating to the teaching about far-right extremism for the use within RE lessons.

When considering how to implement a syllabus, teachers may choose to access existing resources made by organisations external to the school as part of their own recontextualisation of the syllabus, and utilising their own teacher agency to ensure what is being delivered is best fit for their class. This may include charities issuing resources around a particular issue, commercial groups aiming to provide materials for a syllabus for example REToday, or the commercial arms of the exam boards. There are also teachers who share resources online via resource banks or maybe via social media. Teachers can have a vast choice of materials to use, and identifying the best for the purpose can be a difficult task.

There are also documents giving guidance to teachers on how best to deliver certain topics in lessons. These can support with the teaching pedagogy selected or the skills development for the pupils themselves. There are some guidance and resources available for teaching about far-right extremism and a few of these will be considered to highlight the potential options for a teacher and illustrate what already exists related to this thesis topic.

2.5.1.1 Learning together to be safe

In 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) produced *Learning together to be safe* (DCSF, 2008) which was made available to teachers to support preventing violent extremism and building up resilience in pupils. Alongside other aspects of raising awareness, discussion of the cause of violent extremism and managing risks, it also considers practical ideas of what schools can do, building on existing work which might already be taking place. A tiered approach is suggested with universal actions, targeted activities and support for particular individuals.

Amongst these it suggests using the curriculum to challenge extremist narratives, developing understanding of local issues and tensions and allowing space for debate, and increasing staff confidence in discussing controversial issues (DCSF, 2008 p. 8). When considering curriculum developments to support this RE, alongside Citizenship and History are seen to be ‘particularly critical in developing a stronger shared understanding of and respect for culture, belief and heritage, across all communities and dealing explicitly with aspects of violent extremist narratives’ (DCSF, 2008 p. 28).

This demonstrates a key role for RE as it will develop knowledge of religions and allow pupils to analyse current issues of concern. A further role RE can play is by ‘provid[ing] opportunities for pupils to understand, meet and engage with people from different backgrounds in ways which promote common values while recognising diversity within communities’. (DCSF, 2008, p. 28). RE teachers, in the Rochdale locally agreed syllabus for example, are encouraged to use visitors as a way of developing pupils understanding of religion and belief (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019).

There is also an annex which outlines the legal and contractual powers which support teachers in carrying out this role. It starts with the requirement that teachers bring political issues to the attention of pupils in a balanced presentation of opposing views. It then however indicates how behaviour policies, IT policies and Uniform policies can be used to support the duty to Prevent violent extremism.

This report was produced in 2008 and many similar documents have been produced as a result, particularly ones produced by local authorities and charity groups for example Lancashire (Crossley, n.d.) and Barking and Dagenham (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2020).

2.5.1.2 Teaching Controversial Issues to support the DfCSF toolkit on Prevent

An example from the local area, issued by Greater Manchester Police with Chester University (GMP, 2010) develops teacher training to implement the Learning Together to be Safe document. It aims to improve teacher confidence through a number of aspects including an understanding of the background of

violent extremism, guidance on how to manage controversial issues, difficult conversations and how to create a critical-thinking environment.

It gives an overview of national threats which at the time included Al Qaida, dissident Irish republican terrorist groups and other UK-based extremist groups including racist and fascist organisations. The document also encourages schools to understand the local area issues through the Safer Schools Partnership, recognising that the activities of different extremist groups vary across the country. It also recommends schools can support local authorities and police to understand tensions affecting their communities through observation and witnessing events or becoming aware of something that might happen.

2.5.1.3 Teaching approaches that help to build resilience to extremism among young people

In 2011, the guidance *Teaching approaches that help to build resilience to extremism among young people* (Bonnell et al., 2011), which has already been considered in the introduction, was shared with schools. It presents findings from research considering teaching methods, knowledge, skills, teaching practices and behaviours that help to build resilience to extremism (pg. 2). Supported by case studies the research stated three broad categories to consider when engaging in resilience-building teaching:

Making a connection through good design and a young person centre approach

Facilitating a safe space for dialogue and positive interactions

Equipping young people with the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding and awareness for resilience

(Bonnell et al., 2011, p. 106)

One of the key elements here is knowledge to counter extremist narratives or challenge negative stereotypes, which is a key aspect of this thesis. RE can give pupils the knowledge of religions to counter far-right narratives relating to religion. It is recommended in Bonnell et al.'s (2011) research that teaching

methods to build resilience should be sustained and ongoing, it can't just be a one off. Pupils need to have a positive sense of identity, including through conflict management techniques. They also need to develop critical thinking skills which allow pupils to think for themselves when encountering differing perspectives. This supports the resilience of pupils to propaganda. Finally, interaction and teamwork are key, particularly where it supports transferable skills for positive collaboration and ongoing engagement.

Many of these resources are now out of date and whilst some of the risk factors, pedagogic tools and outcomes may remain, updated research takes into account the changing nature of violent extremism in the UK, particularly as a result of digital technologies, online forums and conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation.

2.5.1.4 Addressing Extremism through the Classroom

Addressing Extremism through the Classroom is a report of research carried out by UCL IOE, sponsored by the charity Since 9/11 (Taylor et al., 2021). Based on interviews with teachers and focus groups with KS3 pupils and later as a result of changes due to COVID-19 with Prevent officers, it aims to examine how schools, and their teachers, build resilience to extremism in students in England and prevent them from being drawn into violent groups. Key findings include that teachers saw it as important for schools to engage with the issue of violent extremism and that teachers had encountered extreme views at some point. Conspiracy theories were the most frequently encountered and teachers reported feeling less confident about how to deal with them.

Teachers expressed a concern about pupils' exposure to extremist views online, which had been made worse by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The research suggests that this is an emerging area that needs more consideration. Teachers also expressed a concern that even though they felt schools can make a difference to discouraging attraction to extremist groups, teachers are worried about getting it wrong.

The pedagogic tools used by teachers included open debate carried out in the appropriate way allowing pupils to feel safe, but also encourage respectful disagreement. Critical literacy skills are needed to develop political and media literacy. It is also suggested that teachers enable pupils to understand the motivation for terrorist acts and not just condemn them. FBV is seen as a key starting point for discussions on democracy, diversity and dissent. Teachers did express a concern that ‘untrained’ teachers selecting from some of the excellent resources available could end up just delivering content, rather than a thorough investigation of ideas. The research does however give a list of resources which teachers have access to support their teaching about violent extremism and makes a recommendation for improved teacher training.

Within this report whilst it is recognised the important role RE has in building resilience and preventing violent extremism it takes issue with RE being seen as the ‘subject tasked with countering extremist narratives’, it states that it is a whole school issue and beyond that an issue for the government and communities.

2.5.1.5 Educate Against Hate

Finally, consideration shall be given to the government-backed website Educate Against Hate. Due to the changing nature of this website, it is important to note that it was accessed for this research on the 12th of Jan 2025. Developed by the DfE and the Home Office the website aims to give guidance to a number of stakeholders including teachers and parents and practical advice on how to protect children from extremism and radicalisation. Whilst the website shares relevant materials, it does not accept responsibility for external content linked on the site. The site encourages people who feel they have relevant materials to share with them for review and inclusion.

Within the classroom resources filters are available to better identify relevant content. Relevant examples of these include debate and discussion, extremism, FBV, Prevent duty, Radicalisation, Religion and Terrorism.

There are twelve resources included under the religion category, nine of these are for KS3 or 4. All of them are appropriate to be taught in RE lessons, but some depending on the school would generally fit into the PHSE curriculum.

One of the resources ‘Stand Up!’ is developed particularly to counter antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. It does this through consideration of Nazi Germany and a comparison to today’s society. Another ‘The Deliberative Classroom’ is a project funded by the DfE to support teachers in leading discussions and debate on issues relating to FBV. This is hosted by the Association of Citizenship Teachers website. There is also a project relating to interfaith relations aiming to build mutual respect though greater understanding of religions.

There are two projects which are particularly focused on religion and religious education. The first is *REsilience: Teaching Contentious Topics (REsilience: Teaching Contentious Topics - REC, n.d.)*. This project aims to increase confidence in teachers when addressing contentious issues in the classroom. This is particularly focussed on those linked with violent extremism. It provides continuous professional development to ensure teachers can access high-quality lessons, reflection tools and guidance on teaching such topics in the classroom.

The second is the *Shared Space Toolkit for Teachers of RE* (Christopher et al., 2018) this is a toolkit which aims to provide teachers with ideas and resources to best promote good community relations in RE classrooms. Using contact theory principles of encounter, conversation and interaction it aims to ‘improve young people’s intergroup attitudes (i.e., reduce prejudice) and help them to develop some of the skills necessary to navigate the increasingly diverse world in which they are growing up’ (Christopher et al., 2018, p. 2).

2.5.2 Conclusion

This section has given an overview of the literature relating to this research, to set the research in context, outline the key issues and identify the gaps in knowledge to support the importance and relevance of this research. This has included what the unique role RE can have, through the locally agreed syllabus

in supporting the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism.

It has defined the key terms relating to far-right extremism. It has also given a framework for understanding the far-right as a result of the varied and fragmented nature of the far-right. It has given an overview of key far-right extremist narratives and particularly those referencing religion. It has identified the local impact of far-right extremism to the area of Rochdale, using local, national and international events. It has also highlighted the rising threat of online encounters with the far-right.

This section has drawn on the introduction to show how identity development, including moral identity has a key role in building resilience to radicalisation and reducing the threat of violent extremism. It has considered the vulnerability of white British working-class boys to far-right extremism and the role of identity in this. This has shown the need to find out more about what influences pupils' identity.

It has considered a framework for understanding moral education and its role in RE. It has also linked this to more recent framing of RE to a Religion and Worldviews approach. It has been suggested that there needs to be a 'remoralising of RE' to support the moral development of white British working-class boys. This has shown the need to find out how the RE curriculum fits with moral development currently.

Finally, teachers' policy enactment has been framed through the work of Bernstein (2000), showing how policies are recontextualised in the classroom and emphasising a teacher's unique role in this, through teacher agency. As part of understanding recontextualisation, this section considered the place of teaching about far-right extremism currently in curriculum design and development. This included the locally agreed syllabus and the GCSE syllabus. . It has also given an overview of existing materials relating the teaching about far-right extremism. This has shown the need to find out how RE professionals' view teaching about far-right extremism, the opportunities they identify and how this might be implemented.

Research Projects

Overview

This research has been split into two complementary projects, each aiming to find out about how a locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism. The first project looks at pupil views. The research was carried out at a school in the Rochdale area and addresses the research questions based on the literature review:

- What do pupils see as the main influences on their own identity?
- Where do pupils get their perceptions of religions, cultures, and communities?
- Whether pupils think far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- To what extent do pupils use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school?

The second project looked at the views of RE professionals. It took place at an online RE conference *RExChange* organised by the Culham St Gabriel's Trust. This answers the research questions formulated from the literature review and the pupil focus groups:

- Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

This project aimed to triangulate and assess the data from the pupil focus groups to see if the pupils ideas related to RE professionals' experiences. It also gave an indication of whether the pupil ideas could be practically

implemented, and meet the moral development purposes of including far-right extremism with the RE curriculum.

3 Pupil Nominal Group Technique Focus Groups

3.1 Research Questions

This first project set at the fore pupils' views, as it is through an understanding of the development of their moral identity, their perceptions of religions, cultures and communities, and their use of what they are taught in school, that adequate policy and pedagogical changes can be made. This can then support the moral development of white British working-class boys. The key purpose of this research, therefore, was to find out pupils' views on aspects relating to the teaching about far-right extremism in school and particularly within Religious Education (RE) lessons.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research Context: Rochdale

This research has arisen as a result of my teaching experiences in a Rochdale school, and the pupils' experience of far-right extremism in the area. Rochdale as an area offers an important context to this research due to the nature and make-up of the area.

3.2.1.1 Ethnic Identity

Rochdale is a diverse area (ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, 2013). Based on the 2021 Census data (NOMIS, n.d.), Rochdale as a metropolitan borough has a population of 223,800 people. 84.5% have the UK as their country of birth. This increases to 89.2% for people born in Europe. There is a significant number of people born in the Middle East and Asia at 8%. 2.4% were born in Africa. When considering Ethnic group 74% identify as white. 18.5% Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh. In terms of religion 46.9% stated Christian, 28.8% said no religion and 18.8% said Muslim.

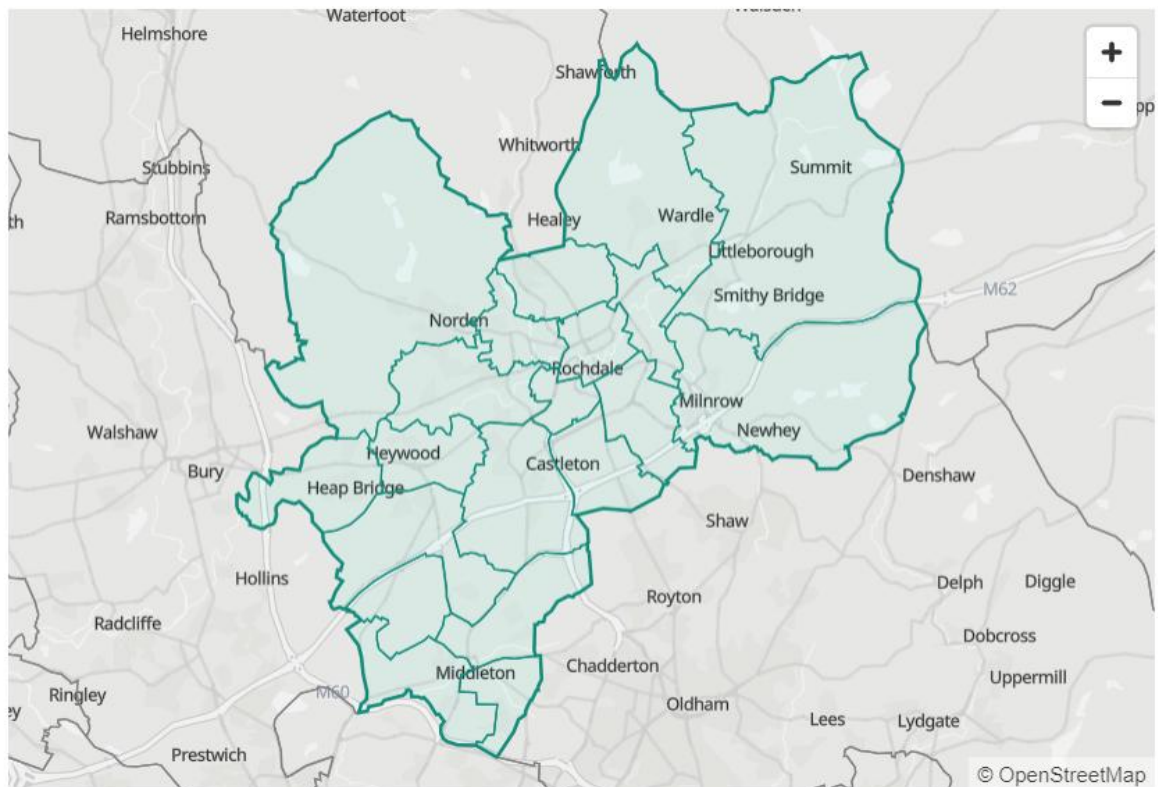


Figure 3 Map of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough (NOMIS, n.d.)

Area One is the pseudonym of the location of the school which is used later as a case study within this research. Its demographics are different to Rochdale overall. Combining all four wards of Area One, over 80% of residents are white, much fewer are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh than in Rochdale overall. More people are Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African than Rochdale overall. More people consider themselves Christian and more people do not have a religion. A smaller percentage are Muslim and this is considerably lower than Rochdale as a whole. These figures are significant as it shows the diversity in areas in Rochdale, but also the segregated nature of the areas. Other wards in Rochdale, for example have over 50% Muslim residents.

3.2.1.2 Voting History

The voting patterns in the area have typically shown Rochdale constituency as a labour strong-hold. In general elections between 2010 and 2019 Labour have held office with a majority of votes (UK Parliament, n.d.-b). However right-wing parties have often achieved well in the area with National Front and the UK Independence party collectively receiving 7.9% (approximately 4000 people) of the vote in 2010, The UK independence party (UKIP) received more votes than the Conservative party in 2015 with 18.8% of the votes. The Brexit party achieved 8.2% of the votes in 2019. In 2024, a highly controversial by-election was held following the suspension of the Labour candidate for comments about antisemitic conspiracy theories. George Galloway from the Workers Party of Great Britain won with a pro-Palestinian campaign, an appeal to Muslims through accusations against Labour of ignoring them, and an appeal to disaffected white voters through promises of workers' rights and meeting key social needs of the area including revival of the football club, housing and shopping needs (Burnell & Lazaro, 2024). The constituency boundaries changed in 2024.

Area One was part of a different constituency until 2024, but has also typically voted Labour from 2010, until 2019 when the Conservatives won in the area (UK Parliament, n.d.-a). Here too, right-wing parties have achieved a notable percentage of the votes. In 2010 the British National Party (BNP) achieved over 3000 votes. In a by-election in 2014 UKIP achieved nearly 40% of the vote with

candidate John Bickley referencing the Rochdale Grooming Scandal and the Labour Party disenfranchising and betraying its core working-class voters (Merrick, 2014) within his campaign. The Brexit party achieved nearly 4000 votes in 2019. In 2024, Area One was split between two constituencies, each voting Labour.

The election results of both of these areas which recognise a Labour prominence, show some success of far right-wing politics. There are thousands of people in the areas voting for candidates with far-right views.

3.2.1.3 Socio-economic Data

The socio-economic data about the areas are also of interest. Rochdale is ranked the 15th most deprived borough in England. According to the *Rochdale Borough Deprivation Briefing in 2019*, deprivation ‘covers a broad range of issues and refers to unmet needs caused by a lack of resources of all kinds, not just financial’ (Rochdale Borough Council, 2019, p. 1). There are seven key domains including income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment. Rochdale has been within the 100 most deprived LSOA since 2004 showing historical deprivation (Penney, 2019, p. 5). Several areas of Rochdale are within the 3% most deprived areas in the country, including, a feeder area for the secondary school. A further area of intake has been identified as one of the ‘left-behind’ neighbourhoods along with three other areas of the Rochdale local authority. According to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report (2023), left behind neighbourhoods are ‘those facing the dual disadvantage of high levels of deprivation and community need, and low levels of investment and resources’ (OCSI in APPG, 2023, p. 17). This area, in particular was also recognised as having the third highest ‘Hardship Vulnerability’ in the country based on increased economic pressures as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic (APPG, 2023).

Figure 5. Map of overall deprivation in Rochdale Borough 2019

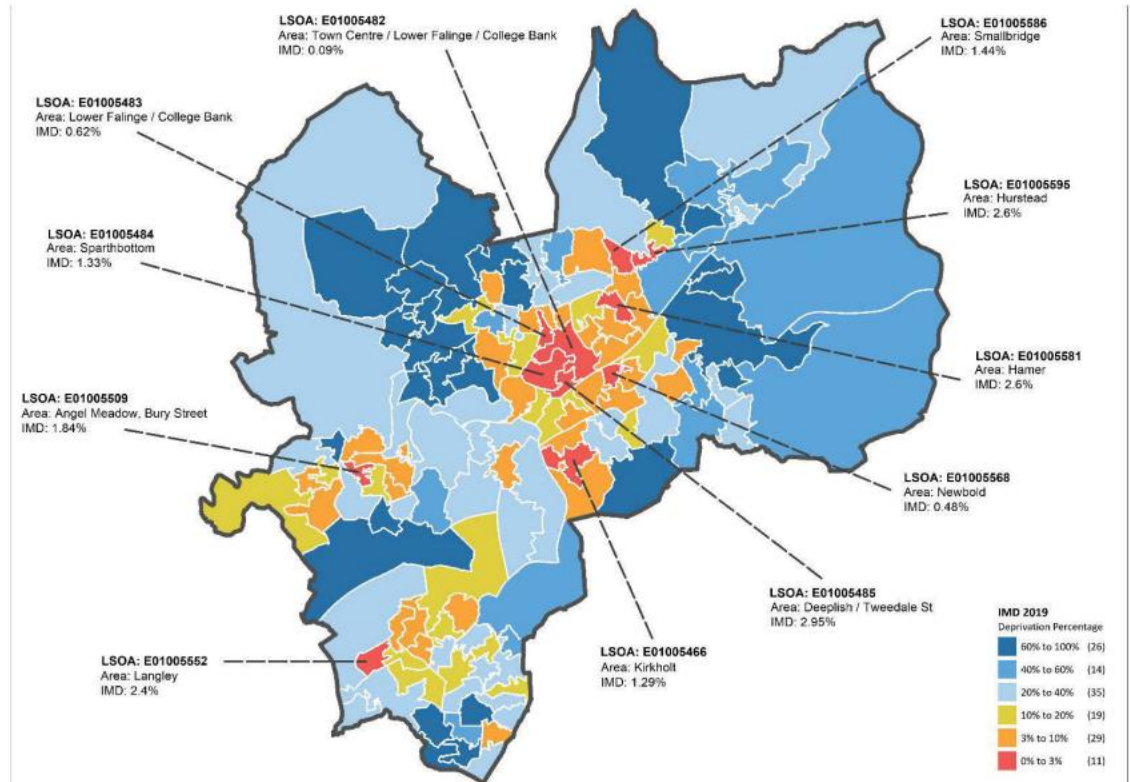


Figure 4 Map of deprivation (Rochdale Borough Council, 2019, Figure 5)

When it comes to the typical employment of people within the area. Using the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC) and comparing the areas to England, it can be seen that more people are employed in L12-13 roles and less people are employed in L1-6 roles. There are considerably more people who have never worked or are long-term unemployed. Whilst the NS-SEC are not formally a way of determining class status in the UK. It can be seen from the types of roles included in each classification that the area could be seen as employed in roles which are traditionally working class (Wright, 1980). This is of importance to this research as the far-right is known for recruitment within working-class areas and has an appeal for people who may feel part of a 'left-behind working class' with concerns around identity and opportunity.

3.2.2 Justification of Methodology

There has been a long history of involving children and young people in decision-making in education (Arnot & Reay, 2007), and central to many inclusions of children and young people, is a reflection on their human rights ((Whitty & Wisby, 2007). As this research especially concerns pupils' identity, influences and use of knowledge taught in school, it would follow that pupils should be given the opportunity here to express their views and for their views to be taken seriously (Robinson, 2020). It also fits with the role of pupils within the PRF as indicated previously, building in an element of pupil agency .

Margaret Wood (2011) in her research, looking at pupil voice and the development of schools, suggests a 'worm's eye' perspective on schools, highlighting the importance of pupil partners, as those 'closer to the ground' and therefore offering a unique perspective on learning and the development of the school community. She states that children and young people being heard is 'legitimate in terms of children and young people being important stakeholders in schooling, but also that this will promote more informed decisions by including the student knowledge base.' (Wood, 2011, p. 12). This research set out to see how policy changes might be implemented in the classroom, so it is notable that research also shows that 'giving serious consideration to pupil voice can generate highly effective pedagogy' (Husbands & Pearce, 2012).

Ann MacPhail (2001) also outlines research to show that there is a strong case for including young people in educational research, and importantly for this research, shows that group techniques are popular for working with young people due to the quality and data generated. There are further benefits to using small group discussion or focus groups here. Firstly, focus groups are 'particularly well suited to exploratory and illuminative work when there is little research on a topic' especially as 'Participants are allowed to express themselves in their own words and this can provide insights on their understanding of topics and the level of feeling associated with them' (Menter et al., 2011, p. 149).

Focus groups also allow for more anecdotal and day-to-day language and interaction to be used which can give confidence to young people taking part,

but also allows researchers to hear ideas as expressed in their own terms. As this research engaged in what can be controversial topics, it was important that pupils felt they are able to express themselves in their way and on their terms. It would also allow them to define their identity in their own way which was important with the research focus of white British working-class.

There were, however, some potential problems with the use of focus groups including how to ensure all voices were heard and how to avoid some participants monopolising the discussion, with others not being involved. As this research was about the sensitive topic of far-right extremism, there was additional concern around confidentiality. Pupils would be able to identify what each other said, despite anonymisation of the research data at a later stage. This therefore needed to be made clear to participants.

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) used in this research was developed in the 1960s (Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1972), is a consensus development method for use within focus groups. It is a technique which can be used for problem exploration, but also on initial fact-finding tasks (Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1972).

The key strength of the technique is the equal voice it gives to participants and the equal validity it gives to their answers (Gallagher et al., 1993; Lennon et al., n.d.). It generates both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data identifies the consensus achieved through the process and the ranking given to other potential answers or solutions. The results of this 'provide a useful starting point for more detailed qualitative analysis' (Gallagher et al., 1993, p. 78).

The research by MacPhail, suggests NGT as an appropriate technique for the use with young people as it allows them 'to generate ideas, engage in discussion and prioritise items' (MacPhail, 2001, p. 168). As a consensus method it supports the research questions by determining the priorities of topics covered within RE lessons and generating ideas for how this might be done (McMillan et al., 2016). The qualitative data generated by NGT can allow for comparisons to be made between individuals based on their discussion and ranking of the ideas generated, but also allows for analysis of the collective voice generated by the group and the processes by which they get there.

There are several alternative techniques which could have been used including brainstorming and the Delphi method, which aim to elicit similar information. However, linking to the above-mentioned concern with group work methods, it is the socio-emotional advantages which made this an appealing technique.

Michael O'Neil and Lorna Jackson (1983) in their research on curriculum development in higher education, summarise these advantages to potentially include the equal opportunity given for contribution, less dominance of individuals, lower group pressures to conform and less chance of personality clashes. This would be particularly important in this research where the focus was on white British working-class boys who may feel a lack of identity or belonging, so this may encourage them to engage more. Further benefits of the use of this technique include that it could be considered a 'safe forum' for ideas, allowing for more creative ideas or comments than other methods (Dobbie et al., 2004) which will lend itself to the difficulties raised previously of confidentiality when discussing confidential issues.

The Delphi method is a similar structured method, but in its typical form uses 'interactions between group (called panel) members via questionnaires rather than face-to-face communication', with the benefit of preserving participant anonymity. (McMillan et al., 2016, p. 658). This is seen as a particular benefit where personal contact is not possible or not desirable (Day & Bobeva, 2005). In this research, despite concerns about the lack of participant anonymity, face to face contact between the participants was easily organised and desirable. It was desirable as it allows further qualitative data to be gathered from the group dynamics, the participants interactions with each other and reflects classroom-based discussion which pupils are used to. This then removes the advantages of the Delphi method in this instance.

There are also less structured brainstorming methods, with participants simply verbally sharing ideas through unstructured discussion. Issues with this include the requirement of participants to wait their turn in the discussion, meaning ideas may be forgotten and if the group is too big, participants can feel less personally involved, so may not join in (Paulus & Nijstad, 2019). As a result of the above, less ideas are generated making the brainstorming less

successful. This again suggests that the structured approach of the NGT helped eliminate some of these problems.

A typical use of NGT (McMillan et al., 2016), starts with silent generation, where in response to a question posed, participants will record their own individual responses. They will not discuss or share their ideas at this point. Following this there will be a round robin whereby participants in turn will state one of their ideas to the group, repeating this until there are no more unique ideas remaining. Again, there is no discussion at this point. Next, there is time for clarification of ideas. This is where discussion may be had to determine clarity, importance and inclusion of each point. Points may be adapted or removed with the agreement of the original proposer. Finally, ideas are ranked with participants individually selecting their five most important ideas from the list and ranking them, five being the most important and one being the least. These rankings are then tallied up to find the most favoured. In some adapted versions of NGT (Gallagher et al., 1993) there is then time for discussion of the favoured items, which is an adaption utilised in this research.

Using the NGT process for the focus group, also reduced the necessity for a pilot to be carried out. This is because it felt like a familiar teaching technique, particularly for an experienced teacher which the researcher is. This meant that how pupils would engage with the technique, could be anticipated, and the technique easily adapted by an experienced teacher-researcher to ensure that the best data was collected during the focus group sessions.

There were however some remaining issues which this type of research with pupils can pose. As practitioner research, the first issue is that of dual role of teacher and researcher, which brings ethical concerns and concerns of research bias. Brianna L. Kennedy-Lewis recognises that 'Both teacher researchers and former-teachers-as-researchers face the challenge of defining their roles as practitioners and scholars during the research act' (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 110). Pupils develop a trust relationship with their teachers and will act in accordance with this. If teachers are using that trust relationship to, for example, gain research covertly, this does not comply with ethical criteria for research (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007).

This research therefore needed to ensure there was full transparency, and all required permissions were requested. The dual role of researcher and teacher may also have caused assumptions to be made, based on previous teaching experience, or for the teacher role to supersede the researcher role, causing discrepancies within the research. This need not be a negative for as the narrative of Kennedy-Lewis's study showed:

I found that my experience as a former teacher continually drew my attention to aspects of teaching and learning upon which I might not have focused if I had not had experience as a practitioner. My attention to these details helped me to recognize the nuances of student-teacher relationships that I might have otherwise missed.

(Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 111)

It must be noted that the professional role as an insider teacher will always prevail in order to ensure safeguarding and serious risks are dealt with in accordance with school policies (Menter, et al., 2011).

An issue linked to this, is that pupils may have answered in order to say what they feel a teacher will want to hear, particularly as some of the questions could be construed as controversial, where they 'reflect conflicts of interest and reveal divergent views' (Flensner, 2020, p. 1). One of the ways this may already be mitigated is as a result of the type of RE which is delivered in the school already. Robert Jackson states that pedagogical approaches in RE should encourage a 'safe space' for pupils (Jackson, 2014). The pedagogical aim desired is for 'students to be able to express their views and positions openly, even if these differ from those of the teacher and peers' (Jackson, 2014, p. 48). This can be achieved through a lack of judgement by the teacher, a discussion of ground rules for dialogue and for pupils to be actively participating and respectful (Jackson, 2014).

Whilst criticism of this concept of 'safe space' has been made (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019; Iversen, 2019), there is agreement on the importance that

students need to be safe in the sense that they, are individuals, are respected and not harassed, but in a classroom ought never to be 'intellectually safe', as this would prevent students from learning and

developing new understanding, which is the overarching purpose of education (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019, p. 286).

With an active promotion of these things already existing within lessons and a pupil awareness of this, it would follow that pupils adopted these expectations within the focus group too. This would have allowed them to feel more inclined to express their own opinions, as opposed to what they think they should say.

However, the potential for pupils to have said what they feel a teacher wants to hear, may still exist and needed to be considered alongside other aspects of bias. This included the influence of being in a focus group with their own peers, particularly where controversial issues and class identity were being discussed. Research into social desirability bias highlights the serious concerns that this can raise, whereby data, if not analysed with this in mind can be seen as having reduced validity and undermine the conclusions of the research (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Nederhof, 1985). 'Other deception' was a key issue within this research, where a participant 'might purposely misrepresent the truth as a form of impression management motivated by a desire to avoid evaluation' (Nederhof, 1985, p. 264).

Nicole Bergen and Ronald Labonté (2020) in their research using focus groups, outline how they detected and limited social desirability bias in their research. Part of this included utilising knowledge of the research context to identify common cues suggesting social desirability tendencies. It is here that the role of practitioner researcher may allow common cues to be identified within this research. In this research reflexive writing was used as part of this identification process.

Bergen and Labonté (2020), also employed strategies to minimize social desirability bias including ensuring the location was private and out of earshot, data collectors establishing a rapport with participants and ensuring that participants had full understanding of the purposes of the research to avoid feelings of there being an audit or evaluation of performance. These too were employed within this research, carrying out the focus groups away from staff offices will have supported pupils in feeling relaxed. Ensuring that pupils were able to engage with the researcher was key. Pupils were given full details of the

research and reassured that it is not a lesson, a test or something used to 'grade' their performance.

Alongside methods for the detection of social desirability bias, Anton J. Nederhof (1985), in his article suggests methods for its reduction (or elimination). For this research, two were most relevant, including the selection of interviewers and proxy subjects. Whilst the selection of the interviewers is not an option here, social desirability was still reduced by the social distance between the researcher and the pupil. 'Proxy subjects' refers to the target person being spoken about by someone who knows them well, rather than asking the individual themselves.

The use of proxy subjects links in with the above research by Bergen and Labonté (2020), where questioning techniques are used to depersonalise the exchanges to try and reduce social desirability bias. Here, rather than asking pupils about another pupil, pupils were asked about 'other' to achieve the same result 'Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities?' Such wording allowed pupils to disguise their personal responses as a response of 'others'. A difficulty that did however remain regardless of this, was pupils seeing themselves as 'informing' adults of potentially negative influences and therefore refraining from providing such information. This needed to be considered during data analysis.

3.2.3 Research Design

This research used two focus groups. The focus groups were made up of eight pupils from the participant school. Ideally there would have been one male and one female selected from each of years eight to eleven, however, year 11 were not available for the first focus group so were replaced with additional year 10 pupils. These were eight pupils that had been in the school and RE lessons for at least a year. This meant they had enough experience to reflect on. Pupils were selected at random based on pupil and class availability at the time of the focus groups, but excluded new starters or those with low attendance who did not have the experience to reflect on. It was not possible to select pupils based on whether they were white British working-class boys due to an inability for the school to identify pupils in this way, and due to the ethical approval granted.

This research adapted the typical use of the NGT above, in order to ensure accurate and usable data was collected. In order to answer the main thesis question of how a locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism, the following questions were considered:

For Focus Group 1:

1. Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities?
2. What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?

For Focus Group 2, the first question altered the NGT process by offering pupils some newspaper headlines which they could include in the brainstorming part of the process. This supported pupils in generating ideas where they may not have had existing knowledge to answer.

1. Which topics should be taught about in RE lessons?

Headlines were made up of local news stories which reflect RE themes currently included in the locally agreed syllabus, but also included those reflecting the far-right influence in the area to see if pupils identify them as topics to teach about in RE (appendix A). Only local (Greater Manchester) headlines were included to stop pupils from potentially selecting headlines purely on the basis that they are local, as opposed to their topic. With the population size and diversity of the area, this did not narrow down the range of newspaper headlines available and therefore the scope of the brainstorming.

The second question followed the typical NGT progress.

2. How could school better help you make sense of the information presented to you about religions, cultures, and communities?

Whilst the two questions were considered in separate NGT processes. It was anticipated that pupils would draw on ideas and decisions from the previous process, and this added to the qualitative data analysis carried out.

These questions would address the gaps in knowledge identified in the introduction and allow an analysis to be carried out to see the impact on the moral development of white British working-class boys.

3.2.4 Ethical Approval

As this research was focussed on a sensitive and controversial topic of far-right extremism, and the research involved children, the ethical considerations were complex. The risks included that with my role as a teacher within the school, pupils may think their lessons, grades or school life may be impacted by participation. Participants may worry about bullying as a result of their answers or participation. The topics themselves may cause pupils to feel upset.

These ethical concerns were managed through transparency over what the research involved. Reassurances were given that participation, refusal to participate or withdrawal from the research would not impact school life. A link teacher was identified as a neutral person to discuss this further if necessary. Procedures already exist in the school for managing bullying, safeguarding concerns and well-being. These were reiterated to pupils along with external support available if they did not want to speak to school. The data was pseudonymised to help protect pupils further, and pupils were not asked specifically about themselves in the data but rather about pupils in their year group, again to support personal concerns.

Gatekeeper consent was given by the headteacher of the school for the research to take place. Parental consent was obtained for each pupil participant, children also had to consent to their taking part (Appendix E). One of the aspects of this consent was to ensure that parents and pupils were clear about the research. This was achieved through a detailed participant information form (Appendix C and D). However, in earlier ethical approval applications it had been hoped that the topic of far-right extremism could be implied instead of explicitly mentioned to avoid pupils coming to the research already anticipating the discussion of far-

right extremism and impacting the results. Due to the nature of the topic though, this could not be avoided, so had to be factored into the analysis of the data.

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the School of Social Science at the University of Glasgow (#400210105)

3.2.5 Data Analysis

There were two types of data generated by the NGT focus groups. Firstly, there was the quantitative data. This was ordinal data from the ranking task allowing participants' highest ranked items to be identified, but also allowing outliers to be highlighted. This data has been used on its own to show the answers to the questions posed in the focus groups in the simplest form, as an overall consensus. This data has also been presented as a table of ranking, showing the groups' top five and the overall ranking of the other ideas. This data was additionally used to identify themes and question which could then be used to analyse the qualitative data.

The second type of data was the qualitative data. The full recording of the NGT focus groups was transcribed for analysis. A coding framework was developed for the coding and categorisation of the data. This allowed for a thorough analysis to be carried out through the reduction in the quantity of the data, and to ensure coding was used as a method of discovery.

3.2.5.1 Coding Framework

This coding framework (example in Appendix H), was developed to include codes which had been generated as a result of the literature review, but also as a result of the reflexive writing based on the researcher's own experience as a teacher. As outlined in the introduction, reflexive writing is often used in the analyse of qualitative data to reduce bias and improve data reliability. This was essential here, but another important purpose of reflexive writing at this code-generating stage was to identify the 'insider' knowledge that the practitioner-

researcher brought to the process and how this supported the interpretation of the data. Based on definitions given by A. J. Bingham and P Witkowsky (2022), this can be seen as a priori, inductive coding as it is the application of pre-existing codes to data to test knowledge gained from the literature review, and as an insider, practitioner-researcher.

Additional codes were also added to the coding framework to further support the interpretation of the data. This allowed for inductive analysis to take place with codes emerging from the data.

One of the issues which arose is that the initial cycle of coding seemed only to draw out the factual, objective data, which was useful, but left out key aspects of the focus groups. As the coding framework had been drawn up very specifically to the research questions, it was similar to a structural coding framework (Saldana, 2021), where content or concept phrases are applied to the transcript based on the specific research questions. An example of this would be applying the code of 'politics' as a code derived from the question 'What should be taught about in RE?'. Such structural coding meant that the personal, subjective, or narrative aspects to the research were missing.

An additional coding cycle was needed (Appendix H) and the type added here can be referred to as in vivo coding as it is developed from the participants' own words (Saldana, 2021). This was important due to the desire to allow pupils to articulate in their own way and allow them a legitimate voice and give more informed data analysis. The encouragement given by Saldana is to 'trust your instincts' suggesting that when 'something in the data appears to stand out, apply it as a code' (Saldana, 2021, p. 140). An example of this would be coding how animated pupils became when discussing debates. This demonstrated the importance of the topic to the pupils, which wouldn't have been picked up from just a 'debate' code. It allowed comparisons of where else pupils became animated too. There were however elements of narrative coding which was used to identify important sections of pupils' stories or experiences. An example of this would be the pupils joking about a TV chef coming to the school.

The overall coding framework was manually applied to the coding using the following phases:

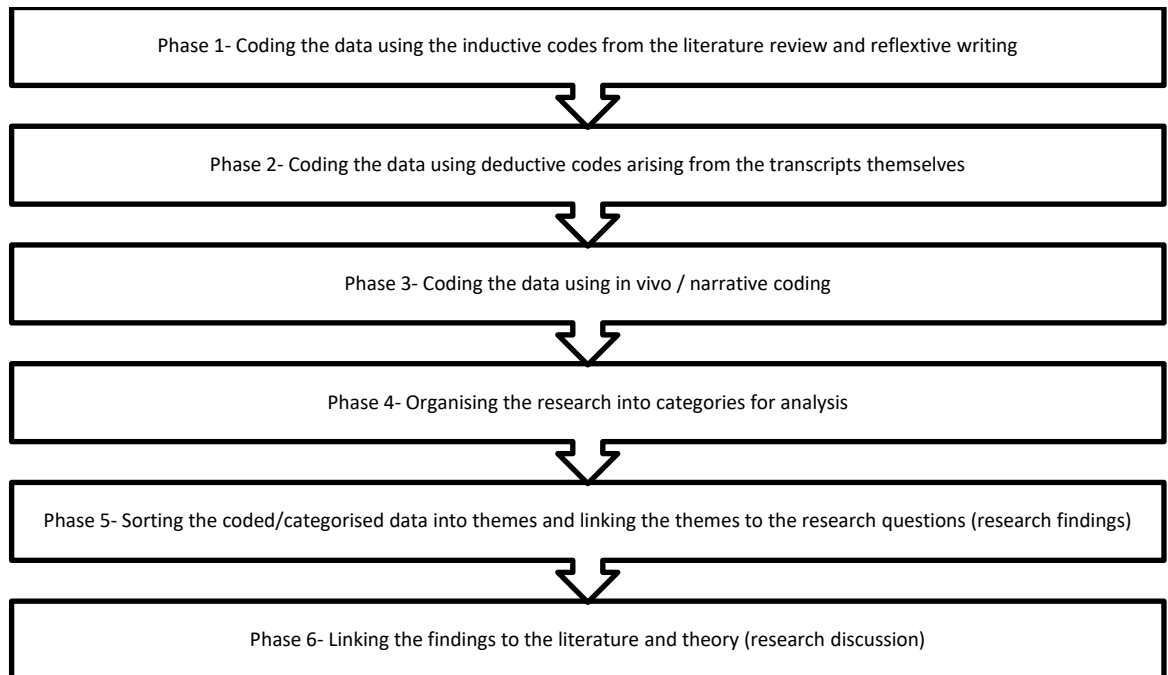


Figure 5- Coding Process

It was anticipated that much of the qualitative data would come firstly from the clarification stage of the NGT process where participants can question, amend and remove brainstormed ideas. The transcribed discussion around this was coded to show where clarification is needed, why participants felt it necessary to amend ideas and the justification for the removal of ideas. This discussion also generated data on individual misconceptions and misunderstandings which was beneficial to the wider analysis of the data. The discussion also showed the decision-making process itself and how the group were able to come to a final list of ideas for ranking and any group dynamics within this.

Secondly, further qualitative data came from the discussion after the top five ranked list was generated which allowed individuals to comment on the responses, including their own views and why they thought that list was the one that was produced. As a freer discussion to what has gone before, this allowed additional clarification about the choices given and also revealed more with regard to the group dynamic and decision-making process. This data again was coded to identify categories and themes which arose in line with the research questions.

It was also anticipated that there would be additional data generated due to the natural pause in the process as participants await the collation of data from the brainstorm and individual ranking, prior to the announcing of the ranking of the top 5 answers. This pause provided new conversations and as with above, a freer discussion of what had been considered prior.

3.2.5.2 Process

Pupils participating in the focus group, were initially introduced to the Nominal Group Technique process, and any questions about the process answered. Pupils were presented with the first question and pupils carried out the initial brainstorming on paper. Pupils were then asked one at a time to share one idea from their selection, moving on to the next pupil to share one and repeating as required until all ideas have been shared by all pupils. These ideas were written by the researcher on a PowerPoint slide so all pupils could see, as they are given. A key aspect of this is that pupils used their own categories and wording to express their thoughts. Pupils were able to ask questions to ensure clarity of

understanding and reasons for the inclusion of each of the ideas. Much of the time, this was facilitated by the researcher where there seemed to be elements of repetition or overlap (see question two from focus group two as an example). If any ideas were deemed by all pupils, including the one who suggested it, as invalid on clarification, it was removed from the list. Ideas were reworded to ensure they stated exactly what was meant. Pupils themselves dictated this process to keep the answers as authentic as possible. Once the list was finalised, pupils then ranked their top five by awarding five points to the answer they felt was the most important for answering the initial question, down to one for the lesser important of the top five. The researcher then added up the scores for each of the ideas, to generate a focus group top five. Pupils then had the chance to comment on the selection in terms of why they feel that was the decision of the group and their own thoughts. This process was repeated for the next question. The NGT process for both the questions took approximately one and a half hours to complete with breaks to allow the researcher to prepare the next step or question in the process.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Quantitative Data

This quantitative data below therefore arises out of the brainstorming and the voting activities from the process, whereby the pupils chose their top answers out of the brainstormed responses and ranked them from five to one, with five being the best answer down to one, the remaining responses are not ranked in answer way individually, but the collective responses allow a fully ranked list to be given.

From these focus groups covering four questions the following data was collected.

3.3.1.1 Group One Questions One: Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities?

The top answer for this question was Religious Studies.

The top five as ranked were:

Table 1- Pupil Focus Group G1 Q1

Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities		
Ranking	Response	Votes received
1	Religious Studies	20
2	News Apps on Phone	14
3	TV	12
4	Social media	10

5	Friends from different cultures and Books	8
---	---	---

The other potential answers for pupils to vote on received votes as follows:

Table 2- Pupil Focus Group G1 Q1

Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities		
Ranking	Response	Points Awarded
6	History lessons	6
7	Documentaries	5
8	Going on holiday to other places Visiting a religious holy place Life ed. lessons	4
9	Gatherings of different cultures	3
10	News on TV Teachers Trying food from other cultures	2
11	BBC Bitesize	1
12	YouTube Vimeo English lessons Websites	0

In these results, pupils didn't give a reason why video streaming websites were different from websites generally, but they seemed to indicate a distinction. This was similar to why video streaming and social media were different, particularly when pupils spoke of influencers who often use video channels as part of social media for example, reposts on Instagram and Facebook. Pupils did not see a need to make a distinction.

This might have been an area where pupils mentioned their local community, but this was not explicitly listed.

3.3.1.2 Group One Question Two: What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?

The top answer for this question was influencers.

The top five as ranked were:

Table 3- Pupil Focus Group G1 Q2

What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?		
Ranking	Response	Votes received
1	Influencers	16
2	Social media People you grow up with	14
3	Good and bad actions of others	9
4	The country they are from	8
5	Older generations	7

The other potential answers for pupils to vote on received votes as follows:

Table 4 - Pupil Focus Group G1 Q2

What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?		
Ranking	Response	Points Awarded
6	Primary School (e.g. religious nature) How you actually feel	6
7	Fashion Trends Video games	5
8	Their perceptions of how other people see them. Hobbies and past times	4
9	Love interests/crushes	3
10	Friends	2
11	Actors and musicians Theories around the world	1
12	Things going on around the world e.g. climate change TV shows and their characters Books that they read Magazines Teachers Students	0

Pupils did not explicitly mention class identity, or local area influences specifically.

3.3.1.3 Group Two Question One: Which topics should be taught about in RE lessons? (Use of newspaper headline prompts to generate ideas)

The top answer for this question was religious influence on politics.

The top five as ranked were:

Table 5 - Pupil Focus Group G2 Q1

Which topics should be taught about in RE lessons?		
Ranking	Response	Votes received
1	Religious influence on politics Politics in general	16
2	When religion has been used to justify violence (not just Islam)	14
3	Hate crime relating to religion	12
4	Hate towards races	10
5	Religious stereotypes as dangerous and harmful	9

The other potential answers for pupils to vote on received votes as follows:

Table 6 - Pupil Focus Group G2 Q1

Which topics should be taught about in Religious Studies lessons?		
Ranking	Response	Points Awarded
6	Marriages	8
7	How and why religion influences violent action How religions started Drug Use	7
8	Religious beliefs making people feel more isolated or distanced from peers Different ways children are introduced to their religion and expectations including indoctrination	6
9	LGBT relationships How religion has influenced certain historical events	4
10	Exploitation Interreligious marriages e.g. when Christians and Muslims marry	3
11	Religious Stereotyping Why wars happen	2
12	Modernisation of religions	1
13	Religious people's questions about other religions Faith schools should teach about other religions and relationships	0

	protections of religion and religious values Life in general- what's waiting for you General beliefs Religious Festivals Case Studies on key individuals Jobs Child exploitations Impact of religious belief on day to day life Cultural monuments	
--	--	--

For this question, pupils gave very specific answers, some of which were clearly drawn from newspaper headline prompts which were given, others may have been influenced by or completely distinct from the headlines. Pupils' first choice for what should be taught in RE lessons was religious influence on politics. This was followed by politics in general and examples of when religion has been used to justify violence, with pupils wanting to be recorded that this should not just be relating to Islam. The fourth-ranked option was hate crime relating to religion, and fifth was hate towards races. As shall be seen in the qualitative data analysis, pupils commented that they expected the answers to be more diverse, but recognised hate as being a key topic to learn about. Some said maybe some of the topics should have been grouped together. This is also illustrated by there being so many responses with no votes, including religious festivals, cultural monuments, and general beliefs.

Pupils mentioned politics but did not mention specific aspects of the political spectrum here, including far-right extremism, despite knowing that the research was about this from the participant information sheet.

3.3.1.4 Group Two Question Two: How could school better help you make sense of the information presented to you about religions, cultures, and communities?

The top answer for this question was bringing in a visitor to talk about their religion.

The top five as ranked were:

Table 7 - Pupil Focus Group G2 Q2

How could school better help you make sense of the information presented to you about religions, cultures, and communities?		
Ranking	Response	Votes received
1	Bringing in a visitor to talk about their religion	29
2	Visiting places e.g. mosques	20
3	Real-life experiences	17
4	Plan and play out debates from multiple perspectives (including not their own)	15
5	Watching Movies	13

For this final question, pupils generated the smallest number of responses, and the qualitative analysis showed that pupils found this question ‘hard’. Only one response received no votes, and that was using the internet and computers to help. This may be because more specific uses of the internet had been given as separate categories (e.g. influencers and social media), but pupils didn’t want to change this when asked. The results given for this question were the most focussed and drew out some of the richest discussion.

The other potential answers for pupils to vote on received votes as follows:

Table 8 - Pupil Focus Group G2 Q2

How could school better help you make sense of the information presented to you about religions, cultures, and communities?		
Ranking	Response	Points Awarded
6	Watching the news	7
7	Form time can be used as a place to gather new information and ask a trusted adult what it means (form tutor) Reading recommendations (age appropriate) Quizzes and Questionnaires	4
8	Research in class Ability to ask others [in class] questions about their beliefs Documentaries	2
9	Recreate practices (similar to that of the religion)	1
10	Use of the internet/computers to help [in lesson]	0

Whilst the full discussion of this data will be considered later, there are some aspects from this data which fed into the coding of the results from the qualitative data. Firstly, any responses not already included in the coding framework were added, so that they could be used in the analysis of the qualitative data. Secondly, where there was seeming repetition in the quantitative responses e.g. BBC Bitesize and websites, the nuances from the pupil explanations were highlighted to ensure that any coding was done precisely.

3.3.2 Qualitative Results

The coding framework (example in Appendix H) allowed for the sorting and condensing of the qualitative data, before organising it into themes, relating it back to some of the theoretical concepts outlined earlier in this dissertation, including identity development, the role and purpose of RE and moral development.

An overview of the coding and themes of the data is given in Table 5 which follows. The results from each theme will now be presented. A discussion of the qualitative and quantitative data in answer to the research questions will be considered afterwards.

Table 9 - Codes to Themes (Pupil Focus Group)**Pupil Focus Group- Codes to Themes**

Experiences in the real world	Quest for what is true	Identity Development	Films and transferable skills	Changing times and generational divide	Teaching of Politics Purpose of RE
• Friends and Family • Friends • Where you are from • Visits • Visitors • Local Area • Going somewhere • Specific to religion • Black lives matters • Russia/Ukraine • Racism • Sexism • Generational Divide	• Real life • Virtual • Cross over with far-right • Lack of motivation • Unsure • Changing times • News • Influencers • Unique identity • Identity development	• Lack of identity • Strong identity • Weak identity • Being like someone • Pressure • Unique identity • Own awareness of identity • Celebrity • Influencers • Appearance • Family • Where you are from • Cross over with far-right • Internet • School • Home • gender	• Revision • Knowledge • Recall • Truth • Case Studies • Debate • Lack of motivation • Religious representation • Politics/political • Skills • Unique to school • Unique to pupil • Critical thinking	• Family • Sexism • Racism • Generational divide • Changing times • Identity development • Unique identity • Religious representation • War • Hate crime • Black lives matters • Celebrity • Pressure • Where you are from • Modernisation of religions	• Politics/ Political • Films • Debate • Critical thinking • Truth • RE • Other subjects • Visits • Visitors • Case Studies • Modernisation of religions • Religious influence on current affairs • Tolerance/respect • Already in curriculum • Not in curriculum • Perceptions of RE • Positive • Negative • Religion • Islam • Christianity

3.3.2.1 Real Life Experiences

One of the key aspects of this research was finding out where pupils get their information about religions, cultures and communities and how schools can help them understand this information. This would support in knowing what pupils' reference points are and how these would relate to far-right narratives they may also encounter. The above data shows that pupils recognised RE lessons, news apps and social media as highly important as a source. However, prominent within the qualitative data arising from the pupil's choice of sources was a desire to engage with 'real life' religion. Pupils indicated that to understand religion, people in their year group needed to or wanted to engage with real people (face-to-face interactions), real places and real stories. This included visiting places of worship or places of religious significance for example pilgrimage sites, going on holiday and going to places where there was 'more of that culture' [Pupil 14]. When it came to school-based trips, pupils seemed to lack recent experience of this. Some of this may be down to school trips not taking place in recent years, due to COVID-19 restrictions, but for others, it was seen as something they 'did in primary school'. One pupil in focus group two, drew on an experience of visiting the Tower of London with family as an experience which he had found helpful:

Pupil 9: Yeah, I went to London. Couple of weeks ago and went to, what's the castle where you can visit? It's near? I don't know what it's called?

Researcher: Tower of London, or what it an actual castle?

Pupil 9: Oh yeah, yeah. Tower of London. So I went in there and do you know like them beefeaters?

Researcher: Oh yeah, that's the Tower of London

Pupil 9: They're pretty helpful...

Researcher: So why did you find them helpful?

Pupil 9: Just giving information and stuff.

This was not linked to their understanding of religion, cultures and communities directly, but showed how a visit can be seen as helpful. It was however suggested by one pupil that people in their year group may not have the motivation to do this:

Pupil 6: Yeah, I don't think people are going to go there like voluntarily "Oh I'm curious to go to this religion holy place", I feel like nowadays no-one is really going there to you know, to learn.

This pupil frequently questioned pupils' motivation to find out more about religion particularly, and their discussions led to others further clarifying their ideas or agreeing with their response. When focus group one was asked whether they wished to clarify their response to just school trips rather than visiting places more generally, they however disagreed, with some giving times when they themselves had visited churches and mosques with family or friends.

When it came to places, there was a distinction between the idea that pupils needed 'to go somewhere' and the notion that information was available 'locally'. The recognition of the diversity of the area and family and friends presenting opportunities to engage with religion, cultures and communities, contrasted with suggestions that pupils needed to visit tourist areas or areas with more of a particular culture. This occurred across both focus groups and relates to with far-right concepts of 'othering' where a division is made between groups or communities.

Connected to this was the response that pupils wanted to meet people who knew about religion or were from that religion. Suggestions included priests, imams, experts, people who have studied it closer and family and friends. The justification for this was that they would be good at explaining everything, would have a better understanding and you could ask them questions. There was discussion over who might actually visit:

Pupil 9: Like Malala?

Pupil 8: She's not going to come to this school though

Pupil 11: Haha

Pupil 8: But she might

Pupil 14: Haha

Researcher: Just a suggestion, but someone like that?

This interaction between the pupils indicated a disbelief that certain people would come to their school. Reasoning for this was not given but could indicate that someone would not give up their time to come to the school, or that the school was unworthy of having such a visitor. The pupil whose suggestion it was, had had experience of visitors coming to school which may also raise his

expectations of who might come in. He had had a visit in primary school from ‘a Viking’ and a TV chef. The other pupils did not indicate such experiences.

Pupils were aware that visitors and people could give ‘misinformation’ or biased information:

Pupil 6: After that, because we got most of our influence from my parents and sometimes, they can tell us like misinformation or useful information, it just depends really.

And

Pupil 14: It ‘cause it also depends on, like, because they are going to have their own opinions, their own beliefs. Especially if you invite in like a Muslim, they won’t represent the entire Muslim community and one question won’t represent and entire community.

Misinformation is contrasted here with useful information. Showing pupils recognised the negative aspects of misinformation.

The discussions from the focus group also indicated a perceived limitation of the information about religion they could be given by teachers in school and therefore the benefit of visitors. One pupil suggested that teachers can’t talk about religion as they are supposed to ‘stay in the middle’ [Pupil 2]. Further to this another pupil stated:

I only feel like if they are teaching a subject that contains like a religion, but I don’t feel like they necessarily talk about it unless it’s like a lesson that they are doing.

[Pupil 6]

A teacher who had a PhD was mentioned as someone who could give information, but this was in the context of inviting people into school. A value was however put on teachers, showing that it was not just a judgement against the standard of teaching, but rather a tension of what could be said or discussed. It was still recognised that teachers could change a pupil’s opinion on things:

Pupil 7: I mean they help you learn stuff, so could sway you into their opinion

Researcher: Yeah, OK, so teachers sway your opinions on things, or by their opinion you said, wasn't it? Ok I think...

Pupil 4: Sometimes with teachers they might inspire you to become a teacher. That stuff because of how they seem to you, like maybe, like, you like them so much. They inspire you to become a teacher yourself because you want that experience that they have.

Researcher: That sounds good? Anything else on teachers?

Pupil 1: If you particularly like a teacher. Then you might like try and act like them when your older, yeah.

This may reflect pupils reasoning for wanting to invite people into school due to this perceived limitation on teachers.

Finally, related to this response of real-life experiences, was stories. One pupil suggested being told stories was more beneficial to just being given a worksheet about a topic:

The story, like if you've been told something, like just a flat sheet in class and you're just going to read it and be like it's something you can actually engage with, your just gonna remember a bit more and understand it more

[Pupil 14]

Pupils recalled hearing the stories of Greta Thunberg, Oscar Romero and Malala, but this same pupil also suggested using:

...smaller case studies of just different people and learning more about individuals who have used religion for good or bad, as an example when we are learning about different beliefs.

[Pupil 14]

Pupils were also able to recognise texts in English about religions, cultures and communities such as *The White Rose and the Swastika* and *Macbeth*, which developed their understanding further through storytelling.

3.3.2.2 Truth and Reality

This desire for engagement with 'real-life' is better understood when it is set against another arising theme from the data which was pupils wanting to know what is real or true and not. Across both focus groups pupils acknowledged that

they do not always know if something or someone is true and if information has been changed. This was particularly related to material they found online:

Researcher: ...I know you talked about seeing positive things about religion, what about anything negative about religion?

Pupil 2: I think you see it more on social media as people can hide behind a screen and you don't know who it is.

Researcher: Yeah, so can you give any examples of anything more specific?

Pupil 2: like after the euro final with like Saka and Rashford and Sancho who got racist abuse because they missed penalties

Researcher: Yeah Ok, so you have seen that. Anybody else seen anything like that on social media?

Pupil 6: The Palestine...the Israel and Palestine conflict and people have changed the narrative in the media, yeah? Changed how it is portrayed.

Pupils recognised that people hide their identities online and this made them feel like they could do things like being racist. They also identified that they could not always trust a presented view on things. When discussing influences on identity, real and fake was again raised:

They [influencers] use sometimes these like filters and things like fake images of themselves and people want to be like them. That sometimes isn't very healthy for them. [Pupil 4]

Here the personal risks of this were raised, showing a rationale for this desire to know what is fake and real.

When discussing how pupils figure out what is fake and what is real, there were differing views on the role of the news in helping establish what is real. One pupil suggested that the news was a way of proving to people that something was real, but others recognised issues with the news:

The news doesn't really show the whole side of it. For like example, the whole Black Lives Matter. I feel like they could treat it as like a violent and like people just rioting where there's lots of peaceful protests, but they don't really show that in the news. [Pupil 6]

Another pupil suggested teachers as a source of verification. They referred particularly to their form tutor, who in the research school is seen by pupils as

their first point of contact and many pupils establish very good relationships with their form tutor:

Pupil 13: Like, form time could be used as a place to gather new information about different cultures and places and to be able to ask your trusted adult what that could mean.

Researcher: ...do you mean your form tutor?

Pupil 13: Yeah

This pupil here identifies the need for adults to help them interpret the information they are being presented with, but other discussions show issues with a perceived generational divide and assumed limitations on what teachers can talk about. This desire to know what is true or false, considered in light of the need to engage with real-life also suggests that pupils wish to hear from the person who has direct knowledge of it.

3.3.2.3 Identity Development

Pupils were asked specifically about the influences on their identity development. The quantitative voting results showed the different influences, but the qualitative data allowed the clarification of what these meant and how they were an influence.

A pupil mentioned influencers. The example given was fitness influencers. Later this was clarified as online influencers. Though another pupil mentioned people like presidents who could be influencers with Barak Obama as a positive example in comparison to Donald Trump. As mentioned above pupils also referred to beauty influencers when talking about using beauty filters and changing how you look for social media. Later in the focus group pupils mentioned how celebrities can influence them in a similar way to characters in computer games.

Another pupil mentioned social media and gave the example of Instagram.

Older generations were mentioned and this particularly referred to fashion trends initially with the evolution of fashion. However, this then changed to attitudes and religion, sexism and racism were mentioned along with differences in expectation.

Pupils talked about video games, this included wanting to be like the characters, but they also mentioned peer pressure here. The conversation began with pupils talking about earning money through video games. This however changed to peer pressure to then buy the latest characters in the games.

Peer pressure was mentioned again when discussing appearance

Researcher: 'Their perceptions of how other people see them' explain that one a bit more

Pupil 1: They could like feel pressured into like...like dying their hair colour or like getting Botox or something.

...

Pupil 4: Maybe like if people think like your one of the ones that like skip classes and was like generally bad or like the class clown, they expect you to act like that- stereotypical/stereotypes

Pupils felt control over their identity was affected by others around them.

This was also related to bullying:

If there's a bully they could like force you to be someone who you are not
[Pupil 1]

However contrary to this, pupils recognised having different hobbies to others and this being OK

Pupil 5: Hobbies might be different from others so for example you can be interested in one thing that maybe not everyone knows much about.

Pupil 4: Yeah, 'cause some people can be into football or people, or people can be like interested in dressing up more people like watching paranormal things and like studying unique things. So yeah I agree that everything would change depending on what they like to do themselves.

This shows a stronger sense of identity around things that you enjoy doing.

Related to this, pupils also mentioned how their friends influence their identity

Because I feel like friends are more personal to you and I feel like their opinions matter more than the other people 'cause I, so, like, when other people bring up, like make assumptions about you, I feel like you can block them, but not necessarily your friends, because like their close to you, so it hurts more in a way.
[Pupil 6]

This doesn't suggest peer pressure, but rather that pupils in their year group are perhaps more concerned about what their friends think than other people and this shows how friends can impact identity.

A pupil mentioned where you are from influencing your identity.

Pupil 5: Things might be different in a different country where you are from. So for example the way they speak, their currency or like their food.

Researcher: Yeah, so just the general things. Any other ways that it influences identity?

Pupil 4: It could link back to religions like 'cause some people like to stay in their tradition, like religious garments when they are walking around.

This shows aspects of cultural and religious identity.

Pupils did not specifically mention class identity, working-class was not a term used. They also did not mention gender identity, or having a particular skin colour being part of their identity.

3.3.2.4 Films and Transferable Skills

Pupils had suggested the idea of films as a way school could better help them understand information presented to them about religions, cultures and communities. Here too, they identified the issues in knowing what is factual:

Pupil 13: I think movies could be replaced with documentaries because it is a lot more factual than it would be than a movie.

Pupil 13: I think movies over documentaries 'cause to like children it just represents short forms of the story

Pupil 8: Movies are better

Pupil 9: But it won't be children. Or will it?

Pupil 14: But it will be, like year 7s, year 8s and that

Pupil 15: I always engage more with movies than documentaries

Pupil 14: Like, they will remember a movie more than they would a documentary and some documentaries are more like wordy and like factual

Pupil 8: That's why a movie is better

Pupil 14: That's why a movie would represent information

Pupil 15: I always remember more information from like movies and TV shows I've watched than documentaries

Researcher: What might the problem with movies be?

Pupil 13: Sort of like dramatized

Pupil 9: They might get too silly, funny

Pupil 15: Yeah, yeah

Pupil 8: Not historically accurate

Pupil 14: It depends on finding the right movies, historically accurate movies.

Pupils are therefore able to identify the benefits and limitations of using movies. What pupils didn't make the connection of (which was pursued by the researcher) was whether pupils used the skills of detecting what is historically accurate, bias and overly dramatized, when watching movies at home. They connected it with the learning benefits instead:

Researcher: So just going back then to some of my research, how can schools help you with understanding what information is accurate and correct? 'cause that's obviously something which, you know, how do you know what sort of information you are being presented with and whether it's accurate and correct? What could we do to support that?

Pupil 14: Well, if you're using like movies and obviously like dramatized and what is like historically accurate and obviously, they [teachers] must check the movies and everything before and make sure that it does apply to what children are learning. Not that just it's about the topic, before watching a movie or recommending a movie

Researcher: So what impact do you think that might have when you are watching movies outside of school then?

Pupil 14: It's not entirely revision, but it kind of feels like you're actually revising and your learning and it doesn't feel much work as well, especially for like younger years who don't necessarily, aren't like in the cycle of, like revision and homework. Now recommending them like movies or stuff to read might be like an easier way of getting them to absorb more information outside of school

Researcher: But I mean in terms of knowing whether stuff is accurate and correct, do you think doing that in school might help you then when you're watching movies outside of school.

Pupil 14:...Yeah?

This interchange between the researcher and this pupil may indicate several things, it may be that teachers are not framing movies in this way to allow pupils to identify what is historical, bias or dramatized. It may also indicate that pupils

are not making the connections with how they might then interpret what they are seeing in films outside of school, so the skill is not transferring. It may be that they are doing this, but it has become something they do subconsciously. For this research, it does indicate that there may be a lack of transferal of skills from school to outside of school and this needs considering in more depth in the next stage.

3.3.2.5 Generational Divide and Changing Times

Within focus group one and particularly when discussing identity. There was one pupil who indicated a generational divide throughout their answers. This was also mirrored in some of the answers by other pupils also. Terms were used such as ‘younger generation’, ‘older generation’, ‘new age’, ‘generational influence’, ‘my generation’, ‘these days’, ‘nowadays’. It was clear that this pupil felt that identity influences now were different to previously and this impacted on where people get their information from also. The example given was that Snapchat is for younger generations, Facebook for older. Pupils however suggested that fashions from older generations could be passed down, something they saw as a positive. Teachers could also influence pupils by inspiring them to be like them when they are older “If you particularly like a teacher, then you might. Then you might try and like act like them what you’re older” (pupil 1). However, in other aspects of the discussion older generations were identified negatively:

Researcher: So, we mentioned older generations in terms of passing on style, I’ll put there [referring to list on PPT]. Is there anything else which you think older generations influence in terms of identity?

Pupil 6: Opinions on things like religion and especially like older generations. They are more like sexist and like racist.

Researcher: What makes you think that, because?

Pupil 6: Just time, as you know, probably like a, let’s say like grandparents were during the 50s and 60s there was like an expectation that you can be like mistreated and they must have like grown up with that and they might share their opinions onto like the newer generation.

Whereas younger generations were shown more positively:

Pupil 4: So like a lot of the younger generation, like Greta Thunberg. She’s she’s, when she saw it [climate change] when she was little. Ever since then, she’s become fixated on climate change and we do see a lot of news surrounding stuff, about children born into the like I want to save the planet and protect the planet.

Researcher: So a lot of people change once they hear about climate change?

Pupil 4: Yeah so it's like become like a generational influence for people our age or influence because of climate change.

When considering sources of information and influences on identity, this perception of the divide between generations is key. This however was not something apparent in the second focus group. This is likely to be down to the difference in questions asked but may indicate that not all pupils may feel this divide as strongly.

3.3.2.6 Teaching of politics/ purpose of RE

A final theme from the data concerned the purpose of RE and the teaching of politics. This is an important theme due to the focus of the research on far-right extremism. From the quantitative data pupils in focus group one felt that RE had an important role in providing information about religions, cultures and communities. This may be because the researcher was an RE teacher and the research connected to RE lessons as a result of this. It is however notable that in the first focus group there was limited explicit discussion of RE, aside from its selection as a source of information. Though as one pupil stated when considering the top five responses, 'I agree with the list entirely, like obviously the top one being Religious Studies, obviously, because that's about that all of the time' [pupil 4]. It may therefore simply be the obvious answer, so the pupil feels it requires little discussion.

In the second focus group, there was much more specific discussion of RE and experiences within RE lessons. This is because of the questions but will also have been influenced by the position of the researcher as an RE teacher, and also because this focus group took place in an RE classroom. Pupils in this focus group felt that RE was a place for the teaching of a wide variety of topics. This included drugs, 'what happens next' considering life skills such as getting a job, LGBT relationships and hate crime. As the majority of these responses came from year 10 and 11 pupils who have a combined programme of Personal, social, health and economic education (called Life Education in the research school) and RE, the researcher checked if pupils were confusing the two subjects:

Researcher: So LGBT relationships. Can someone expand a bit more in terms of what we mean or why you would include it in Religious Education.

...

Pupil 14: Maybe how like Christian gay couples justify their relationship?

And later

Researcher: Ok, So what about drug use. What do you mean by that and why in RE?

...

Pupil 10: Yeah, because in religion, it's also taught not to do drugs, so then this just should be taught about a bit more.

These answers indicate ideas specific to an RE curriculum, suggesting that there isn't a confusion. This is particularly important when considering the top responses for this question as it would follow pupils therefore want these in an RE curriculum- a key one being topics about politics.

Pupils were keen to learn about politics in RE lessons. Pupils wanted to know the religious influences on politics and war (possibly in light of the focus group taking place within two weeks of Russia invading Ukraine). They also wanted to study politics in general and one pupil stated:

I think that politics should be more spoken about because it also has a big influence on like religion and like many things, so yeah. [pupil 10]

Another pupil reiterated this saying:

Like especially in this country, how separated is the church from the state? And how it still influences a lot of like the laws and things that are passed. [pupil 14]

Pupils also mentioned political issues including hate crime, why wars happen, protection of religion and life in general. As the research is looking particularly about far-right extremism, the researcher took the opportunity to ask about this directly as it had not come up in discussion. The researcher asked whether far-right extremism should be taught about in RE. One of the pupils stated:

I think it definitely should be talked about like [inaudible] and how groups have the need to, kind of, What's the word for, like radicalised

people into some sort of more far right groups or far right extremism.
[pupil 14]

Another pupil talked about it in political terms of pupils not knowing about the far right and far left extremes of politics [Pupil 8].

These two responses show pupils may consider far-right extremism something to be taught about, but neither example here is particularly specific to RE.

There could have been an opportunity here to discuss class politics or far-right extremism in more detail, but pupils did not do this.

3.3.2.7 Debates

Linked the teaching about politics, pupils were really enthused by the idea of debating in lesson. Pupils clearly expressed the use of lesson debates as a way of supporting their understanding in lessons. One pupil suggested a structured debate where pupils were given positions to argue from:

I've said letting children plan and play out debates in class with the standpoint allocated to them, so it wouldn't be like their personal beliefs, but rather arguing for a belief they might possibly not have
[Pupil 14]

When discussing the inclusion of debate, it was a point in the focus groups where pupils became quite animated and showed a real enjoyment of debating in lessons.

Researcher: then we talked a bit about debate. How do you debates help you in terms of understanding information, because I know you said you like having debates, so why? What is it about debates which helps you to understand the information you have been given about things?

Pupil 14: Well, say you're given a standpoint that you have to debate. We'd have to do your own research and not even like just for school. You'd... you know, research like for yourself so I can use in your debate. You'd be doing as much as you can so that you can get the points going back and for the and make you realise new things about the points that you hadn't considered before and it just, don't think. I think it's just helpful to just have an argument sometimes about different things.

Researcher: yeah, it's actually being given the chance to have that argument. Yeah go on pupil 3?

Pupil 3: Get a good understanding of other people's views and you get to argue.

Researcher: Does that help with your own views?

Pupil 8: Because their view might prove your view wrong, or it might change your views.

Pupils associated debating with the chance to research, argue and potentially change your own views on an issue.

When pupils were asked if they had a lot of experience of debating in school. The pupils said no but that they should. They recalled debates in English and how sometimes debates in RE had happened spontaneously:

Pupil 9: We have had some [debates] in here haven't we?

Researcher: Yes, both planned and unplanned [eluding to a recent in lesson debate about whether racism in the UK is the same levels as racism in America].

Pupil 8: We went a bit far then [referring to part of the debate which got heated]

Year 11 pupils: *laugh and look at the researcher hard done by* [pupils have often complained that COVID-19 stopped them from having the experience of RE lessons that they should have had, suggesting that they missed out on debate due to online lessons]

Researcher: Yes, as I said, planned and unplanned!

Pupil 14: Like most classrooms have like really, a big personality that would love to debate certain topics and I think it should be like a really fun experience for children like to learn from the debate.

Researcher: And so you would like it to be a formal structure if you know what I mean?

Pupil 14: *nods*

Many of the pupils joined in with this discussion, which hadn't been the case at other points in the focus group, showing how appealing the idea was.

3.4 Discussion

This section will consider the results outlined above and use the themes and codes identified to link the research back to the original research questions and the how this data relates back to what we know from the literature review and how it addresses any gaps in knowledge. The discussion will show how the locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right wing extremism.

3.4.1 Experiences in the ‘Real World’

When engaging with religions, cultures and communities, pupils want the ability to do this face to face; to experience something real. Some of this may be a fatigue left over from Covid restrictions where pupils may not have had the experience of this. It has been shown in the literature review that COVID-19 led to a rise in the threat from far-right extremism as a result of the time spent online and the material being accessed. It is positive here that pupils are showing that they want to engage with things in ‘real life’ and therefore may encounter information in a different way, potentially leading to better analysis of the information they access online.

This desire for face to face, real encounters however is not a new feeling with pupils expressing similar thoughts in the research report into *The Materials Used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England* (R. Jackson et al., 2010), which highlighted visits and visitors as a valuable resource based on pupil opinion. This also aligns with research conducted by Jo Beavan (2013) who also showed the desire for and the value in visits and visitors within RE lessons in particular. It also fits with the DCSF toolkit issued in 2008, which states that pupils will build their resilience against radicalisation through ‘opportunities for pupils to understand, meet and engage with people from different backgrounds in ways which promote common values while recognising diversity within communities’ (DCSF, 2008)

The appeal of visits and visitors for the pupils, however, was the ability to get authentic, knowledgeable responses from those who practice a religion or are part of a certain community and is a valid aspect of RE teaching. Pupils seem to be expressing that meeting someone face to face allows them to better analyse and evaluate the information that is being presented to them. There is an element of relationship building and trust implied here which suggests a way that directive teaching around settled moral issues might be used within RE. This links to the research outlined in the literature review by Lundie et al. (2022). With careful planning visits and visitors can be beneficial to pupils bridging an 'authenticity gap', making pupils feel comfortable learning outside the classroom and therefore accessing the benefits of being able to 'find out more about the motives for faith, ask questions, express views, challenge beliefs and find out about the lived experience of faith' (D. Lundie et al., 2022, p. 146)

Britten and Jørgensen (2019) show how visiting places of worship allows pupils to engage with the 'reality' of religion and how they exist in the world. In this research pupils showed they understood that one person does not represent 'a whole religion' [Pupil 13] and Britten and Jørgensen in their research highlight that this can be a flaw of a visit where pupils think that visits are a 'visit to the tradition as a whole' (T. H. Britton & Jørgensen, 2019, p. 316). This can reinforce prejudices, so needs to be considered by teachers. They indicate that careful planning and follow-up work from a visit is necessary to avoid pupils understanding a religion very narrowly. They suggest an analytic tool which may support this. When pupils recognise this, it leads to a better understanding of what it means to be religious.

Well-planned visits and visitors can therefore be seen as a key tool when teaching about far-right extremism as it will give pupils an authentic experience of what it means to be religious, so when they are grappling with far-right extremist narratives they will have better knowledge and understanding to counter for example, Islamophobic or antisemitic claims. This will support white British working-class boys in their moral development.

3.4.2 Quest for What is True

Within the focus groups here seemed to be a clear struggle in pupil's lives where they do not know what is true and false. This is always an issue in most aspects of life historically and existentially, as an aspect of being human, however this does seem to have been exacerbated by social media and the online fake news culture. This has wide-reaching implications for the research questions of how pupils particularly white British working-class boys are taught, what they are taught about and how pupils make sense of information outside of school. Several research projects have considered how younger generations are developing an intuition to fake news, with one suggesting that younger generations are better at spotting fake news than others (Soetekouw & Angelopoulos, 2022), but others highlighting that there is still a risk (Breakstone et al., 2019; National Literacy Trust, 2018). The solution here could be to engage pupils in visits and inviting visiting speakers, and no doubt this would be helpful as a learning experience and in building resilience to extremist attitudes as outlined above. However, the question is also raised as to why pupils feel they are better equipped to use skills of analyse and evaluation, and identify true and false in person, and whether these skills could be strengthened through RE teaching to manage online and virtual situations.

Some of the answers to this are also included in the pupil responses, with pupils suggesting how schools can better support them in making sense of the information presented to them (including that online), and topics that would be beneficial to be included within RE. One of the key aspects of this was to support pupils in engaging with debate. Pupils suggested debate as a valuable aspect of RE lessons, which some identified as having been lost as a result of COVID. This links in with research projects looking at RE as place for engaging in controversial issues (Flensner, 2020) and RE as a place to develop critical analysis, with debate being central to this (Easton et al., 2019). These opportunities and skills have been identified in the literature review as methods which support pupils in developing resilience to extremism (Gearon, 2013) and should therefore be central to an RE curriculum. It is these skills which white British working-class boys may use when confronted with far-right extremist narratives and allow them to feel able to engage with these in a moral way.

Within the GCSE curriculum opportunities for debate come from the skills of analysis and evaluation which make up 50 percent of the GCSE assessment objectives. Pupils are required to analyse and evaluate aspects of religion and belief, including their significance and influence (DfE, 2015b, p. 8). Within the interpretations and definitions pupils are required to deconstruct information, make connections, provide logical chains of reasoning, appraise and make judgements. All of these are key elements of debate. In an analysis of this requirement by Tim Hunting et al. (2024) pedagogical tools were considered in how best to teach these skills, using the framework of Toulmin's Theory of Argumentation. Teachers identified court room scenarios, tug of war analogies and written structures to support pupils in formulating arguments. This work complements the ideas suggested by the participants in this research who suggested having allocated roles in a debate to research and defend. Whilst the work by Tim Hunting (2024) was focussed on exam success, the application here allows pupils to build and develop skills which will support them in managing areas of debate and contention in wider aspects of life and also allow them to see the importance in building and using strong evidence when developing their own opinions and beliefs.

3.4.3 Films and Transferable Skills

Connected to the above discussions of how to support pupils with understanding information and also the quest for what is true was the discussion of films by the pupils. This was a point within the focus group where the researcher and the pupils didn't understand each other. I was asking pupils to think of ways they use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school. The pupils were responding with how they understand or recall what they learn in school outside of school, for example by doing revision, searching on the internet or watching films. This however led to an interesting discussion around films and documentaries and again the concept of what is true.

Pupils were suggesting that watching films was beneficial to helping them remember information. However, they discussed how films can be overdramatized, biased, whereas documentaries are supposed to be a presentation of fact. Some pupils recognised issues with films sometimes 'going

too far' or being silly. This reasserts the finding in this research that pupils are wary of the information they are taking in and are looking to fact-check or verify information they are presented with. They suggest that teachers can support them in this.

Using films as a framing for developing understanding, is a pedagogic tool which has been used in RE previously. David G. Horrell, Karen O'Donnell and David Tollerton (2018a) consider this in more detail in research looking at the lack of modules on religion and media in the new GCSE and A-Level exam syllabus' and argue that critical appreciation of media depictions of religion is important to include as it allows the formation of responsible, education citizens. Through the consideration of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in the research argues that through considering coverage of religion in the media by asking critical and probing questions pupils will better understand religion in society. It also argues that in doing so pupils can be more critically literate about the values of wider society.

Giving pupils the opportunity to engage with films about relevant topics of religion may help them to better understand religions, cultures and communities, but also develop the critical thinking skills to expose incorrect narratives about religion, supporting the building of resilience to radicalisation.

3.4.4 Identity Development

One of the key concerns when considering recruitment to far-right extremism is a lack of identity and particularly a lack of identity within the community in which a person lives (Goodwin, 2023). This can be exacerbated for white British working-class boys. Pupils seemed to use the same definition of identity as used throughout this research, to simply mean how they see themselves and who they are. This research showed that pupils had a clear understanding of what influences identity amongst pupils in their year groups, including influencers, social media and where they are from. Some pupils suggested a clear identity of their own, or factors which could prevent a strong identity. This is reassuring as it shows that pupils are finding a grounding to their identity despite environmental factors around them which have previously been suggested to lead to a lack of identity, including poverty, unemployment and social segregation.

Influencers was the top choice in the ranking of responses of what impacts on identity and there was much discussion of this. There did seem to be a wariness in line with the points above, around influencers and what was real and fake. Pupils knew there was a risk, and that all might not be as it seems, using the example of fashion influencers using beauty filters. This may be of benefit when countering far-right extremist use of influencers (P. Jackson, 2022). If pupils are developing a wariness of influencers generally, they may be less susceptible to negative influence. A key next step would therefore be to identify what has led to pupils feeling this way.

Additionally, when supporting the moral development needs of pupils living in an area with high prevalence of far-right extremism, it is also key for teachers to be aware that students are using the same platforms engaged with by recruitment strategies of the far right. This includes for their sources of information on religions, cultures, and communities. Social Media, influencers and also news in an indirect way (e.g. comments sections on newspaper articles) are key aspects of far-right recruitment, when engaging with young adults (Ebner, 2021). These were identified amongst the top responses of the pupils in this research when it came to their own sources of information. This is no accident with far-right recruiters also researching and utilising how school pupils find out their information and therefore using them as part of their recruitment. The question is therefore what happens if pupils do view far-right extremist material online. Have they built up a resilience to it? Do they have a bank of skills to draw upon in their consideration of the material? How does their moral development allow them to respond to the material? As discussed previously, how this might be achieved by teachers is not necessarily clear (Hand, 2022), but this research does give an insight into this, with pupils clearly identifying some key aspects relevant to this. When it comes to navigating the online world, pupils are aware of critical media literacy, but they still want help with making sense of information.

3.4.5 Changing Times and A Generational Divide

Pupils mentioned a number of times how different generations influenced them, but also how when it came to identity development, they felt that older

generations held different opinions as a result of changing times and pupils felt their identity was different to theirs.

When it came to the positive aspects of older generations influencing their identity, pupils mentioned things like fashion and music. However, when it came to issues such as LGBT rights and racism, a pupil gave a negative opinion about older generations and suggested that times had changed. The example was also given of how Greta Thunberg was an inspiration as she was a similar age and campaigned on relevant topics.

When it comes to strategies for recruitment to far-right extremist groups and particularly in a move from street-level protests to online forums, the key figures have expanded from older white males to younger males, and females. Females, as has been shown previously, offer a motherly image to add a sense of security to those hearing the narratives online (Leidig, 2021), younger males can be used to attract those of a similar age by focusing on topics relevant to that particular age group.

How this impacts the role of teachers and RE lessons is the need to recognise the generational divide between teachers and pupils. Directive teaching can be more challenging as pupils may see the 'settled' status as a position of an older generation or a different time. This is why moral inquiry and critical RE is so important. When considering issues, pupils need to be given the chance to engage in moral inquiry including an analysis of generational differences and contexts. This will allow them to make an informed decision of whether the moral outcome is valid or one to be questioned.

It was however mentioned that teachers could be influential and could be someone who they might like to be like in the future. This suggests that teachers can still have a role in influencing the moral identity of pupils as they are admired. This however would still need to be around settled issues so that teachers are not using their age and influence to push an agenda or certain way of thinking around controversial issues as defined by Hand (2014).

3.4.6 Teaching of Politics and the Purpose of RE

When considering how an RE syllabus can meet the moral development needs of pupils living in an area with a high prevalence of far-right extremism, there are some clear suggestions given by the pupils in this focus group. Pupils want to learn about politics. The narrative coding in the focus group showed that it was particularly boys who became animated in this discussion. It can also be inferred from the demographics of the area and that eight boys were included in the sample that most of these would be white British working-class boys. In the quantitative data, the top-ranking answers of what to learn about in RE were associated with political issues. Their discussion throughout the focus group was politically minded and there was a clarity that RE had its own unique role in this due to the content associated with the subject. There was less discussion around far-right extremism specifically, but some related issues such as racism, stereotyping and hate crimes were mentioned.

This would mean that RE syllabus need to make room for the teaching about politics or at least acknowledge that this is what it is doing. Most aspects of RE have a political element, but this may need to be explicitly named for pupils to have the awareness that this is what they are doing. It is also here that cross-curricular links can be made with pupils bringing what they are learning in other lessons such as Citizenship, History and English to supplement the content of an RE lesson, bringing fuller understanding to the topics. The pupils identified examples of when they do this already, including in teaching about the holocaust and racism.

3.5 Conclusion

In summary, Pupils agree with learning about political issues which may include about far-right extremism in RE. Pupils believe that visits and visitors help their ability to critically engage with information about religions, cultures and communities. Further research could establish more fully why this is and how it can be used to support directive teaching of settled issues. If the moral development of white British working-class boys can be developed in this way it will be worth a locally agreed syllabus including guidance for visits and visitors.

Debate is a core component of critical thinking and analysis, but pupils lack experience of it. Pupils have critical literacy skills and suggestions of being wary of information online or in films shows they use these, but pupils still want support. Giving support to white British working-class boys will help prepare them for when they encounter far-right extremist narratives outside of school.

Pupils' identity does not necessarily depend on the local community, and can be enhanced online and allow pupils to develop a strong identity. This could be key for the development of identity in white British working-class boys. However, there are risks in this, including the conferring of the identity of influencers on themselves. Further research here could build further knowledge around the role of far-right extremist influencers.

Pupils also recognise the impact different generations can have on their identity both positive and negative. There was a clear view that older generations' impact can be negative, and younger more positive. This is of interest when far-right recruitment is often linked to older white working-class males as shown in the literature review. There has begun to be a movement away from this as highlighted through the use of female influencers which can therefore put young people more at risk if it has been recognised that they have less trust in older generations. Teachers in the research are seen to have a unique position within this as an older generation, but also a trusted source. This could make the position of teachers more important in countering far-right narratives.

Finally, pupils want to engage with political issues in lesson, they could easily name topics this includes, but don't always recognise that these are often already included; explicit teaching and making cross-curricular links could support with this. This could engage white British working-class boys more in the learning and allow them to build resilience to radicalisation and support their moral development.

4 RE Professional ‘Hot Topic Discussion’

4.1 Research Questions

This second stage of empirical research was based around a focus group discussion held at the online RExChange conference in 2022, organised by the Culham St Gabriel’s Trust. Culham St Gabriel’s Trust is a charitable foundation who aim to provide RE professionals with the support, connections, challenges and professional development they need, promoting the benefits of high-quality of RE (CSTG, 2024).

The conference is for RE professionals in a wide variety of different roles, including in schools, universities and SACREs. It allows a place for discussion, sharing and engagement to promote the interdisciplinary nature of RE. The focus for the conference was *‘Real world research for real world classrooms’*.

The purpose of this phase of the research was to triangulate the data from the pupil focus groups to see if what the pupils were presenting in their responses was similar to the experiences of RE professionals in their practice. This would support the credibility of the data. The research also allowed practical and pedagogical implications of what the pupils were suggesting or requesting to be considered. Whilst it is important to have pupil involvement in this research, as highlighted previously, teacher agency is being shown to have a key role in this research too, so it is important that how teachers interpret the data from the pupils is considered. It also gave some new insights by finding out the views of RE professionals on the inclusion and teaching about far-right extremism in RE. The findings are used to analyse the wider research question of how a locally agreed syllabus can support the development of white British working-class boys in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism. The conference provided the ideal opportunity for this research to happen as there were many RE professionals from different aspects of RE education, this included teachers, university lecturers, SACRE members and curriculum developers.

The research took place as part of a recorded Zoom breakout room session, held as part of the conference programme. Within the focus group, the participants

were given an overview of the findings from the pupil focus groups and were then asked to share their thoughts on two questions:

- Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

The Zoom recording was then transcribed and coded, using a coding framework devised by the researcher. This was based on a literature review, reflexive writing from the researcher's RE practitioner experience, and the data from the previous research involving school pupils.

4.2 Methodology

Whilst having the views of pupils was of core importance to this research, it was vital to obtain the views of the RE community about issues relating to the teaching about far-right extremism. The pupils were able to give their own perspective allowing some insight into what influences their identity, where they find out about religions, cultures and communities. They also explained how they use the information they are taught about in school and whether far-right extremism is something that should be taught about in RE.

A focus group involving RE professionals however would give practitioner insight into the challenges and opportunities of teaching about far-right extremism and how this would support the moral development of white British working-class boys. When considering the theoretical contribution of this research Singh et al.'s (2013) understanding of policy enactment the PRF is made up of university researchers, national subject associations, curriculum developers. It is also made up of the teachers and advisors themselves. By engaging with such members of the PRF would allow a fuller understanding of policy implications, research connections, classroom practice, curriculum development, along with individual experience and narratives, supporting the assertion that there is a unique application of Bernstein's (2000) work within RE.

In line with policy enactment as understood by Singh et al. (2013) focus groups with RE professionals will allow for the struggle for control of the pedagogic discourse to be considered. Whilst the PRF may be seen as a single entity to recontextualise a policy from the ORF, it has previously been shown when agents within the PRF operate in micro levels there can be a struggle between and within the different sites. This research will aim to highlight some of this and interpret the importance for a policy and the teaching about far-right extremism.

Combining the results from all the focus groups would allow for a comparison of the pupil and professionals views on the teaching about far-right extremism, seeing if there are any commonalities in thought, but also what the key differences are and why these are the case.

When deciding who should make up the RE professionals focus group a decision had to be made about where these professionals should come from. With a focus on the locally agreed syllabus, it made sense for the professionals to come from the local area. However, a number of issues prevented this from being achieved. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2024) found that teacher recruitment is in critical state and this has created a buoyant job market. When initial enquiries were made at local RE groups about the potential for participating in this research, the response was that teachers were no longer in post, or had moved to other roles or were too new in the job to feel ready to participate in local research. This would have made it incredibly difficult to recruit participants from the local area. It was therefore decided that to limit participation to local RE professionals was not feasible, but through the considerations that it may also not be the most beneficial. A national perspective would give different experiences of the issues and may highlight if teaching about far-right extremism fitted best with a local need or if it was a national concern. This would also be of relevance to any move of RE from being locally determined to being nationally determined.

It was decided that the research should be carried out at the Culham St Gabriel's RExChange Conference due to the nature of the conference allowing access to RE professionals from different aspects of the national RE community. This would include university lecturers, classroom teachers, SACRE members, curriculum developers, exam boards and policymakers in line with the above outline of the PRF. This was chosen instead of a focus group of, for example, only teachers or only curriculum developers as it was more desirable to get a general overview of the issues relating to teaching about far-right extremism in light of the pupil feedback at this stage, with more specific research with teachers coming from a community of practice group in a potential third phase of research.

There were however some drawbacks in using this conference, as it would mean that there were elements of participant bias as the conference would appeal to certain RE professionals. The conference takes place a weekend reducing the participation of some people due to other commitments. It may be viewed that only very committed RE professionals would be willing to give up their free time to attend, so it does not include all RE professionals. It may also mean that the

participants are those who already have an interest in particular topics at the conference and a certain type of RE (Culham St Gabriel's as the organiser, is a strong driver of the move to a religion and worldviews approach to RE), so does not offer a variety of views. However, for the same reasons above many positives can be drawn from this group as it will be very committed RE professionals with a vested interest in current developments in RE, with a knowledge of a worldviews approach to RE who will make up the focus groups. This potential bias however, needed to be considered when analysing the data.

As an online conference was chosen for the location of the research, this also limited the type of research which could be carried out. There were several sessions including paper presentations, panel discussions, seminars, workshops and hot topic discussions which formed the conference programme. The 'hot topic' sessions would allow for the most in-depth discussion and therefore giving the most amount of research data, so this was chosen. It took the format of focus group research as the researcher presented the topic, and offered questions for discussion.

The time constraint of the forty-minute session, meant there was less time for a structured focus group approach such as the NGT technique used with the pupils. This meant there were compromises to make on some of the concerns with focus group research raised previously. As an open discussion, it would mean some people would be left out or not say as much as they may want to, and more dominant voices may be heard over others. To mitigate against this the researcher would encourage all participants to introduce themselves, as getting this initial contribution would alleviate any group participation 'nerves' (Harrison & Chapman, 2023). The researcher would also try to lead the discussion to ensure that participants were asked to contribute. This was done by encouraging the group to use the raise hand function in Zoom and by the researcher keeping a tally of who had had the chance to speak and giving time to those who had not.

A pilot of the research was not carried out due to issues mentioned earlier around the recruitment of participants, which would also limit participants in a pilot. The unique circumstances in which the focus group was carried out (an online conference for RE professionals) is also difficult to recreate. The

necessity for a pilot, was also reduced by the fact that this part of the research was mainly used to triangulate the data from the previous pupil voice focus groups.

4.2.1 Research Design

The research took place as part of a breakout room session during part of the online conference. Conference participants were made aware of the session through the conference programme and those interested were invited to contact the researcher for further information, this included signing a consent form by return of email to agree to participate. Those who had signed up joined the focus group session by entering the breakout room session and any who joined without giving consent or by mistake were asked to attend a different breakout room.

Individual personal data on the participants roles was not collected, however some participants identified themselves during the course of the focus group as university researchers, SACRE members and cross-phase and secondary school teachers. This gave a broad range of perspectives for the focus group.

The session was forty minutes long. The first part allowed participants to introduce themselves and give verbal consent to take part. The researcher then introduced the research giving a brief overview of the research so far including key results from the pupil focus groups. This was done using a PowerPoint presentation. This took ten minutes. Based on this introduction, participants were then shown the two research questions simultaneously and asked to give responses. This was to encourage an even coverage of both questions, though the researcher also prompted discussion of the second question. For some the two questions overlapped, others addressed each individual question.

- Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

The researcher played a limited role in the discussions, but did ask for clarity when necessary and drew comparisons with the pupil data to draw out further thoughts on the key themes so far.

The ‘hot topic discussion’ took place as planned. One person mistakenly entered the breakout room having not consented to participation, they agreed to join a different breakout room session. There were ten participants. One of the participants consented but did not join in with the discussion, the other nine participants contributed to the discussion. One participant joined the breakout room late, having already given written consent.

4.2.2 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained in line with the recommendations of the School of Social Sciences at Glasow University (#400210262 Appendix K). There were similar ethical concerns with this focus group as with the pupil focus group. Firstly, the nature of the topic of far-right extremism meant that participants may have become upset by the contents of the discussion, or as part of the discussion disclosed risk or potential harm. This meant that communication of these aspects with the conference organisers was key to ensuring appropriate responses were in place, including referral to supporting agencies where necessary.

To avoid the risk of upset participants were made fully aware of the content of the research in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix I) and were able to leave the Zoom break-out room if required and join an alternative conference session. They were able to withdraw from the research at any time during the focus group and remove their data after the research for up to a month. Participants were anonymised.

Linked to this was the risk of participants feeling coerced into being involved as a result of this session being offered at the conference. To avoid this, participants were asked to sign up in advance for the session, so that time and thought could be given to participation. Consent forms were completed prior to the conference (Appendix J).

There were similar ethical concerns with this focus group as with the pupil focus groups around anonymity, peer with peer focus group discussion and social desirability. Whilst anonymity was granted to the participants when included in the write up of the research through use of random numbering (RE Professional 1, RE Professional 2), as with the pupil research the other participants would hear what was said within the research and be able to recall it. This might discourage honest or full answers and the inclusion of examples or evidence. Similar approaches were put in place to encourage participants to engage fully, this included notice of this issue within the participant information sheet (Appendix I), so that participants were prepared for this. Participants were not asked for personal views to be shared but rather for them to give more general feedback on 'what the RE community might think'. This allowed anonymity, which could allow participants to put their views on 'others', many participants did, however give personal responses,.

Finally, there was the concern that participants may join the session having not given consent, as the break-out rooms could not be pre-allocated in the situation. This could lead to confusion and reflect badly on the event organisers themselves. It was therefore made clear on the conference programme, during the conference and prior to the session beginning that the session is only for those who had consented. If there were any issues on the day a member of CSTG could remove participants from the focus group and encourage them to join one of the alternative sessions. This was not an issue on the day, with only one person joining by mistake as they had selected the wrong number and could easily leave and find the session they had wanted to join.

4.3 Data Analysis

The online Zoom meeting was voice-recorded and transcribed. The data was analysed in a similar way to the process used with the pupil focus groups. The coding framework from the pupil focus groups, including the codes from the reflexive writing, those which came from the literature review and the inductive codes from the data itself were used to code the transcripts of the RE professional transcripts. This then generated themes and categories which informed the results and discussion of the research data.

Table 10- Codes to Themes (RE Professionals Focus Group)

RE Professionals Focus Group- Codes to Themes

Far Right Extremism	Far-right extremism in RE	Politics in the curriculum	Teacher Agency	The legal and administrative restrictions	Practical and Pedagogical Restrictions
• Extremism • Terrorism • Islamophobia • Antisemitism • White Working Class • Local area • Sensitive • Controversial • Political • White supremacy • Prejudice • Discrimination • Influencers	• Challenging • Powerful • Challenges • Islamophobia • Antisemitism • Age appropriate • Deep thinking • Academic Challenge • KS3 • KS4 • Worldviews • Particular Pedagogy • Critical RE • Explicit • Directive • In curriculum • Not in curriculum • History • PSHE • Islam • Judaism	• History • PSHE • Political Spectrum • Academically challenging	• Challenging • SLT • Allowed • Senior Leadership Expectation • Age Appropriate	• In curriculum • Not in curriculum • Challenging • Allowed • Not allowed • Senior Leadership • Age Appropriate • KS3 • KS4 • Local Area • Racism • White Supremacy • Directive	• Powerful Knowledge • Academically challenging • Time • Controversial • Sensitive • Explicit • Particular Pedagogy • Not explicit • Critical RE • Deep thinking

4.4 Results

This section will state the responses from the RE professionals, to the questions asked in the focus group in line with the coding framework. The RE professional focus group was designed to allow an additional reflection on the research questions, using the responses from the pupil focus groups as a stimulus. It allowed new ideas to be suggested by the RE professionals, particularly on the questions of whether and how far-right extremism might be taught about in RE, and what aspects might take priority. It also allowed further clarification to be brought to the points raised in the pupil focus groups. This would then allow the data to be analysed in response to the question of how the locally agreed syllabus can meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys. The RE professionals were given both questions at once on a PowerPoint slide, which meant that the responses switched and changed between ideas. This results section will therefore go through the categories identified in the coding overview above and show how the responses fit with these identified themes. The discussion section will consider these more fully in light of the literature review and the implications for the research questions.

4.4.1 Far-Right Extremism

The first question asked, ‘Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?’. From this question it was recognised that there was not a clear consensus of what far-right extremism is. It was associated with terrorism and Islamist extremism (RE Professional 4). Another recognised that it was to do with white supremacy and racism (RE Professional 1). Another mentioned about the Nazis and the holocaust (RE Professional 10). An RE professional also linked it with well-known people, but recognised a difference between how they were viewed:

Donald Trump and Andrew Tate both hold extreme, arguably right-wing views, but they aren’t seen as ‘right wing extremists’ in the same way as Tommy Robinson

[Participant 8 in chat function]

This showed a recognition of the diverse nature of the far right.

4.4.2 Far-right Extremism in RE

The first response in the focus group showed that far-right extremism has been taught about in schools and in RE and that it can be linked to topics on the curriculum about terrorism.

The only time I've ever taught it was I did it with my GCSE class last year and it wasn't on the spec or anything, 'cause it's not, but, we did the war and conflict unit and they wanted to use about terrorism and they focussed on Islamic extremism and things like that. So I brought it in as an alternative to that 'cause I thought that, that was useful, but that's just me adding that in rather than uhm, it being anywhere

[RE Professional 4]

The purpose of including about far-right extremism in the curriculum here was to bring about balance when the focus in the curriculum seemed to be on Islamist extremism. The teacher may have been trying to counter negative attitudes and stereotypes about Muslims in doing this.

The results show that other teachers had not explicitly taught about far-right extremism, but they were open to the inclusion of far-right extremism as a topic and could identify places to do this. Teachers suggested particular units of work or lessons where it might fit particularly well.

Yeah, I think it is appropriate to talk about all the way through the key stages.

[RE Professional 3]

I think because we teach a unit on prejudice and discrimination in the year 9, so we look at how, you know, how people become prejudice. And in there is antisemitism and Islamophobia and racism. So, I think it could slot in somewhere like that explicitly.

[RE Professional 4]

We don't have specific lessons on it, but it does fit in with again, year eight schemes of work on prejudice and discrimination and again with GCSE and war and conflict unit when we do about terrorism.

[RE Professional 7]

These are places within the curriculum where the topic fits in, but RE Professional 4 also mentioned how discussion about far-right extremism may come up in unrelated lessons:

...but then also when we teach like an introduction to religions in year 7. So, it could come up then as well, like as and when. But I think there is a space for it there on reflection.

[RE Professional 4]

This demonstrates that whilst there may be planned occasions for teaching about far-right extremism explicitly, it may also come up unexpectedly and teachers need to consider how they will respond in such instances.

One of the participants linked learning about far-right extremism to the teaching about worldviews in RE. They suggested that a worldview can be influenced by far-right extremist beliefs for example racism and that this may have come from the media

...they're going to see people who are influential in the media who may not necessarily, straight away be seen as far-right or on that far-right political spectrum, I'm sure there's probably people who you can think of who students have spoken about in class and who they, you know, may align with, whether rightly or wrongly and actually it's kind of challenging
[RE Professional 8]

When it came to what age group it was appropriate to teach about far-right extremism to it was suggested that it may be possible for most age groups. One participant thought it was important to talk about far-right extremism throughout the key stages:

Having key stage two and key stage three in my school, it's a bit of a different view, but the children want to talk about these hard topics and they want to be challenged
[RE Professional 3]

This RE professional is suggesting that the children themselves want to talk about these topics, which links with the findings from the pupils focus groups.

Linked to the above suggested challenge of the topics, the notion of it being a hard topic in terms of academic difficulty was reiterated by other participants ‘Certain students find the idea of extremism quite difficult to understand’ [RE Professional 8]. It was suggested this was down to the nature of the far-right itself.

I’m slightly confused about what we’re talking about when we talk about teaching about far-right extremism. Whether we like, are we talking in engaging in discussions of, uh, like white supremacy and, or if so, would that be taught, as in what? It’s very difficult to know how that would be taught, because normally racism is an issue that we wouldn’t think is a controversial issue and so having it there in the RE classroom where often we are presenting things as controversial, it is tricky. So, to get to go back to what we are actually talking about, the previous comments, about where it would be on the curriculum, I guess it depends on what specifically you are teaching. It might be appropriate to have in a unit on Islam to have a to have a lesson on Islamophobia and bring out from students, what is it like, why do people have these Islamophobic attitudes and trying, and then to try and present reasons to counter them.

[RE Professional 1]

Where does the belief of far-right extremism develop from? Does it have a political notion or more religious?
[RE Professional 8, in the chat function]

These quotations may show that there is an academic limit on when far-right extremism can be taught about as it may be too complex for younger pupils to understand.

When considering the place of far-right extremism in RE some suggested a cross-curricular approach was necessary for the understanding of the topic but that RE has a unique role within that approach.

Perhaps it might be appropriate to have a scheme of work on extremism, but I’d have thought a more kind of piecemeal approach, getting it in where like where its appropriate in your school? Might be better?
[RE Professional 1]

So we talk about extremism in lots of different contexts, within history lessons and as head of PHC, I’m very involved across the school in exposing the children to the risks of extremism. So I think maybe sometimes a more cross-curricular approach is really important, but I

do find it's really powerful in RE lessons when the children can identify specific examples.

[RE Professional 3]

There were however different views about cross-curricular learning. One participant saw that cross-curricular learning could support RE and the teaching about far-right extremism, but others highlighted the difficulties in cross-curricular work:

For us it comes up, not explicitly, we don't have specific lessons on it...It is talked about to the pupils in their character package or PSHE lessons at both key stages as well, so our students already know about it from those lessons and they're quite good at bringing it across.

[RE Professional 7]

I think that cross-curricular linkage is really important, and we've been talking a lot in my school about interweaving between subjects and the links between contexts. And I think it was a really interesting point, I don't know who made it, but uhm, saying you know, making sure that the children understand they can talk about RE content in different subject areas, And making sure that the teachers who teach the different subjects that connect so closely, as obviously a historian, History and RE just, you know, naturally interweave between each other. But uh, making sure the children understand the content they're learning in the different subjects do connect

[RE Professional 3]

I think I am seeing it from quite a different point of view to be honest. As I said, I am History trained so we talk a lot about extremism through...I teach key stage three history. So, we talk about extremism in lots of different contexts within history lessons and as head of PHE, I'm very involved across the school in exposing the children to the risks of extremism., So I think maybe sometimes a more cross curricular approach is really important.

[RE Professional 3]

How far does history support RS as a discrete subject? Unless there is to be rigorous and explicit teaching and interweaving between units, subjects, historical evidence, in both subjects, this may always be a stumbling block. Its clear students can't understand how human rights and the slave trade in History can translate to RS and the work religions do for that.

[RE Professional 8 in the chat function]

The concern here is that if a topic such as far-right extremism is going to be delivered as part of a cross-curricular theme, then there needs to be assurance

that pupils, like in the comment by RE Professional 7, can bring their learning from the other subjects into RE lessons, to gain the most benefit.

Linked into this discussion is the skill-based learning which such a topic requires.

This just follows up on from what you said, but that, that gives a reason to, in addition to having these topics explicitly within the curriculum, to also just keep emphasising the kind of critical thinking skills and that's something that should be happening across the curriculum. Where you can kind of be looking at the sources and being able to question them. I don't know whether RE is the right place for it. I mean, it seems like to me it's, it's, one place for it, to maybe look at like some examples of tweets or come to look at video and kind of subject it to, subject it to critical analysis, look at the ways in which it's trying to like persuade and get people in, so that people are more resilient to the messages that they might encounter in their own home when there's no one there to protect them from dangerous messages

[RE Professional 1]

This participant suggests that is not just the subject knowledge that need to be shared across the curriculum, but also the skills for example critical thinking skills and analysis. There is also the need to consider pupils' use of their learning in school and outside of school.

A local need for the inclusion of far-right extremism was mentioned:

For in the area I am in, it's very. And like someone said already, it's very white working class. There's not a lot of diversity at all. And so, exposing the children to ideas within different groups and making them aware of that really expands their own experiences of how to function in the world.

[RE Professional 3]

This seemed to suggest that perhaps some areas with lower diversity, need this to be included on the curriculum.

4.4.3 Teacher agency and restrictions on teaching about far-right extremism

There were a number of limitations which RE professionals identified when discussing how to include political topics. Participants had concerns about if

they should or could include it and where the line might be on including personal views.

I think a lot of teachers are scared to talk about politics and no one seems to know the line of what's acceptable and what to share or not. And I'm maybe too honest with the children about my political views, but I think it's necessary. I think it's important the children know that we're invested and know what we think about certain issues...because it gives them validation that they can have their own views and that's OK

[RE Professional 3]

For us it's never been within the department, it's never been an RE teacher having issues with what we've been teaching. It's always come from above at SLT sometimes have had their concerns about what we'd be teaching and how it would be taught and, and sometimes things that they'd rather us not teach. Whereas I think, as RE teachers we're quite open and quite happy to go, what students ask and sort of do the cross-curricular links quite happily.

[RE Professional 7]

This shows there are concerns about what the pupils may think if personal views are shared and the impact it might have on them. There are also concerns about how senior leaders will view the inclusion of far-right extremism.

For some the restrictions did not come from the topic itself, but rather the limited time that is available for the inclusion of the topic.

Yeah, I think, I think there is room to teach politics and I think really to teach the whole uhm, left, right continuum and what communism is and capitalism is and why. Capitalists might like freedom and liberal values? And, you know, because in fact a lot of the things that we do fit into that continuum. And, you know there's lots written about uhm, things like human rights, which are good in themselves, but is that as important as, for example, you know, welfare state fix?...And why do people think welfare state is important and where do that fit in with things like equality and poverty. And so, I think there's a lot of room to actually give people a hermeneutical key of the left and right.

I think it is a problem to fit some of these things, where we fit them in, into the picture. I do, I'm I'm at the moment teaching a holocaust course...it just reminded me a little bit of the fact that you know, talking about right-wing extremism could be as a discrete unit but it's finding time...I'm going to be teaching the holocaust again next term, whether I sort of situate it in, somehow in a broader framework and

I'm I'm you know, whether its just after world war two or I'm not sure how to do it, it can take away from the integrity of the material.

But yeah, anyway, that's just my offering. But I certainly think that there is room for us to teach the whole spectrum. What, what is a communist? And what's a socialist and what's capitalism? Because there are so many philosophers and ideas and worldviews attached toward that.

[RE Professional 9]

The participant here is stating that far-right extremism is a complex topic. Pupils need to grasp the political positioning, the wider topic itself (suggested here as the holocaust) and the RE context. This may demand more time than available to do it justice.

Finally, a participant outlined a more philosophical issue, in the inclusion of far-right extremism, mirroring some of the pupils' concerns:

Politics in the classroom; drawing on links to the environment for example, where do we know what is true and fact. What position do we take as truth in the UK? Does that differ from elsewhere in the world.

[RE Professional 8]

When considering a topic like far-right extremism, this participant is suggesting that it can be difficult for the teacher to know what is true and what is fact and the UK's position in this.

4.5 Discussion

This discussion section will focus particularly on the new knowledge obtained from the data collected during the RE professional focus groups. It will focus on the professionals' views on the inclusion of far-right extremism and how this may be done. It will focus on issues relating to the practicalities and pedagogic practices necessary. The next chapter will give a fuller discussion drawing on the findings across both stages and answering the research questions in full detail.

4.5.1 Far Right Extremism

This stage of the research focussed more specifically on far-right extremism itself. This would give more clarity on the unique role of RE in teaching about far-right extremism and therefore how a locally agreed syllabus can support the moral development of white British working-class boys. What exactly is meant by far-right extremism was a key point of discussion within the RE professionals focus group. A definition wasn't given by the researcher at any point deliberately to see what the perceptions of the topic were within the RE community. Participants seemed to have their own understanding of far-right extremism or posed the question of what it is themselves. The researcher did however identify some core concepts that may be considered far-right including antisemitism, islamophobia, and issues around immigration which a few of the participants drew into their own understanding. The researcher also outlined why it was a pertinent topic for the area where the research is being carried out, giving some background information.

It was highlighted that it is confusing when considering what could or should be discussed as far-right extremism,

There was also discussion of what might be considered controversial and the extent to which far-right extremism is controversial. Contentious issues were considered in the literature review and can be defined in several ways. An overview helpful to this discussion is given by Karin Flensner (2020) in her consideration of how these issues should be taught about in RE and backs up the work by Hand (2008) outlined previously. It suggests that there are a number of

aspects which could make the coverage of far-right extremism in lessons, a controversial topic.

The first is that some of the themes within far-right extremist narratives cause strong emotional reactions and can be linked to a behavioural criterion. This suggests that an issue is controversial depending on whether it is perceived so by the pupils or groups in the community and wider society. This would include policies on immigration as an example. This may also vary according to the local area; what may be considered controversial in one place, may not be in another or evoke a lesser response. The responses in the focus group indicate that far-right extremism may meet this criterion here as indicated by the RE professional who suggested an 'emotional response' from senior leaders who may not allow certain topics to be discussed.

The second is that far-right extremism could meet a politically authentic criterion for being controversial, whereby the views are held as part of a political movement. This is less convincing as it requires the views to have a traction within the public sphere, which the minority positioning of far-right extremist groups may not be considered to have currently.

The epistemic criterion considers how the questions to be discussed are presented. It is this presentation which will determine whether they are seen as controversial or not. This criterion links in with Hand's (2008, 2014) argument that if an issue is controversial it should be presented in a 'non-directive way'. On the other hand, if there is no rational argument for the contradictory views, then it is not a controversial issue and should be presented as 'settled' in a 'directive' way. Far-right extremist attitudes are therefore not controversial, as many of the themes which are underpinned by racist or generally discriminatory ideas could be seen as empirically wrong, so are 'settled', and should be presented as such.

This fits with what RE Professional 1 is stating. They use the example of Islamophobia, where pupils are taught in a directive way how to counter Islamophobic attitudes. If this criterion and Hand's guidance on delivery is utilised for far-right extremism, it needs to be decided what, if anything, of the

narratives is controversial and what of the narratives is empirically wrong and settled.

Such a decision may also answer worries in the researcher's own experience, of teachers suggesting that by teaching about far-right extremism, pupils are being exposed to negative ideas they otherwise may not have encountered and this not being desirable. If the epistemic criterion is applied, then certain aspects of the far-right narratives themselves may be presented as controversial and the issues surrounding that debated within lesson, but aspects which are not controversial, but empirically wrong, can be taught about in a directive way to counter the narrative. This would also answer Trevor Cooling's (2012) criticisms of Hand's approach as not being fair to pupils, as it does not give the opportunity to critique some moral issues. This gives pupils the opportunity to discuss and debate, but also does not leave harmful aspects open to pupils developing the wrong conclusions. Consideration of how these aspects are identified and presented would be a key part of the next stage of this research.

It is also important then, to pick up on the previous comments by RE Professional 1, about the place of critical RE within the classroom, the presentation of where these attitudes come from and whether these are taught as controversial or settled statements:

This just follows up from what you said, but that that gives a reason to, in addition to having these topics explicitly taught in the curriculum, to also just keep emphasising the kind of critical thinking skills and that's something that should happen across the curriculum.

[RE Professional 1]

Teaching critical thinking skills becomes a central part of the school and RE curriculum as a result. This would also be an important aspect to consider in the next stage of this research.

4.5.2 Far-right extremism within the RE curriculum

RE professionals were open to the inclusion of far-right extremism as a topic, including it in across key stages, fitting it in with particular units or lessons (for example when teaching islamophobia or terrorism) and anticipating its

spontaneous inclusion by pupils. The language used within these comments: 'slot in', 'fit it', 'could come up' and 'space for it' suggests that the inclusion of far-right extremism is being seen as something additional that could be included if it works with existing material and not as a topic included in and of itself. It would also be down to the teacher as to whether they pick up on pupils 'ad-hoc' comments in unrelated lessons and give lesson time to its discussion. This links in with the later discussion of the limited availability of curriculum time.

RE Professional 4, early in the focus group, identified far-right extremism as being associated with the type of extremism that may be considered alongside terrorism and Islamic extremism, when that is taught about in the Peace and Conflict GCSE unit of work. This unit of work, in line with the DfE subject guidance, states that pupils need to cover:

religion, peace and conflict; violence, war, pacifism, terrorism, just war theory, holy war; the role of religion and belief in 21st century conflict and peace making; the concepts of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation (religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world only)
(DfE, 2015b)

Within a different syllabus (Eduqas, 2020), extremism is taught within a unit on Human Rights following the guidance from the DfE:

j. religion, human rights and social justice; issues of equality and freedom of religion or belief; prejudice and discrimination in religion and belief; human rights; wealth and poverty; racial prejudice and discrimination (religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world only)

(DfE, 2015, p. 8)

This is maybe why RE Professionals 4 and 7 suggested it would fit in with similar Key Stage 3 units on prejudice and discrimination. In this syllabus, it is associated with 'issues of equality and freedom of religion and belief' and specific content includes 'Censorship, freedom of religious expression and religious extremism'. (Eduqas, 2020). The extremism focused on is extremism because of religious belief. I, however suggest that teaching about far-right extremism would be relevant to include here, when it is recognised that extreme right-wing terrorists 'are more likely to target faith communities than

terrorists of other ideologies, and the threat is the greatest for Jewish and Muslim communities' (ISCP, 2022, p. 65). If a teacher is to give pupils a good understanding of extremism and terrorism in relation to these themes within Religious Education, then far-right extremism would need to be included.

At GCSE level, to include about far-right extremism would be a teacher's deliberate decision to identify it as an example within their curriculum, possibly moving beyond the required elements of the exam syllabus. For many teachers the main justification in doing this would depend on the potential of getting marks in the exam for referencing it. In the AQA GCSE exam syllabus (2020), a sample mark scheme states:

The Content included is designed to be as helpful as possible but in many cases is not exhaustive. So Content sections are introduced by the sentence: Students may include some of the following points, but all other relevant points must be credited: this is to remind examiners that there may well be additional correct answers which, with their expertise, they will be able to allow. With all questions if an examiner has any doubt about answers being credit worthy they should consult their team leader.
(AQA, 2020, p. 2)

It could be seen here that if a teacher decides to teach about Far-Right extremism within appropriate aspects of this course, pupils should be credited, giving far-right extremism a valid place in the curriculum for this purpose. This will justify its inclusion in the curriculum further.

With the focus of this research being on the RE locally agreed syllabus, it is notable that no teacher mentions it. This may be because it is inferred in comments about key stage 3 schemes of work. Most locally agreed syllabus also state that schools should follow a GCSE syllabus to meet the needs of pupils in Key Stage 4. There is however no specific mention of how teaching far-right extremism may meet the demands of the locally agreed syllabus in the professional's particular area or of a locally agreed syllabus requiring it as part of their content. There is however a recognition of the relevance of the topic on a local level:

For in the area I am in, it's very. And like someone said already, it's very white working class. There's not a lot of diversity at all. And so, exposing the children to ideas within different groups and making

them aware of that really expands their own experiences of how to function in the world.

[RE Professional 3]

This demonstrates that RE professionals do take into consideration the local area in their selection of curriculum content and the necessity for doing this to expose pupils to ideas different to their own. This however was the only place where white working-class was mentioned. It had been flagged in the initial part of the focus group where the researcher mentioned the purpose of the research and the findings of the research, but it wasn't a topic picked up on by the participants. This may show a lack of understanding of the needs of white British working-class boys, or that it is a topic participants were not comfortable engaging with.

4.5.3 Politics within the RE Curriculum

When discussing the more general topic of politics, RE Professional 9 suggested that it is appropriate to teach about politics within the RE classroom and that the whole left-right continuum should be spoken about. Within this they talked about pupils developing a knowledge of what is capitalism, what is communism and then how capitalists may like freedom and liberal values. They justified the inclusion, as many of the topics taught in RE fit into that continuum and suggested human rights and the welfare state fix as some specific topics. They also stated how many philosophers, and ideas and worldviews are attached towards the whole political spectrum.

Far-right extremism here is defined in the position it holds within the political spectrum. However, as can be seen from the teacher's simplification of capitalism above, it could be quite difficult to teach about the far right's place in a meaningful way, in the timeframe available, without having to make generalisations and blanket statements about aspects of the political right or political left. This may then reduce understanding of the issues with extreme political views and do a disservice to its inclusion, rather than support any moral development or other educational purpose. This fits in with the earlier consideration of Freeden's (1996) approach to defining political ideologies, and this could be helpful here in supporting teachers in including about such

ideologies within their lessons. This too will be something to consider in the next stage of the research.

If a balance of teaching a meaningful amount of content within the timeframe given to RE could be achieved, then there are benefits as highlighted by RE Professional 9. This includes how political views underpin philosophical thought, ideas and worldviews. This shows the teaching of politics at least, as having a valid place in an RE curriculum and I would argue far-right Extremism more specifically.

A solution to finding this balance of curriculum time would be that in RE pupils should be able to draw on the knowledge they have acquired through the Citizenship curriculum which would have given them an understanding of this, in light of the DfE guidance on Citizenship (DfE, 2013). A full discussion of the cross-curricular aspects of this research will be given shortly.

4.5.4 Purpose of Far-Right Extremism within the curriculum.

Much of the data analysis above shows that RE professionals see far-right extremism as having a place within the curriculum, but the data also shows that professionals see a purpose to it being on the curriculum. The first purpose relates to the discussion of controversial issues, where it can be used to counter racist or discriminatory views. RE Professional 1 suggests that far-right extremism could provide a case-study for discussion with the directive purpose of pupils seeing why such views are wrong. This may be to counter misinformation or disinformation. Kate Cox et. al. (Cox et al., 2021) draw a distinction between the two stating that “misinformation refers to the distribution of incorrect information without the intention to mislead, whereas disinformation refers to the deliberate dissemination of misleading information (Cox et al., 2021, p. 4). Misinformation can be used by far-right groups drawing on existing misinformation to further their narratives. Conspiracy theories are also connected to this as ‘narratives created to infer that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan made by powerful individuals or groups’. (Cox et al., 2021, p. 5). If pupils are aware of how far-right groups use misinformation and disinformation to change people’s views on a topic or a group, through such a

case study, they may be more able to look out for this in the future supporting their understanding and moral development.

A second purpose is for pupils to engage with what could be seen as a powerful topic:

the children want to talk about these hard topics, they want to be challenged. And they want to share their views and it's quite powerful for us to be able to explain that to them.

...

The children need to understand this is what happens in lots of different contexts and so with us we allude to extremism all the way from year five and obviously that gets that little bit more detailed in Key Stage 3. But it is very powerful, and it invokes very deep thinking from the children, so I think it is very important to include it in the curriculum design, absolutely.

...

So, I think sometimes a more cross curricular approach is really powerful in RE lessons when the children can identify specific examples and for the area that I'm in, it's very, like someone said already, it's very white working class. There's not a lot of diversity at all. And so exposing children to ideas with different groups and making them aware of that really expands their own knowledge and expands their own experiences of how we function within the world.

[RE Professional 3]

It is difficult within these responses to determine exactly what is meant by the RE professional in their usage of the term powerful. However, given the connections to the level of challenge, deep thinking and impact on understanding and functioning in the world, it relates to Michael Young's (2013) concept of powerful knowledge. Powerful knowledge as defined by Young is 'real' knowledge. It is:

reliable, fallible and potentially testable'...'Powerful knowledge is powerful because it provides the best understanding of natural and social worlds that we have and helps us go beyond our individual experiences.

(Young in Maude, 2016, p. 71)

Powerful knowledge was a contrasting term to ‘knowledge of the powerful’ and aimed to allow the emergent properties of knowledge that come about by taking into account the social (power) relations and the epistemic relations of knowledge (Young, 2013).

Alaric Maude (2016) in his application of powerful knowledge to Geography teaching, summarises Young’s definitions by stating that knowledge is powerful if enables pupils to:

- Discover new ways of thinking
- Better explain and understand the natural and social worlds
- Think about alternative futures and what they could do to influence them
- Have some power over their own knowledge
- Be able to engage in current debates of significance, and
- Go beyond the limits of their personal experience

(Maude, 2016, p. 72)

These are developed from Maude’s proposal that powerful knowledge should have effects or outcomes that can be described as powerful and builds on his stated need for academic disciplines.

When considering the points raised by RE Professional 3 in discussing the purpose of far-right extremism within the curriculum, it could be classed as powerful knowledge as defined above. When far-right narratives are being presented to pupils as case studies (suggested by RE Professional 1) or examples being used when considering the local area, giving pupils an insight into different attitudes (suggested by RE Professional 3), pupils are being given the chance to discover new ways of thinking, go beyond their personal experience, engage in debates of significance.

When considering the directive teaching outlined earlier in consideration of Hand’s (2008, 2014) work, it could be a concern that knowledge cannot be both

directive and powerful. It raises the question of whether pupils have power over their own knowledge, and can debate fully, if they are being directed to think in a certain way. This research shows that it can, because if knowledge is powerful in what it enables a pupil to do, and it enables a pupil to engage in society in a positive and beneficial way, then this fits with the future visions suggested by Young (2013). These future visions are the context for his discussion of powerful knowledge and that without pupils knowing the extremes of attitudes, knowledge of the social, is limited. It is this type of knowledge which could bring about identity development and social change for white British working-class boys.

4.5.5 Cross Curricular Links

Many of the RE professionals made connections between teaching about far-right extremism in RE and in other subjects. It was strongly felt that RE could support the wider curriculum in teaching about far-right extremism, but it was necessary that subjects worked together on this topic. History and PHSCE were the two subjects most mentioned. The historical context of the far-right was central with reference to the Nazi Party and the Holocaust. It was also mentioned that preventing radicalisation was under the remit of PHSCE, but that pupils were able to bring their knowledge from that to RE. Not all RE professionals were assured of this ability of pupils with one participant reflecting on personal experience that pupils do not always do this. It was suggested that it would need to be presented to pupils explicitly as a cross-curricular topic in order for pupils to bring their knowledge from one subject to another.

Such cross-curricular connections is a common theme within education discussions with some educators suggesting the blurring of lines between subjects is beneficial (Niemelä, 2022; Whitty et al., 1994), but others suggesting that separate subjects is key to protecting knowledge (McPhail, 2018). From my own teaching experience cross-curricular work needs an incredible amount of investment from the subject teachers involved and the school as a whole. The balance of benefits would need to be considered to ensure the investment of time and resources is worthwhile.

4.5.6 Teacher Agency

It is notable within the results that whilst RE professionals identified aspects of restriction on what and how they teach in RE, professionals also identified aspects of agency over their curriculum and lessons. One of the participants altered her curriculum to include about far-right extremism in an effort to bring about balance in the curriculum. This shows a teacher using their teacher agency to adapt the curriculum and be an agent of change similar to that suggested previously (Pantić, 2015; Soini et al., 2015). Others mentioned how it could be slotted in addition to, or fitted with existing materials. One mentioned how due to the local area being a white working-class area it was an important to include about it. This shows how RE professionals are responsive to the needs of their learners rather than inflexible and controlled. This illustrates the importance of a teachers position within the PRF, whilst the ORF may have their imagined teacher and their imagined output, it is the teacher themselves who has substantial control over what happens in their own classrooms. This may or may not be in line with that anticipated by the ORF. This also highlights the potential of the RE teacher to influence policy, as if a teacher is recognising this and also is part of the agreed syllabus conference (and by definition part of the ORF), they could feed these ideas into the development of the syllabus.

4.5.7 The legal and administrative restrictions

Whilst some of the responses indicate teachers using their teacher agency to influence what goes on in their own classrooms and possibly wider, there was an apprehension about doing this with regard to politics. When the researcher questioned the participants about RE professionals' perceptions of teaching about politics and political issues, responses mirrored the comments made by a pupil about what could be said about politics:

I think a lot of teachers are scared to talk about politics and no one really seems to know the line of what's acceptable and what to share or not. And I'm maybe too honest with the children about my political views, but I think it's necessary. I think its important children know that we're invested and know what we think about certain issues.

[RE Professional 3]

And

Researcher: What about teachers? How often do teachers talk about religion?

Pupil 2: They can't can they? Aren't they support to stay like in the middle? In case they like...?

Pupil 6: I only feel like if they are teaching a subject that contains like religion, but I don't feel like they necessarily talk about it unless it's like a lesson that they are doing.

This demonstrates that there is a perceived limitation on what teachers are allowed to discuss in lessons about politics and religion. Where this limitation comes from is explored further in the RE professional's focus group and the restriction according to one participant comes from the senior leadership team in school:

And for us, it's never been within the department, it's never been an RE teacher having issues with what we've been teaching. It's always come from above. At SLT sometimes have had their concerns about what we'd be teaching and how it would be taught and sometimes things that they'd rather us not teach. Whereas, I think, as RE teachers we're quite open and quite happy to do what students ask and sort of do the cross curricular links quite happily.

[RE Professional 7]

This suggests a conflict between what RE teachers are willing to teach in the classroom and what Senior Leaders think. This demonstrates the issues which may lie within school policy or unwritten perceptions as to what is acceptable to be taught within the classroom. Within the research school, all staff are given training on sharing personal views on political and religious issues, where the key policy is that personal views do not need to be and should not be shared, particularly in a way which promotes these views. This was seen to be in line with guidance from the Department of Education (2022) which states:

that parents and carers want to be sure that their children can learn about political issues and begin to form their own independent opinions, without being influenced by the personal views of those teaching them. I know teachers themselves feel similarly".

(DFE, 2022, p. np)

The guidance however can be used in support of what is being proposed in this thesis in the teaching about far-right extremism, as the guidance does not limit

the range of political views which can be taught about in school (DFE, 2022). In ensuring political impartiality, schools also must comply with other responsibilities, for example the fundamental British values, including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. This means that directive teaching against far-right extremist narratives is warranted and required:

Some concepts and views are shared principles that underpin our society and should be reinforced by schools. This includes fundamental rights, tolerance and challenging discrimination and prejudice.

Teachers should not present dangerous and discriminatory views unchallenged, and this is not a necessary part of a balanced presentation of opposing views. They should be clear about the facts including laws in place to protect groups targeted by such views, as well as risks and harms of such views. They should also be clear that they have no place in our society.
(DFE, 2022, p. np)

This also links to the Prevent Duty (Home Office, 2024b) where schools should provide a safe space for the discussion of terrorism and extremist ideas that are part of a terrorist ideology. This is seen to support a pupil's resilience to radicalisation. Encouragement is given to follow safeguarding policies and procedures where there are concerns around a pupil expressing extremist views and is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

This analysis shows that whilst some senior leaders may prefer for such topics to not be discussed, there is backing for their inclusion in the curriculum where appropriate, in the guidance from the DfE. The guidance also clarifies suggestions that teachers should not share personal views (as suggested in both the pupil and RE professional focus groups). It states that there is no blanket prohibition on teachers and staff expressing their own views on political issues being taught to pupils, but they should ensure that this is not presented as fact and highlighted that there are opposing views which pupils may wish to consider (DFE, 2022). The school leaders however, (as is the case within the research school) can have a school wide policy about this.

Within this focus group it was notable that one participant chose to put more comments in the private chat function than they contributed publicly. This

included comments about who may be considered far-right, where far-right ideas came from and the problem of knowing what is true. The fact that these were given in the chat function may suggest a lack of confidence in being able to share these ideas with the wider group. This links with the above concerns of how much a teacher can express their own opinion. The participant also mentioned how different places will have different notions of truth, this fits with the earlier discussion of the duty to promote British values. The comment seemed to imply that it is difficult to have discussions around truth when there is a particular idea of truth which teachers must adhere to. This shows a further level of power and control beyond that of the ORF and the policies themselves, where even if there is policy in place to protect and allow certain aspects of teaching, teachers may not always be willing to do it. This shows teachers values acting beyond the control of the policy, adding an additional element to the values-laden notions of policy recontextualisation from Singh et. al. (2013).

4.5.8 Practical and Pedagogic restrictions

A further constraint which an RE professional mentioned was curriculum time:

I mean, I think it is a problem to some of these things where we fit them in, to the picture...talking about right wing extremism could be a discrete unit but its finding time, I'm, I'm going to be teaching about the Holocaust again next half term. Whether I sort of situate it in somehow in a broader framework and I'm, I'm, you know, whether it's just after World War Two or I'm not sure how to do it, it can take away from the integrity of the material.

[RE Professional 9]

If far-right extremism is to be taught explicitly, it will require curriculum time, either within the scheme of work in which it will be taught, or in lessons where it arises naturally. RE is a subject where time is often limited (Ofsted, 2021b). In the research school as an example, RE is taught for an hour a week in years seven and nine and an hour a fortnight in years eight and ten. This is unless pupils are studying for a GCSE in the subject, in which case it is taught across five hours a fortnight in years ten and eleven. This demonstrates how time is at a premium and teachers may be reluctant to dedicate time to teaching about far-right extremism if it takes from other areas of RE that they feel are more

beneficial. This connects to the above discussion of the GCSE syllabus, where pupils can be credited for discussing far-right extremism in relevant answers, but if this requires more teaching time, teachers are unlikely to wish to include it.

Related to this, throughout the session a few subjects were mentioned as complementary in the teaching of politics and far-right extremism. These included History and Personal, Health and Social Education (which in one school was referred to as their Character Package). It is therefore worthwhile considering how other subjects were seen to contribute to the delivery of this topic and whether time is required within an RE curriculum.

One participant when considering where far-right extremism might fit within the curriculum offered a unique perspective as someone who was teaching RE but was trained as a history teacher:

I think I am seeing it from quite a different point of view to be honest. As I said, I am History trained so we talk a lot about extremism through...I teach key stage three history. So, we talk about extremism in lots of different contexts within history lessons and as head of PHE, I'm very involved across the school in exposing the children to the risks of extremism., So I think maybe sometimes a more cross curricular approach is really important.

[RE Professional 3]

Both subjects could be seen as offering an alternative place for the teaching about far-right extremism. The holocaust is a compulsory component of Key Stage 3 History, so Nazism and Fascism more generally, would be taught about here. There are additional places within the curriculum where consideration may be given to far-right history, but these will not be compulsory and will be decided upon by heads of subject within schools. These topics indicate a historical look at far-right extremism but would not necessarily allow pupils to understand the far-right extremist narratives they may be encountering today. RE may therefore have the unique role to give pupils the opportunity to discuss current aspects of far-right extremism.

There have been several changes in recent years with PSHE education. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education became compulsory

in state funded secondary schools in 2020 (DfE, 2020). Citizenship and careers guidance which were also already compulsory are also often taught alongside Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education. These subjects can have a combined curriculum and have an overarching subject title (e.g. character package, life education). RE again is commonly included here. This can cause confusion over which content belongs to which subject and even more so when there is a natural overlap between the topics. In other schools the subjects are kept separately and given their own curriculum time. It has been strongly advised in the OFSTED (2024) subject review for RE that the subject is distinct and given its own curriculum time and this thesis is written on that basis and expectation .

It was mentioned previously about the potential of subjects such as Citizenship to support RE teaching through an identification of the cross-curricular elements that can be drawn on. The previous mentioned example was how it can support pupils' knowledge of political definitions, giving RE teachers more time to teach the aspects more relevant to their subject. RE professional 3 discussed how they had worked on a cross-curricular scheme of work on environmental issues between RE, Geography and the Arts, the inference here being that maybe something similar would be possible for teaching about far-right extremism. This was reinforced by REProfessional 8 posting in the Zoom chat function about the necessity for the cross curricular elements of subjects to be rigorously and explicitly taught to allow pupils to see the interweaving between units and subjects.

The skills aspects of the subjects were also highlighted by another participant:

This just follows up from what you said, but that that gives a reason to, in addition to having these topics explicitly taught in the curriculum, to also just keep emphasising the kind of critical thinking skills and that's something that should happen across the curriculum.

[RE Professional 1]

This suggests that it is not just the subject content that may benefit from cross curricular teaching, but also the skills required to critically engage with the content pupils are learning about. It would therefore be important to consider how a cross-curricular approach may support the delivery of teaching about far-

right extremism, including the aspects which would be unique to RE and the aspects that could be developed from learning elsewhere.

4.6 Conclusion

The RE professionals were supportive of the inclusion of teaching about far-right extremism within RE. They could suggest places where it may already be delivered or where it could be added as a discrete element of the curriculum or as something to compliment other topics and issues. A discussion of teacher agency shows how teachers are achieving this. A core purpose in including about far-right extremism was to give pupils powerful knowledge which encourages deep thinking and expands their knowledge and experience of the world and how we function in it. It could also counter racist and other discriminatory views.

It is notable that the purpose of including about far-right extremism in RE was not as a reaction to current events. It is a criticism mentioned in literature review that RE is often seen as the subject to address and provide a response to current issues (Mogra, 2022). Here, RE professionals saw a core purpose of including it, fitting with the aims and purposes of the subject. This shows that RE can have a legitimate role in supporting white British working-class boys in their moral development as a result of including about far-right extremism within the curriculum.

The teaching about far-right extremism was seen to supplement the work of other subjects, but there were suggestions that RE had something unique which would support the teaching about far-right extremism which other subjects did not offer. This included critical RE, but also the skill set of RE teachers who would be able to manage teaching about controversial issues more easily than others.

There are however some concerns around its inclusion. There is a limited of understanding from RE professionals about what far-right extremism is, and there is a tendency to hold a historical perspective of it. There is an apprehension about its inclusion as a result of perceived restrictions on teachers and concerns raised by school senior leaders, moving beyond the scope of

curriculum and policy protection. Finally, curriculum time in RE is limited and cross-curricular links whilst beneficial can be hard to set up and maintain.

Some of these concerns have been addressed, but there is still scope for further research. Professional development of teachers needs to better support their understanding of what far-right extremism is. Teaching of critical thinking skills is a key aspect of RE, but how this can be embedded further to support resilience against radicalisation and being drawn into violent extremism should be considered further. What constitutes a controversial issue and how directive teachers should be in their teaching of certain topics needs further policy development.

5 Discussion

5.1 Research Questions

This research set out to consider how an RE syllabus can meet the moral development of pupils in an area where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism.

5.1.1 Moral Development

This research has shown that RE can have a place in white British working-class boys' moral development. Using the framework for moral development proposed by Hand (2008), It has stated that there should be directive teaching around settled issues. Settled issues are those issues for 'which only one view is rationally defensible' (Hand, 2008, p. 228). It has already been argued that far-right extremism should not be taught as controversial, but settled and morally wrong. This would be further backed up by policies around Prevent and FBV. The type of teaching required will be that of moral formation or directive moral enquiry. The pupils in the research are showing that they wish to debate and discuss, but that they also want support in knowing what is right. This is not the remit of moral formation, but rather moral inquiry which is guided towards a particular outcome. For Hand 'moral standards are justified when their currency in society serves to ameliorate what Copp [2009] calls the "problem of sociality", the ever-present risk in human social groups of breakdowns in cooperation and outbreaks of conflict.' (Hand, 2014, p. 528). For what the pupils are suggesting, directive moral inquiry will give them the opportunity to openly discuss and explore moral issues around extreme right-wing narratives. It also allows them to be guided in understanding why these are wrong and shown how they can lead to community breakdown and conflict. By teachers giving opportunities for directive moral inquiry, they are giving pupils a 'moral homeground' to return to, when considering these issues (Thanissaro, 2010).

The pupil research showed that they wanted to know, in addition to what is right, what is true, as this would support them in making correct decisions. This further indicates a desire for directive teaching. This also links in with the Rochdale locally agreed syllabus' requirement that pupils are given the chance

to respond in real and concrete ways to what they are learning (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019). They should have the opportunity for moral development, and that RE creates a safe place for them to put into practice and learn from their mistakes. From the quantitative data, pupils also had a strong opinion that RE could direct against hate, including hate towards religions, races and associated hate crimes. This again fits in with the locally agreed syllabus aim that pupils should learn to value others (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019). This includes visitors in lessons, which will be discussed in more detail later. Within the research by Taylor et al., (2021) it was mentioned that teachers are concerned about 'getting it wrong', particularly in teaching about race. If pupils are to have the best opportunity to respond in real and concrete ways to issues of hate towards religion and race, teachers will need further support and training to have the confidence to do this. This makes websites like Educate Against Hate vitally important.

For the RE professionals, the focus similarly was on teaching against hate, particularly islamophobia, antisemitism and racism. There was however, an additional element of critical thinking which RE professionals felt would support pupils in understanding and making moral decisions. As has been outlined critical thinking has been identified as a key contributor to building resilience against extremism. This fits in with Barnes' (2011b) view that moral development may not necessarily give pupils the answers but will allow them to 'choose their own morality' (Barnes, 2011b, p. 136). This also allows for the locally agreed syllabus aim that pupils can understand moral diversity (Pett, Stephen et al., 2019). However contrary to Barnes' view, it is not possible to discuss many aspects of far-right extremism and narratives in a way that doesn't give answers, as teachers are accountable for promoting British Values (DfE, 2014b). This links back to Thanissaro's (2010) claim that no education is value free. This will also mean that there needs to be directive teaching against certain aspects of moral diversity meaning that pupils will be led towards a particular morality. This is where curriculum design and development are key as it should allow for the balance of directive moral inquiry. It should also build pupils' skills for times where answers are not always clear, but we would want them to make a moral decision.

5.1.2 The Locally Agreed Syllabus

This research aimed to consider how a locally agreed syllabus could contribute to moral development. The above has reflected on how the moral development aspects of the research fit in with the locally agreed syllabus. One of the key purposes of the locally agreed syllabus is to be responsive to local needs and local demographics. The pupil focus groups did not mention the local very much. For example, the pupils mentioned about visiting places, these were not local, however. There was a suggestion that to learn about different cultures, religions, and communities, they would need to go elsewhere, maybe a holiday. It seemed that pupils were associating visiting places like churches almost as somewhere they would sightsee on holiday. One pupil likened this to him visiting the Tower of London. Pupils were not recognising the 'local', they did not see the religions, cultures and communities in their own school or neighbourhoods. One pupil also mentioned that even if it was a thing to do, teenagers wouldn't do it, though there was some disagreement with this. In this way it can be seen that the locally agreed syllabus is not supporting pupils to understand their local communities.

One of the RE professionals did mention the local and particularly the local in terms of what was taught. It was seen as something necessary given the white working-class demographic nature of the local area, though no detail was given. This suggests that a teacher may see the local impact of what they are teaching, so whilst the locally agreed syllabus was not mentioned, the local impact of the curriculum was identified.

This does however raise questions for the status of the locally agreed syllabus. If a syllabus was fully embedded into a curriculum, it would more likely be mentioned "we teach this, because in the locally agreed syllabus it says this". These types of comments did not happen, suggesting a limited role for the syllabus. This fits in with earlier concerns around the locally agreed syllabus and how much impact they have on a school's curriculum.

In the CORE report there is a changing role for the SACRE which would include local support, there was also the call for 'local RE' to still have a role:

Our consultation highlighted the need for there to be space for the local within RE. The landscape of religious and non-religious worldviews in England is varied, and it is important for children and young people to understand the worldviews of people in their immediate locality as well as nationally and globally significant religious and non-religious worldviews. Thus, the programmes of study will need to include clearly defined space for a local study at each Key Stage.

(CoRE, 2018, p. 40)

This is similar to Geography and History in the national curriculum, which have local studies. From this research, it can be seen that the local does have a role in how RE professionals view the subject, however for the pupils in this study they did not always show an awareness of religion, cultures and communities in their local area. One of the aspects coming out of this research is that if RE is to be responsive to the local area and for this research, the needs of white working-class communities, this needs to be more of a focus of the curriculum. This would then allow a space for the consideration of localised aspects of far-right extremism to be considered and more support for white British working-class boys' moral development.

5.1.3 Influence on Identity

5.1.3.1 Role of Influencers

One of the sub-research questions considered 'What do pupils see as the main influences on their identity?' One of the concerns increasing someone's vulnerability to radicalisation to far-right extremism and hampering moral development, is a lack of identity. The literature review stated that some of this was based on class, working class, and Britishness.

One of academic contributions of this research problematises some of the earlier assertions made by the literature, where there is a focus on a lack of identity leading to a vulnerability to radicalisation. This research shows that pupils do not necessarily feel this way about their identity. Particularly within the pupil focus groups, pupils suggested that they had a strong sense of identity, and that the internet was a main part in this, particularly the role of social media and influencers.

Pupils spoke about how they found people they could identify with online and feel a sense of their own identity as a result. The concern here is that whilst it is common to have role models, for some pupils, they are not actually developing their own sense of identity, but rather conferring someone else's identity onto their own. They are not developing their own values and commitments but instead taking on those of someone else. This is especially concerning with far-right extremist influencers, as their influence could be harmful and have negative associated consequences from identifying with them.

There has been much research globally about the impact of influencers on identity (González-Larrea et al., 2021; Reyero et al., 2021). This includes both online identity and social identity. It also looks at the consumer patterns of influencer followers.

In research by Gonzalez-Larrea et al. (2021). Young people's social vulnerability has been exacerbated by the lack of strength in the institutions that support them for example family, school and politics. They suggest that adolescents have a limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure. They are attracted to the internet due to the quick response, immediate rewards and interactivity. Using discourse identity theory, Gonzalez-Larrea et al. (2021) state that online social learnings and transactions are affecting the construction of the younger generation's identity.

In research by Reyero et al. (2021), Influencers are considered specifically. They are identified as persons who produce online content in social media, gaining followers. It is argued that the number of followers and video views suggest some influence on personality constructions. Using the concept of mimetic, when it comes to adolescent personality, the impact of influencers is greater due to the higher exposition to social media and because adolescents' character and personalities are still developing.

When comparing the impact of influencers on the education of adolescent followers in line with Biesta's 'assessment, socialisation and subjectivation' (Biesta in Reyero et al., 2021), it is shown again that influencers are having a broad impact. They address subjects and matters that students must learn during their schooling (assessment). They popularize activities and challenges

which to be accepted, adolescents must be aware of or participate in for example TikTok dances (socialization). The continual input received from influencers and adolescents' responses to this, means that adolescents embrace patterns and models that they take as their own (subjectivation).

The research highlights that living in this way is frustrating, demanding and wearing, as human relations have dematerialised, and life online is not real life. The suggestion is made that there should be a reduction in or limited use of social media. It recommends recovering face-to-face living and establishing real 'bodily' connections. This fits in with the desire of pupils for real-life experiences, visits, visitors, case studies and narratives.

This suggests a need for a movement away from exploring the identity of white working-class boys as somewhat lacking, but instead towards a focus on where white working-class boys are finding strength in their identity. Where traditional white working-class face-to-face communities may be struggling to uphold identities, it may be that this is now being found online.

5.1.3.2 Heritage and Identity

Another aspect of identity the focus groups raised was the idea of where people are from. RE professionals and pupils here seemed to have differing interpretations of this. Pupils mentioned this in relation to other countries. The pupils suggested that where someone was from could influence their identity. However, the RE professionals mentioned this in relationship to where in this country someone is from. They suggested the inclusion of the far-right being important for a particular area and working-class pupils.

The focus of this research started as having a local focus as it was recognised that far-right extremist groups are often more active in specific areas where people are vulnerable to their narratives, often seen as due to a lack of identity or collective identity. This might include being a part of a 'left behind community' and the white working class. Whilst this research has challenged that assumption, it does not change the targeting of such areas. The RE professionals recognise that the Far Right target some areas more and feel that the curriculum should be flexible enough to address this where necessary. This

is an example of the power within policy enactment that both the pupils (as the ones bringing the necessity of the policy) and the teachers (as the ones implementing the policy) bring to the recontextualization process.

5.1.4 Perceptions of Religions, Cultures and Communities

A further question considered was ‘Where do pupils get their perceptions of religions, cultures and communities?’ A key theme from the coding process was online.

As outlined above, initially, this research was looking at localised permutations of far-right extremism, something which Rochdale has as result of the events outlined previously, such as the so-called child-grooming scandal. However, due to the impact of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, the presence of far-right extremism online became more prominent. This was demonstrated during the pupil feedback which showed a reliance on the internet as a source of information. Pupils said that they were most likely to find out about religions, cultures and communities from online sources. Whilst the online did not feature so prominently during the RE professionals focus groups, this was more to do with the questions in the focus group, than a disagreement over the importance of the online.

The key issue raised by pupils regarding using online sources for information was how reliable they were. Pupils were not naïve and were aware of the risks of online information, but there was an insecurity in how to know what was fake and what was real. This does fit in with the RE professional feedback as there was a need mentioned here for pupils to engage more with critical RE and develop the skills which would allow them to engage more confidently with online material, knowing they had some ability to validate sources or know how to rebut material they disagreed with.

This also fits in with the research about argumentation in RE (Hunting et al., 2024), which shows how the GCSE requirements to formulate an argument can be supported through the use of models, linked to Toulmin’s theory of argument. Pupils in the focus groups mentioned online comments, given on Facebook posts and following newspaper articles. This written ‘debate’ format

could be seen to reflect that created during a GCSE answer, with pupils formulating arguments, giving evidence, acknowledging rebuttals and coming to a conclusion on the validity and persuasiveness of the case put forward. However, within critical RE, pupils could be taught how to identify when people are not formulating arguments well, not using suitable evidence and not challenging rebuttals effectively, increasing their digital literacy.

One of the other key aspects of the research relating to the online threat from far-right extremism was that pupils recognised that they could learn about religions, cultures and communities online. They suggested that sometimes they would encounter stories about these groups on news apps or channels, they could also encounter them while scrolling through social media feeds. Online stories can give pupils a broader understanding of how lived religion manifests and therefore give a more accurate perspective of different religions, cultures and communities that may not be available otherwise. This could support pupils in understanding the variations, personal stories and impacts of religion allowing them the chance to counter the stereotyped view of religion drawn on in far-right extremist narratives. RE lessons again utilising critical RE could draw on this to support learning within the lesson and strengthen the moral development of pupils.

Whilst there has been more of a movement to online radicalisation from far-right extremist groups, this doesn't mean that white British working-class boys are not still vulnerable. Whilst localised street activity is lower, the white working class are still targeted online, so support with online information will support their moral development and build resilience to far-right extremism.

5.1.5 The teaching about far-right extremism in RE

A considerable amount of the data from the research focus groups for both the pupils and the teachers considered whether far-right extremism should be taught about in RE.

One of the key findings from this study is that there is confusion about what is meant by far-right extremism. Some of this comes down to the nature of the far-right itself, as has been considered already. It is flexible, changing, and

made up of different ideas and narratives. This nature, makes it possible that when pupils, RE professionals and researchers are discussing far-right extremism, they could be talking about something different. The example from the results is that for pupil 8 the far-right was seen as a point on the political spectrum, so understood in light of this. For RE professional 9, it was the historical far-right that they were considering. For other RE professionals, it was the far-right in relation to Islamophobia and discrimination more generally which was being considered.

A further reason for this confusion, is that the understanding of the far-right here is being discussed in relation to what is taught about in RE. This may lead participants to view the far-right through the lens of RE. RE professional 9 taking a historical stance on what far-right extremism is, was thinking about the fact that they teach about the Nazis and antisemitism in RE. Another RE professional was thinking about the fact that they teach about prejudice and discrimination in RE. Far-right extremism is therefore fitted in with the existing topics covered. It is not being viewed as a topic in and of its own right. If far-right extremism was taught about as a topic then coverage could be much broader allowing for a better understanding.

The final point is that this research is considering a localised version of the far-right in Rochdale, however, this research has also recognised the considerable change which has happened in recent years where pupils are getting their information from online sources, which means a much broader understanding of what is meant by the far-right is available. However, pupils will still be recontextualising this information to their own lives, schools and communities, retaining a certain level of local input. For example, a pupil reading the same information online in Stoke on Trent may understand it differently from a pupil in Rochdale in relation to their local context.

This means that for the far-right to be included in RE there would need to be support available to teachers to learn about this nature of the far-right. They would need guidance on how to teach it in light of online and localised demonstrations of it and locally agreed syllabuses might need to consider how it best fits with the local area. This will include the vulnerability of white British working-class boys in relevant areas.

Relating to the research question more specifically, for pupils the focus was very much on the political aspects of teaching about far-right extremism and the topics they would learn. For the RE professionals, much of the discussion was based around whether they could teach about far-right extremism. This shows that pupils and teachers are occupying different policy spaces. This illustrates the power relationships discussed within the pedagogic device (Singh et al., 2013), with pupils looking forward to what knowledge they might learn, but teachers feeling constricted in what they might teach.

The introduction outlined some of the key policies relating to this research. When the RE professionals were considering the question of whether far-right extremism should be taught about in schools, there was no mention of the Prevent duty. RE professionals did not state that it should be taught about as a way of building up resilience to radicalisation or that it was part of the role of a teacher to do this. As has been considered, Prevent has caused a variation in response from schools but now it is something that has become embedded in teachers' practice. This may be the reason why it is not mentioned as it is simply something that is done. However, it may also be that teaching about far-right extremism in RE is not flagging up this opportunity for RE professionals.

In the same way, the teaching of fundamental British values is also not explicitly mentioned, so again it may be that it is embedded within the teaching practice in schools, or it may be that it is inferred in the mention of specific British values in this research. For example, RE professionals mention teaching against prejudice and discrimination, both of which come under the value of tolerance and mutual respect. Teachers are not however justifying the inclusion of far-right extremism based on having to teach about the fundamental British values.

Political Impartiality is however mentioned, and this is because it is seen to indicate something which teachers should not do. This research took place shortly after the publication of the document relating to Political impartiality (DfE, 2022), and it received media attention as a result of what was considered controversial content, particularly as it was related to the behaviour of politicians during the COVID pandemic. RE professionals and pupils were aware of this guidance and mentioned it within the focus groups. As has been discussed the guidance does give teachers protection to teach against far-right

extremist narratives. However, the media attention had led to misunderstandings similar to that which was expressed by the pupil- there are certain things which should not be discussed by teachers and politics is one of them. Whilst teachers should remain politically impartial when teaching in the classroom, it does not mean that they cannot speak out against what may be seen as political narratives which contradict the British values discussed previously.

This shows that whilst there are policies which could be seen to imply that far-right extremism should have a place on the curriculum, pupils and RE professionals were not using them to this end. For RE professionals some of this may be related to the weariness of having to justify RE's position on the curriculum by using policies such as these (Mogra, 2022).

5.1.6 Transferable Skills

A further research question was 'To what extent do pupils use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school'. It was highlighted in the discussion of the pupil focus groups that when the researcher questioned pupils particularly about information outside of school, they struggled with answering this question, and often identified how they revised rather than how they used the skills or knowledge in life outside of school. Some suggestions were made and this included films, but they suggested again that they needed help.

This raises two further points, the first is there a disconnect between what pupils learn and use in school and outside of school, and the second who is helping pupils when they are outside of school.

Firstly, In research carried out by Brian A. Burt et al. (2013), looking at the impact of ethics instruction within engineering curricula, it was shown that there was a disconnect with what students were learning in the classroom and their ethical development outside of the classroom. Whilst they engaged with ethical dilemmas as part of the curriculum, it was deemed too 'abstract' with students not being able to take this into the workplace setting.

It was suggested that instead, teaching should use out-of-classroom experiences to support learners in reflecting on ethics. Whilst the out-of-classroom experiences here referred to work experience opportunities linked to the students' degrees, a parallel can be drawn with the findings from this research where pupils want real-life experiences, to hear real stories, engage with people and places. If teachers can bring in pupils' outside experience into the classroom, they may be better able to make the connections themselves away from the classroom.

Secondly, when pupils are away from the support of a teacher, they may still need help in figuring out a moral situation and how to critically evaluate sources they are engaging with. This is where home-school communication may be key. If parents have an awareness of what pupils are learning in school, they may be better able to support them with applying it outside of school. They may also be more aware how to support their children. This is an area requiring further research to build on what schools are doing.

5.1.7 How to teach about far-right extremism in RE?

One of the key findings of this research is that pupils want to learn about political topics and teachers want to teach about political topics. It is clear from the focus groups that pupils want to engage with challenging topics and RE teachers are willing to teach about them. This means that teachers should teach about politics explicitly and in RE, in relation to religious topics as they crossover with politics. The pupils made suggestions of what this can be including laws around gender and marriage, and hate crimes against religious people. This could also include far-right extremist narratives. RE can give pupils the opportunity to discuss the way which religion is presented by far-right groups. Pupils do not want teachers to avoid these issues as they may be too sensitive or controversial.

In the RE professionals focus groups it was clear that teaching this way could be enhanced through critical RE. This will give pupils the opportunity to engage with far-right narratives and understand why they are not acceptable and the

challenges they bring to individuals, communities and wider society. To do this, teachers should use their local knowledge to identify how these narratives may be encountered outside of school and give opportunities to critically reflect on them. This could include using newspaper articles (as was done in the focus group), referencing local situations e.g. the spray painting of a local mosque or discussing comments on online forums. Through directive teaching pupils can be led to an understanding of what is right and wrong in these situations and support their moral development.

Connected to this is the desire to debate. Structured debates allow pupils to engage with a whole variety of topics and can include those involving far-right narratives. An example from the researcher's own experience includes pupils debating whether a mosque should be allowed to sound the call to prayer five times a day. Taking on the characters of different community leaders, pupils can debate this issue. Integrating far-right opinions about this, can allow pupils to engage with this in a real-world way and see the application of what they are learning. Directive moral inquiry is key here to enable pupils to come to a moral conclusion.

In the pupil focus groups, they wanted to meet people, they wanted real-life stories. Pupils can meet those who have been affected by far-right extremist narratives in the area to understand first-hand the impact. Teachers can organise visits to places of worship and discuss that place of worship's role in the community and how this can be challenging. As in the research by Lundie et al. (2022), visits to places of worship when planned carefully can be impactful. Having a focus for visits is far better than a general visit to find out more about the religion. A theme like the role and challenges facing a place of worship in a local community, with a mind to far-right extremism, can offer a meaningful visit for pupils.

If teaching about far-right extremism is framed in this way it can be highly beneficial to white British working-class boys as it will give them opportunities to discuss the political topics which they are interested in. They can engage in debate and critical thinking to challenge their own ideas on the issues. They can meet others and visit places to get a face-to-face experience which they are clearly wanting and needing. These, working together can support their moral

development so that they are able to make informed decisions when encountering far-right extremist narratives.

5.1.8 Using Nominal Group Technique as a Research Method

A further academic and methodological contribution of this work has been the use of the NGT focus groups in order to answer the research questions. There are not many examples of the use of this technique in educational research and less with pupils. This technique, however was adopted as it felt familiar to me as a practitioner researcher. I could see how this technique could work within a classroom-based environment. This familiarity would also lend itself to enabling the pupils to quickly feel comfortable in joining in with the discussion and giving answers which would provide rich data for analysis. The data collection itself was straightforward meaning limited scope for error on the day. The time required to collate the data from the voting, to present back to pupils for the discussion part of the technique, also provided additional opportunity for more casual discussion, improving the quality of the data. Adopting this technique could give researchers of similar topics robust data.

The research also highlighted how this technique could be a useful pedagogic tool for classroom teaching and giving opportunities for the level of debate pupils were requesting within the research data itself. If a teacher was to use this technique to consider similar topics in lesson there would be many benefits. The structured approach meant that all pupils got the chance to contribute. In a classroom this would support teachers in checking for understanding. The requirement to hone your ideas and debate their validity meant that pupils had to really think about what they meant. Such a structure could support pupils in having the opportunities for discussing these big topics such as far-right extremism in a safe and open environment.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Reflection on Research Questions

The key question of this thesis was finding out

To what extent could a locally agreed syllabus meet the moral development needs of white British working-class boys in an area with a high prevalence of far-right extremism?

The main argument forwarded is that RE, through a locally agreed syllabus, has a unique contribution to make to the cross-curricular and whole-school issue of pupils encountering far-right extremist narratives. This is due to RE's role in moral development, the religious focus of far-right narratives and the specialist training of RE teachers. The locally agreed syllabus offers a way to be responsive to localised forms of far-right extremism. In turn, this could help the moral development of white British working-class boys living in an area with a high prevalence of far-right extremism.

The main contributions of this research shall be explored further in this conclusion, including:

- Academic reflections on the make-up of the far right and the impact this can have on pupils within the classroom.
- Academic reflections on pupils' identity development
- A theorising of the role of teacher agency and pupil agency in curriculum development
- A theorising the structure of RE policy development and application through an exploration and adaption of Basil Bernstein's (2000) research
- Pedagogical implications for the classroom, including increased opportunities for moral development through RE, a confidence for teachers to address far right extremism explicitly through classroom Methodological innovations for carrying out classroom research

The dissertation began by showing the rationale for the research, including my own experiences of working in predominantly white British working-class areas

and having pupils question me in RE lessons about far-right extremism. White British working-class boys have been shown to have a vulnerability to radicalisation and therefore demonstrates the relevance and unique contribution of this research. The ethical and logistical difficulties in carrying out research with white British working-class boys has been highlighted with the research questions, therefore taking a broader approach to allow for valuable data to be collected. The research questions were therefore as follows:

- What do pupils see as the main influences on their own identity?
- Where do pupils get their perceptions of religions, cultures, and communities?
- Whether pupils think far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- To what extent do pupils use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school?
- Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

6.1.1 Academic reflections on the make-up of the far right and the impact this can have on pupils within the classroom.

The research gave an assessment of pupils' risk from radicalisation and also the duty schools have to build resilience to radicalisation in pupils. An examination was made of the encounters pupils may have with far-right extremist narratives. One of the key aspects coming from this was understanding what is meant by far-right extremism. This is not an easy task, with the literature review identifying this. The far-right is changing, fragmented and diverse in its ideology/ies (Freedon, 1996). Whilst core concepts exist, the application of

these varies between and even within far-right extremist groups. Individuals encountering the far right online may create a more disparate understanding as they negotiate attitudes on a potentially global scale. The risk from lone actors has been highlighted in relation to this (ISCP, 2022). White British working-class boys are seen to be of particular risk of radicalisation as a result of targeted campaigns by the far-right and feelings around a lack of identity and a sense of being 'left-behind' (Abbas, 2017; Ebner, 2020; Goodwin & Evans, n.d.). This provided a key academic contribution for the research, by drawing together this thinking on the make-up of the far right and connecting it with the situation in school classrooms, education more generally, RE specifically. The research adds to existing knowledge by examining the make-up of the far right through an education lens. It also provides a contextual application of the theoretical understanding of how the far right impacts individuals (particularly white British working-class boys), communities, and society. This increases knowledge about the need to take into consideration localised permutations of far-right groups, and adapting definitions and policies around this. The research location in Rochdale provides a valuable context to this research because of the high prevalence of far-right extremist action in the area and the white working-class demographic of the area. This research has shown the changing nature of the threat from the far right in this area over recent years. This has come as a result of the COVID pandemic which meant that the street-level recruitment focus (e.g. leafletting, marches and violent actions) moved more to the online sphere. A number of local, national and global events have had an impact on the nature of far-right extremism for example the Black Lives Matters campaigns and the spread of misinformation and disinformation following the Southport attack. This has then been encountered by pupils who have to make sense of the information within their own context and understanding, and as has been seen from the results- they want help. This is an important outcome as it demonstrates the necessity of implementing the findings of this research.

Academic reflections on pupils' identity development

Given the nature of far-right recruitment with white British working-class boys and the local context of the research, identity development has been recognised as having a role to play in the risk of radicalisation of this group in particular. The research considered why this is the case, but also suggested from the focus

groups, that pupils generally seemed to perceive themselves as having a strong identity. Their identity however was often linked to that of others for example role models and online influencers. This connects with existing academic research about the role of influencers in the spread of far-right ideologies (ISCP, 2022), but there is limited academic knowledge on how this connects with identity development and a potential increased risk of radicalisation. Supported by research from González-Larrea et al. (2021) this research has begun to contribute to this, by showing how pupils perceive themselves as having strong identities, but that their identity may be influenced by who they follow online. This suggests a need for more understanding of pupils identity development in light of online identity and influencers and a movement away from the assumption of a lack of identity often associated with being a white British working-class boy. It opens up a key avenue for future research, as engagement with these online personalities can have positive effects (inspiring business owners of the future) or negative effects (convincing young adults of the truth of hateful narratives).

Moral development is linked to identity development and this has been considered particularly through the work of Hand (2014), Barnes (2011a) and van der Kooij et al (2015). Hand (2014) offers a framework for moral education which applies particularly well to this research as it clarifies the meaning of controversial issues, frames the teaching of moral issues and offers a role for RE within moral education. It has been shown that moral formation and moral inquiry are both important to building a pupil's resilience to the influence of far-right extremist narratives. Within the unique role of RE however and the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus, directive moral inquiry has a key place. This shows the pedagogical implications of this research, with a renewed call for moral development opportunities in RE, to be a key part of RE teachers' training and continuing professional development. Pupils want to be able to inquire into the issue of far-right extremism; but as a settled issue, they want help to know how to interpret and understand the information they are being presented with in a way which directs them to know why such narratives are morally wrong. Such a finding fits in with Barnes' (2011b) proposal for the 'remoralising of RE', but also builds upon the moral formation work which can be achieved through the worldviews understanding of Religious Education (van

der Kooij et al., 2013). Supporting a pupil's moral development will help white British working-class boys become more resilient to radicalisation from far-right groups.

6.1.2 A theorisation of the role of teacher agency and pupil agency in curriculum development

The nature of RE itself was also considered, with the unique role of the locally agreed syllabus analysed. To support with this, consideration was given to the concept of policy enactment and more specifically recontextualisation. The work of Basil Bernstein is useful for providing a framework for understanding policy enactment, as whilst not a focus of his own work, his structures have been taken and developed to give an understanding of policy enactment by Singh et al. (2013). This is particularly vital as there are several policies which relate to the teaching about far-right extremism. This is alongside the wider policies relating to RE teaching and ultimately for this research the locally agreed syllabus. Little research has considered policy enactment and recontextualisation in the RE context and this research aimed to address some of that gap. To understand how these policies are recontextualised attention was given to teacher agency and how teachers may be agents of change in their own classrooms and beyond. Linking the work of Bernstein (2000) to teacher agency, it has increased knowledge about the opportunities teachers have for responding to the needs of their pupils. An example of this is that the pupils in this research showed a desire to learn about politics, to engage in challenging topics and to have the opportunity to discuss and debate in a safe but open way. When policies, teacher values and teacher confidence come together, this is something that can be met through teacher agency. This highlights both a theoretical and pedagogical contribution of this research.

Many schools adopt the locally agreed syllabus in England. This is compulsory for schools with local authority control, but other schools may adopt a diocesan syllabus or academy syllabus. Within the pupil research, pupils attended an academy which used the locally agreed syllabus for RE. The enactment of these policies is complex and the extent to which they are implemented is varied. This has been something which has changed during the research, with a call becoming more prominent for a national entitlement or curriculum to take the

place of a locally determined curriculum. However, for this research the unique role of the locally agreed syllabus could be seen to lend itself to countering localised variants of far-right extremism, as it could be adapted for the area. This is something which would support the moral development of white British working-class boys in areas where there is a high prevalence of far-right extremism. Maintaining a local element to the teaching of RE would therefore remain vital in the future even if a national approach was adopted.

6.1.3 A theorisation of the structure of RE policy development and application through an exploration and adaption of Basil Bernstein's research

The wider education policies relating to teaching about far-right extremism and those relating to the RE teaching in schools (e.g. guidance for GCSE) provide a context for further understanding how the moral development needs of white British working-class boys can be met. Their recontextualization within the RE classroom was a key aspect for analysis within this research. These policies included Prevent, community cohesion and political impartiality guidance. It was shown that the RE world crosses the usual division of the ORF and the PRF. This brings a unique application of Bernstein's recontextualization in policy enactment and adds to the theoretical contribution of this research. RE teachers can be seen as having more agency than usual for teachers in the PRF as they can be involved in the development of new policies in the ORF (for example being involved in the SACRE). This means there is also less of a gap between the 'imagined teacher' and what actually happens in the classroom, potentially meaning policies can be enacted more in line with what was anticipated. Contrary to this, the lack of a formal ORF in RE means there can be a lack of monitoring of implementation and this means some schools do not follow the syllabus or even have lessons as required in RE. Until this is resolved there may be inconsistencies and variation even within local areas. This would mean that any application of the locally agreed syllabus to meet the needs of white British working-class boys, may not be consistent across areas.

6.1.4 Pedagogical Implications for the Classroom

The empirical research carried out allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the issues, the pedagogic tools which may be utilised to support pupils, and the

existing practice which pupils and RE professionals recognise as necessary. The focus groups with the pupils gave insights to where pupils access information about religions, cultures and communities. It considered what should be taught about in RE, and how school helps pupils make sense of information they are presented with outside of school. There were several findings from this.

The first finding is that pupils want to have directive moral enquiry when considering contentious issues. The recontextualization of policies such as *Political Impartiality in Schools* guidance (DfE, 2022), seems to have made teachers wary of actually telling pupils what is right and what is wrong when it comes to political issues. This was noticed by the pupils, but also commented on later in the RE professional focus groups. A neutral stance is the default position and to expressly state that a behaviour or attitude is wrong can cause concern for teachers. An analysis of this duty and the implementation of Hand's (2008) ideas concerning what is a controversial issue, means that topics such as far-right extremist ideologies can be contested in the classroom. Pupils can have the opportunity to enquire into these attitudes, but teachers can correct and direct pupils towards a particular outcome. This will be vital to supporting white British working-class boys in their moral development where identity and social belonging is not secure.

The locally agreed syllabus for Rochdale gives room for this as shown by the overview of the aims and purposes of RE outlined in the syllabus. This includes valuing others, moral character development and moral diversity. By teaching about far-right extremism in RE lessons, it can give pupils the opportunity to meet and achieve these purposes of RE.

Another key finding is that pupils recognise that RE offers a place for the teaching about far-right extremism. Pupils had a broad idea of what could be covered in RE teaching and much of this reflected issues which were affecting them. Pupils felt that RE was a place to discuss current issues. This was particularly because they saw RE as offering an opportunity to safely discuss these issues through debates and asking questions. The topics discussed showed pupils had a desire to understand more about prejudice and discrimination, mentioning hate crimes, racism and war. Additionally, they wanted a more in-depth understanding of controversial issues such as interfaith marriage, the

treatment of women and racism within religions. This is not 'safe' RE where pupils learn only what and why people hold particular beliefs, but instead the type of RE where pupils grapple with truth claims, analyse and evaluate controversial arguments and try to navigate through issues of meaning and identity. This is the type of RE which will hold its own in debates around the role and purpose of RE and solidifies its place in the curriculum.

The online focus group with the RE professionals focusses more specifically on the teaching about far-right extremism in schools and how this might be done. There were several findings from this. RE professionals found a place for teaching about far-right extremism in RE. They linked far-right extremism with topics of prejudice, discrimination and more specifically Islamophobia and Antisemitism. Cross-curricular connections were made by RE professionals, including with history and PHSCE. For these teachers, the implementation of the policies is done with other subjects in mind. RE does not stand alone in meeting the requirements of the policies and complements the work carried out by other subjects. Working together in this way can offer the best support to white British working-class boys in building resilience to radicalisation.

The unique role of what RE can contribute came to the fore, with RE professionals suggesting that in teaching about far-right extremism, RE becomes a place to give pupils powerful knowledge. Knowledge which builds them up with what they need for the future. With the increased risk from radicalisation by far-right extremist groups, this powerful knowledge is important and a key area that RE can contribute too. Whilst the locally agreed syllabus was not mentioned specifically, educating pupils in line with local needs was, reiterating the role of the curriculum to respond to local need. Something which the locally agreed syllabus is well placed to do.

The RE professionals also agreed with pupils on the role of critical RE. Whilst the pupils referred to it more as the skills of debate, the debate set-up they were suggesting, which encouraged them to view topics from numerous points of view, fits with what the RE professionals were referring to as critical RE. Much of the literature on how to educate pupils about far-right extremism and reduce the risk of radicalisation is based on critical thinking skills (Bonnell et al., 2011; DfE, 2017; Miller, 2013; Taylor et al., 2021). This is one of the key aspects of

many RE lessons with pupils developing skills of reasoning, analysis and evaluation. If pupils, including white British working-class boys, can take these skills and use them with information presented to them about religions, cultures and communities, they will be able to come to reasoned conclusions. Paired with the directive teaching, this could lead to better decisions on moral issues.

The RE professionals focus group drew the research back to the consideration of policy enactment. One of the challenges facing RE teachers is that they may be confident to include such topics as far-right extremism, but may feel that they are not allowed. Some spoke of the role of senior leaders in schools to stop teaching about some topics, or show a preference for what should be included. Others on the other hand talked about adapting the curriculum and being flexible in lessons in order to meet the needs of pupils, including a specific mention of white British working-class boys.

Drawing the findings from both the pupil and the RE professional focus groups together. When it comes to policy enactment, there are clearly concerns amongst RE professionals around time. When it comes to the policies relevant to the teaching about far-right extremism, including Prevent, promoting FFBV and political impartiality there is a fatigue of RE being seen as the place for delivering these aspects, even though the policies themselves might suggest a much more school wide application. The feedback from the RE professionals suggested that teaching about far-right extremism would need to be ‘fitted in or slotted in’. This is very different to the pupils’ view which saw RE as a political subject, where topics such as hate crime, extremism and war were natural aspects of the curriculum. They were topics they wanted to learn about and saw as relevant.

What came through from both focus groups and the wider research was that teaching about far-right extremism has a place in RE, its inclusion would benefit pupils’ moral development and support the prevention of radicalisation and building of resilience to harmful narratives. This is because RE offers a safe space place for critical analysis of related issues. This may include the Islamophobic and Antisemitic narratives, the narratives which challenge freedom of Religion and Belief and also the aspects of far-right extremism which misappropriate religion to further their cause.

6.1.5 Methodological innovations for carrying out classroom research

One of the innovations in this research was the methodology selected for the pupil focus groups. It was felt that pupils should have a voice in the research and should allow for a fair and in-depth analysis of their views to be made. Utilising the NGT method for the pupil focus groups enabled this to happen. The data collected was substantial, giving not only quantitative data through the ranking of the ideas given, but also qualitative data. The qualitative data was collected in different ways, including the structured process but also the 'downtime' while waiting for answers to be collated. The pupils were able to contribute through the structured process giving not only their answers, but building on the answers of others. It enabled all to be able to ask for clarity or question the ideas of others. This ensured that the pupils and the researcher understood the points made. The unstructured discussion allowed for more narrative data to be collected.

As highlighted in the discussion section, methodology would be recommended for future research with pupil focus groups, but also as a classroom pedagogic tool. It could be used to support learners in understanding differing views around an issue and come to a class consensus where necessary.

Additionally, a further innovation in the methodology selected was the triangulation of the pupil data by presenting it to RE professionals. This allowed the data to be analysed in ways not achievable through a coding process alone. Professionals from different aspects of RE education could share their insights about the data and draw out aspects not otherwise considered for example the different ways teachers manage political topics within the classroom. It also highlighted the practicalities of implementing some of the suggestions pupils had for example, increasing the amount of debate in lessons.

6.2 Limitations of the study

There were some limitations of this study. The first phase of this research was based around the case study of a single school. This means that the comparative

analysis has not been made which may be available in a much larger research project. Because of this, it is not known which results are unique to this school and area and which are found elsewhere. Some of this limitation was reduced as a result of the RE professionals focus group taking place at a national RE conference. This meant that the participants were able to reflect on the pupil focus groups results using their experience, and comparisons could be made as a result. For example, one RE professional agreed that in a working-class area, there is a need for teaching about far-right extremism.

Another aspect of this research which limited, but also brought opportunities to the research was the time in which the research took place. When the initial stages of the research were being considered, the country was facing lockdowns as a result of COVID-19. Schools were not operating as usual, and public life had changed incredibly. It was a slow process out of this, which took place in different stages throughout the empirical research. This caused uncertainty as to the format of the research that could take place and had an impact on the data. For example, pupils reflected on how they had not had opportunities for school trips.

The opportunities which arose from COVID-19, however, included better knowledge and understanding and usage of online communication. This was beneficial as there was the opportunity for the RE professionals focus group to take place online which gave access to RE professionals from across the country. Participants had become very used to Zoom and Teams meetings, so this improved the engagement of the participants. Additionally, recording and transcription tools improved considerably during this time, giving ease of access to the research data.

A further limitation of this research was the ability to focus on white British working-class boys. Within the scope of this research, it was not possible to ask a school to select a group of white British working-class boys for a focus group. Pupils are not categorised in this way, and definitions of the working class and how people perceive the working class differ greatly. It would also have been important to have groups without white British working-class boys for comparison. It was instead necessary to focus on pupils more broadly. Pupils had the opportunity to comment on identity and could have spoken about class

identity. They did not. This may show that class identity is a concept that they are not used to engaging with or that the importance within the discussion was not there. Despite this limitation, the rationale for the focus of white British boys is maintained by their increased risk of radicalisation to far-right extremism. The discussions in this research around teaching about far-right extremism in RE are based on what is possible in RE lessons for all pupils, with the benefits being for all pupils, including white British working-class boys.

Finally, as has been considered at several points in this thesis, the changing nature of the far-right has been prevalent throughout the research. When the research started, far-right extremism was an emerging threat. It is now unfortunately a primary terror risk in England. This has led to a fast-paced change in policy, knowledge and strategies for countering far-right narratives. This research can only give a tiny snapshot of what is now a global issue. It does however outline the unique role RE can play, a subject studied by children across England showing the larger scale impact potential of this research.

6.3 Recent developments

As has been highlighted throughout this research, RE is in a unique position of having a locally agreed syllabus determining the curriculum. An exploration of this using Basil Bernstein's policy enactment (2000) has been given and the unique benefits and challenges shown. However, since November 2025, a move towards a national curriculum is being considered by the DfE, as a result of a Curriculum and Assessment review (DfE, 2025a) which recommended RE becoming part of the national curriculum. An independent task and finish group has been formed considering how the subject would be taught in the new curriculum, trying to develop a consensus across the RE community. For this thesis it is hoped that part of the rationale of RE will reaffirm that it can support pupils in countering stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination and can support them in being respectful and informed citizens, critically analysing worldviews presented to them. The aims and content of the curriculum would therefore support pupils in this, allowing many of the findings from this research to be implemented, giving or reinforcing a place within RE for directive moral inquiry into far-right extremist narratives.

This research has however, shown the benefits for RE of a policy system which allows a blurring of the ORF and a role for teachers in influencing policymaking and enactment. One of the key aspects of this, is the SACRE, which teachers can be a part of, therefore giving them a role in influencing the shape of RE in their RE. The SACRE can also take into consideration local need and build in support and through syllabus writing, curriculum content to ensuring issues like far right extremism can be included. A recent government report however seems to protect the role of SACREs (MHCLG, n.d.) and therefore gives reassurance that the advantages for RE outlined above could be retained. This fits with a visioning article by Smalley (2023) which considers what might happen to SACREs as an outcome of academisation, and whilst some of it is not applicable here, it looks at what function a [regional] SACRE equivalent may play when the role of providing a locally agreed syllabus is taken away. Part of this includes monitoring the provision and quality of teaching about RE, provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE (including methods of teaching, materials), how to interpret national standards (in the future case maybe a national curriculum) and give a broad and balanced curriculum, support for the networking of teachers and the monitoring and assurance that local religious speakers and visits to places of worship are encouraging the development of religious literacy (objectively, critically and pluralistically)(Smalley, 2023, p. 437). If SACRE's were able to maintain such a position, it could serve the purposes which bring the advantages outlined in this thesis. It could enable RE to continue to reflect the needs of the local area and for teachers to have a role in the application of the national curriculum to their schools and areas in a way which other curriculum subjects do not have.

6.4 Research Significance and Future Opportunities

This research is significant for a number of reasons. The first is that resources for including about far-right extremism need identifying, quality assuring and evaluating. When this research began in 2020, there were limited resources available for teachers, meaning new materials to use for teaching would need to be designed. However, in recent years, as the awareness of the issue of far-right

extremism has increased and come to the fore, more materials have become available. Websites like Educate Against Hate are particularly useful. How teachers use these- select the materials and implement them in the classroom and the impact of this, would be a key area of research and leads on to a potential follow-up project for this research.

A third phase of this research could be carried out, using the data from the pupil and RE professionals' focus groups. Due to the need to meet ethical procedures demanding more time, and the impact of staffing issues within RE in the local area, this stage did not take place as part of this research. This phase, however could draw on a community of practice to explore together the results from the initial phases of research. A suitable methodology, would be to use action research cycles to consider how these findings could be implemented within RE policy, RE curricula and classroom practice. It could also have a wider impact on guidance concerning the teaching about far-right extremism in schools more generally. There would be benefits to this phase taking place as it would give an insight into how teachers select from materials available online and implement them in the classroom, allowing curriculum developers, SACRE groups and wider RE bodies to consider how best to develop materials for the future and particularly around this topic. The research also argues for a key role for RE in moral development. RE teachers would need training in this 'remoralising of RE' in line with the framework forwarded by Hand (2014), but also in light of the work by van der Kooij et al. (2013, 2015, 2017) due to the movement of RE towards a Religion and Worldviews framing. Through the moral framework of Hand (2014), teachers need to be able to identify how to bring about moral inquiry and moral formation in lessons. They need to be able to recognise what are settled and what are controversial issues and how to adapt teaching to meet this. They need to feel confident to give directive teaching on settled moral issues, including teaching against far-right extremist narratives. Senior leaders also need training in this, to ensure they can champion this sort of RE, rather than discouraging the discussion of some issues. It is notable that this also brings benefits with the current Ofsted focus on personal development (Gray, 2024).

This research also identifies a continuing role for local RE in responding to local need. This is particularly important for meeting the moral development of white British working-class boys. Whilst far-right extremism is not just a localised

issue, this research suggests that pupils are carrying out their own process of recontextualisation based on the information they are acquiring online, into their local context. RE teachers would need to be aware of this when tackling issues like far-right extremism, as what pupils are encountering may not be from the local area, especially if seen online, but is still being understood through the local context. Further academic research would be needed into the role of far right online influencers in the identify development of white British working-class boys.

RE professionals also identified this local need, recognising that white working-class areas have a particular need for learning about far-right extremism due to the higher risk of radicalisation. A locally agreed syllabus has this potential already as part of its remit, if there was a move from locally determined RE, then any national RE syllabus would therefore need to have flexibility built in to allow RE teachers to respond to local need. This should include the use of visits and visitors to bring pupils real-life experiences, but also an awareness of their local communities.

When it comes to the delivery of teaching about far-right extremism, beginning teachers need to continue to be taught how to develop the RE classroom as a safe space for discussion and debate. Critical RE needs to be a central aspect of training, with teachers learning how to engage pupils in debates, how to manage controversial and political issues in the classroom and how to allow pupils to engage in moral inquiry around such topics. Teachers also need to be aware of their role in moral formation. Specialist teachers are essential to this type of RE to ensure that pupils are receiving expert support and can develop these critical thinking skills in the best way. The recruitment and retention of RE teachers must be addressed to ensure this is achievable.

RE teachers also need ongoing training around the changing nature of the far-right, their role in contributing to digital literacy and digital citizenship, and an awareness of the protections given in the various policy documents for countering extremist attitudes in an explicit and directive way.

Finally, pupils and particularly white British working-class boys, need to be encouraged, motivated and engaged in school with these difficult topics. Pupils

in the focus groups showed a determination that they should study a challenging curriculum. They want political, they want controversial and most of all they want support. Pupils see schools as a valuable place for engaging with key issues. They feel that these opportunities are not always available. Pupils are living in a world where they are struggling to know what is true, they want real-life experiences, and they want support in knowing what is right. RE teachers are well placed to do this and in taking up this need, can help develop white British working-class pupils' morality, support them in their identity development, contribute to their sense of belonging and ultimately build resilience to radicalisation and help prevent violent extremism.

Appendices

Appendix A- Newspaper Headlines

Muslim leaders warn of far right exploitation of Rochdale child sex case
Muslim groups report upsurge in hate mail and abusive phone calls since conviction of nine men over child sex ring.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/may/11/far-right-rochdale-sex-case>

New church opens in Rochdale town centre in building formerly used as restaurant and nightclub

Date published: 25 June 2021

<https://www.rochdaleonline.co.uk/news-features/2/news-headlines/141622/new-church-opens-in-rochdale-town-centre-in-building-formerly-used-as-restaurant-and-nightclub>

Paul Pogba discusses the impact of fasting during Ramadan on Manchester United preparations

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/pogba-ramadan-manchester-united-preparation-20462732>

Religious and race hate crime rise by nearly a third in Greater Manchester

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/manchester-race-religious-hate-crime-10849104>

Andy Burnham: I'd force faith schools to teach about gay relationships

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/andy-burnham-faith-schools-gay-9536682>

Inside Greater Manchester's new Hindu temple built after years of hard work from volunteers

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/inside-greater-manchesters-new-hindu-21913272>

Mosque attacked by arsonists in Oldham in suspected revenge attack for Manchester bombing

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/oldham-mosque-attack-manchester-bombing-arson-revenge-suspected-police-a7751866.html>

Worshippers left shaken after Jewish service on Zoom was ambushed with swastikas and 'awful racist images'

Manchester Reform Synagogue's service, which was being held over Zoom, was hijacked on Friday evening

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/worshippers-left-shaken-after-jewish-21955778>

A new hope for the endangered Greater Manchester masterpiece that celebrates the true meaning of Easter

"The figure of Christ is so powerful, poignant, and distressing."

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/new-hope-endangered-greater-manchester-20297210>

Rochdale: where every 200th person is an asylum seeker

The north-west town has a higher concentration of asylum seekers than anywhere in England. Locals have been both generous and furious

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/rochdale-town-conflicted-large-asylum-seeker-population>

'Morning-after pill? It's against my religion'

A MUSLIM pharmacist told a couple he couldn't give them emergency contraception because it was against his religious beliefs.

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/morning-after-pill-its-against-my-religion-954570>

Religions come together for peace walk after suspected mosque arson attack

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/religions-come-together-peace-walk-13368308>

Appendix B- NGT Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Makeup

Focus Groups will be made up of 2 pupils from each year group years 8-11, ideally this will be a boy and a girl, but this may not be possible with availability of pupils and consent.

This research does not include year 7 pupils as they have not had a full year of RE teaching on which to base their experience and answers. They have also not had a full year of Life Ed. Lessons to have enough understanding of the more sensitive topics covered (e.g. grooming) or the support available in school for discussing issues arising as a result of these topics (e.g. learning mentors, counsellors etc).

Focus Group Questions:

Focus Group 1

Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities?

What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?

Focus Group 2

Which topics should be taught about in RE lessons? (Use of newspaper headline prompts to generate ideas)

How could school better help you make sense of the information presented to you about religions, cultures, and communities?

Focus Group Structure

Introduction to the Focus Group including reminders of the right to withdraw, availability of the link teacher, wider school support and an overview of the process.

Stage 1- Silent brainstorm of answers to questions on paper

Stage 2- round robin sharing of individual ideas until there are no more unique ideas.

Stage 3- Discussion of the inclusion of each of the ideas, amending the wording or removing the idea if required by a consensus of the group.

Stage 4- Ranking of the list of ideas 5-1

Stage 5- Revealing of the groups top 5 and discussion of why each of these ideas has been listed as the top 5 and participants thoughts on the final list. This is a freer discussion and will be supported by these questions if required: Why do you think this selection was chosen? Why do you think xx topic was not included? Why do you think xx was included? Do you think this selection is representative of pupils in this school?

Appendix C- NGT Focus Group Participant



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet for Parents

Identity and Influence: Pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study which I am carrying out in school as part of a PhD course with the University of Glasgow forming part of a larger project. Before you decide whether your child should take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me at the school, if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether you wish your child to take part.

The purpose of this part of the study, is to find out pupils' views on aspects relating to the teaching about far-right extremism in school and particularly within Religious Education (RE) lessons. Topics which will be discussed include influences on identity, understanding of religions, cultures and communities, extremism including far-right extremism, religious discrimination and LGBTQ+ issues. This will also include the use of some newspaper headlines relating to these topics.

Some of these topics may be upsetting for your child, if they do become upset then they will be able to leave the focus group for a period of time or withdraw completely. There will also be a link teacher aside from myself for them to speak to, or they may speak to another member of staff of their choice, if they prefer. Pupils can also seek support from external agencies using the links on our website <https://www.middtech.com/wellbeing.html>

Participants will be asked to take part in a one of the two focus group interviews being carried out, which will last up to two hours and will involve discussions around brainstormed ideas in response to two research questions. The first set of research questions will deal with issues of identity and access to information on religions, cultures and communities. The second set of questions will look at

which topics should be taught in RS and whether school helps pupils make sense of information they are presented about religions, cultures and communities. The focus group discussions will be recorded as an audio file and stored on the university's cloud storage provided by Microsoft One Drive for Business. Covid procedures in place in school at the time of the focus groups will be fully adhered to.

Participants can withdraw from the study up to a month after the focus group has taken place, no information that has been provided will be used and no explanation will be required.

Information from this research will be stored securely and participant's personal information will be anonymised numerically to ensure confidentiality. Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this. Please also note that confidentiality of answers may not be guaranteed; due to the limited size of the participant sample, with other participants being aware of what each said.

The data collected will be used for my university thesis, but may also be used for the production of conference papers, presentations and journal articles. Once the study has finished the research data will be stored securely in line with the University's data management policies for ten years and may be reused in the future, with anonymised data sets being made available to all through a public repository. I will share a summary of the research with you and your child.

This PhD study has been partly funded by the Culham St Gabriel's Trust and has received full agreement from the school to be carried out.

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Further information about the study can be requested from myself Mrs Fay Lowe (F.Lowe.1@research.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr David Lundie (David.Lundie@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thank you for reading this.

_____End of Participant Information
Sheet_____

Appendix D- NGT Focus Group Child Plain Language Information Sheet



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Plain Language Statement for Pupils

Title of project and researcher details

Title: Identity and Influences: pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons.

Researcher: Mrs Fay Lowe

Supervisor: Dr David Lundie

Course: PhD Education (Interdisciplinary)

You are being invited to take part in a research project into your views on what you learn about in Religious Studies. A research project is a way to learn more about something. You are being asked to take part because I want to hear what pupils think about these topics.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others and your parents/carers if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that

is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What will happen if you take part

The purpose of this study is to find out your views on what you are taught in Religious Studies, including aspects relating to learning about far-right extremism in lessons. It will also consider how what you learn in school helps you understand information you encounter outside of school. Some of the topics which we may discuss include what influences your identity, your understanding of religions cultures and communities, extremism including far-right extremism, religious discrimination, and LGBTQ+ issues. This will include looking at some newspaper headlines relating to these areas.

Some of these topics you may find upsetting. If needed, you may leave the focus group for a period of time or withdraw completely. You will be able to speak to a member of staff about the focus group discussions if you would like to. You can also access external support if you'd like to speak to someone outside of school by using the links on the school website <https://www.middtech.com/wellbeing.html>

If you decide to take part, you will join a group of other pupils in one of the school's classrooms. You will take part in a focus group with some brainstorming activities and discussion to allow me to hear what you think about two different questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to. This will take about two hours. I will record your answers on a voice recorder so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what you said. We will follow the Covid procedures in place in school, when the focus groups are carried out.

You do not have to take part in this study, and if you decide not to, it won't affect your Religious Studies lessons, grades or school life in anyway. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind, just let me know within a month after the focus group and I will not use any information you have given me. You can also choose to leave without explanation needed.

Keeping information confidential

I will keep the information from the focus group in the university's cloud storage provided by Office 365 for business.

When I write about what I have found out, your name will not be mentioned. I will use numbers to identify the different participants, and no-one will know which number is yours.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to tell other people who need to know about this. You also need to be aware that others in the group may recall what you said, so they may be able to identify you in my university work.

The results of this study

When I have gathered all of the information from everyone who is taking part, I will write about what I have learned in a thesis, which is a long essay, which I have to complete for the course I am studying on. This will be read and marked by my teachers at university.

I will tell you and the other pupils who have taken part what I have found out about your thoughts on what you learn in Religious Studies lessons. My notes and recordings may be used in the future as part of other research.

Review of the study

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

Contact for further Information

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, Mrs Lowe
(f.lowe.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

or my supervisor, Dr David Lundie (David.Lundie@glasgow.ac.uk)

or the Ethics Officer for the College of Social Sciences at
Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this.

End _____

Appendix E- NGT Focus Group Consent Form



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: Identity and Influence: pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons

Name of Researcher: Mrs Fay Lowe

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data and responses up to a month after the focus group, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my grades arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

- ♦ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- ♦ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

- ♦ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.
- ♦ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- ♦ I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.
- ♦ I understand that other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to the focus groups being audio-recorded.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of Parent/guardian

Signature Date

Name of ResearcherSignature

Date

Appendix F- Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: Identity and Influence: pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project: Identity and Influence: pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and age in order to conduct our research. We need this information to conduct the focus group and ensure there is a spread of participants from different school year groups in each group.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and will de-identify your personal data from the research data (your answers given during the focus group, for example) through using number allocation instead of your name.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this. Please also note that confidentiality of answers may not be guaranteed; due to the limited size of the participant sample. Please see accompanying **Participant Information Sheet**,

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by: Mrs Fay Lowe. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe including pseudonymisation, secure storage, and, encryption of files and devices

where necessary. Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompanies this notice.

We will provide you with a summary of the study findings. Details of any subsequent publications or outputs can be shared on request.

What are your rights?*

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](#).

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval (September 2025). After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____

Appendix G- NGT Focus Group Ethical Approval

25 February 2022

Dear Fay Lowe

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: Identity and Influence: pupils' reflections on the content of Religious Studies lessons

Application No: 400210105

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 25/02/2022
- Project end date: 01/09/2025
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.

- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research:

(https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)

- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan A. Batchelor

College Ethics Lead

Appendix H- Coding Framework Example

Questions	Codes	Source	Definition	Potential example from reflexive writing
What do pupils see as the main influences on their identity?	Identified as positive		Pupils see it as a positive influence on identity	My football club is great for letting you be yourself
	Identified as negative		Pupils see it as a negative influence on identity	You don't want to be influenced by stuff on TikTok
	Cross over with far-right	(Goodwin & Evans, n.d.)	Identity influence something targeted by far right	
	Local area	reflexive writing	Something associated with the local area	It rains all the time around here , that's bound to make you a miserable person
	unique to area	(Bright, 2011)	Something unique about the local area	Springvale
	family		Identity influence by family	
	lack of identity	(Stahl, 2015)	Pupils suggest that some people lack identity	A lot of people in my year don't know who they are
	weak identity		Pupils suggest that some people are unsure or don't know what influences their identity	
	strong identity		Pupils suggest that something is core or central to a person's identity	I wouldn't be who I was without my Gran
	School based	(OFSTED, 2008)	identity influenced by something school based	Being a Music Leader gives me identity
	Home based		identity influenced by something home based	How I was brought up gives me identity
	internet based	(Johnson, 2019)	identity influenced by something internet based	
	friends		identity influenced by friends	
	Gender	(Burke, 2006)	identity influenced by gender	
	Being like someone	Focus Group	identify influenced by trying to be like someone	
	pressure	Focus Group	identity formed through pressure	

	celebrity	Focus Group	identity influenced by celebrity role models	
	wider family	Focus Group	identity influenced by family members outside of your household	



College of Social
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Appendix I- Hot Topic Discussion Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Identity and Influence: Hot Topic Discussion

At the REXChange conference you have expressed an interest in taking part in the Identity and Influence: Hot Topic Discussion. This session will be used as a data collection method for PhD research. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Prior to this session, data has been collected from pupil focus groups considering their views on aspects relating to the teaching about far-right extremism in school and particularly within Religious Education (RE) lessons. This session will present the analysis of this data and allow time for discussion of how the Religion and Worldviews community may respond to it; this will include discussion of whether and how the subject might teach about far-right extremism in lessons.

This is a 40-minute session, 10 minutes will be given for the researcher to present the findings and 30 minutes will be given to discussion. This will be a semi structured discussion with the researcher prompting with questions and moving the conversation on, in order to stay relevant to the research questions. Your contributions to this discussion can be both verbal and written as part of the zoom meetings' 'chat function'. The discussion and chat will be recorded by

Culham St Gabriel's and made available to the researcher after the event. This video will not be made publicly available as with other sessions from the event. This video will be stored and transcribed by the researcher and stored on the university's cloud storage provided by Microsoft One Drive for Business.

Participation is voluntary. Participants will need to give written and verbal consent to take part. During the conference a list of those who have consented will be shared with Culham St Gabriel's Trust to ensure all participants in the breakout room have consented. Any who join who have not will be asked to attend an alternative break out room. Following the session, participants can withdraw from the study up to a month after the focus group has taken place, no information that has been provided will be used and no explanation will be required.

Information from this research will be stored securely and participant's personal information will be anonymised numerically to ensure confidentiality. Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this. Please also note that confidentiality of answers may not be guaranteed; due to the limited size of the participant sample, with other participants being aware of what each said. Please also be aware that any participant can save the 'chat' from the session, reducing confidentiality of answers.

The data collected will be used for my university thesis, but may also be used for the production of conference papers, presentations and journal articles. Once the study has finished the research data will be stored securely in line with the University's data management policies for ten years and may be reused in the future, with anonymised data sets being made available to all through a public repository. I will share a summary of the research with you and your child.

This PhD study has been partly funded by the Culham St Gabriel's Trust and has received full agreement from the school to be carried out.

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Susan Bachelor (socsi-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk)

Further information about the study can be requested from myself Mrs Fay Lowe (F.Lowe.1@research.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr David Lundie (David.Lundie@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thank you for reading this

_____End of Participant Information
Sheet_____

Appendix J- Hot Topic Discussion Consent Form



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: Identity and Influence: Hot Topic Discussion

Name of Researcher: Mrs Fay Lowe

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to a month after session, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- ♦ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- ♦ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- ♦ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- ♦ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- ♦ I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.
- ♦ I understand that other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they

agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to the zoom session being recorded and the chat facility comments being retained.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of ResearcherSignature

Date

Appendix K- Hot Topic Discussion Ethical Approval

16 September 2022

Dear Fay Lowe,

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: Identity and Influence: Hot topic Discussion

Application No: 400210262

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 08/10/2022
- Project end date: 01/10/2025
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research:
(https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)

- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan A. Batchelor

College Ethics Lead

Appendix J- PPT from Hot Topic Discussion

Fact Finding Research Questions:

- What do pupils see as the main influences on their own identity?
- Where do pupils get their perceptions of other religions, cultures, and communities?
- Whether pupils think far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?
- To what extent do pupils use what they learn in school to help them make sense of information they encounter outside of school?



Hot Topic Discussion:

- **Identity and influence, Pupils' reflections on the content of RE lessons**
- Should and how do we teach about far-right extremism?

Fact Finding Research- Pupil Focus Groups

Schools can build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by providing them with knowledge and skills to challenge extremist views

What do pupils have to say about this?



Department
for Education



CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

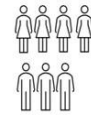
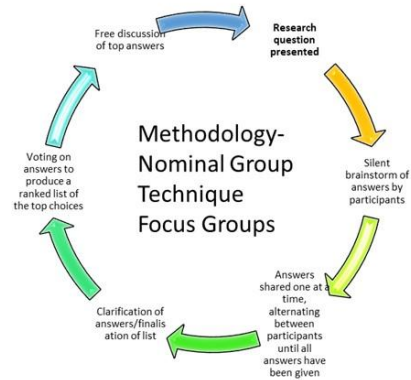
Background to the research

- Far right extremism has been brought up by pupils in the RE classroom in my school.
- Pupils show an awareness of far-right themes e.g. antisemitism, islamophobia, issues of immigration
- As a school with majority white working class pupils there is an increased risk of pupils (particularly boys) being recruited to far-right groups.
- Far-right extremist groups are frequently using religious themes to drive their recruitment.
- Far-right extremist groups active in the area are using local themes to drive recruitment e.g. grooming scandals, Manchester arena attack, murder of Lee Rigby (who grew up in the area).

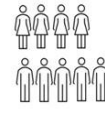


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Methodology



Focus Group 1
 2 Year 8 pupils
 2 Year 9 pupils
 3 Year 10 pupils
 Qs 1 and 2



Focus Group 2
 1 Year 8 pupils
 2 Year 9 pupils
 3 Year 10 pupils
 3 Year 11 pupils
 Qs 3 and 4



CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

Quantitative Data
 Top 5- Ranking

Q1. Where do people in your year group get their information about religions, cultures and communities?

Religious Studies
 News App
 TV
 Social Media
 Books/Friends from other cultures

Q2. What are the main influences on the identity of people in your year group?

Influencers
 Social Media/People you grow up with
 Actions of others
 Country they are from

Q3. Which topics should be taught about in RE lessons?

Politics and war
 Religion and Violence
 Politics in general
 Hate crime
 Hate towards races

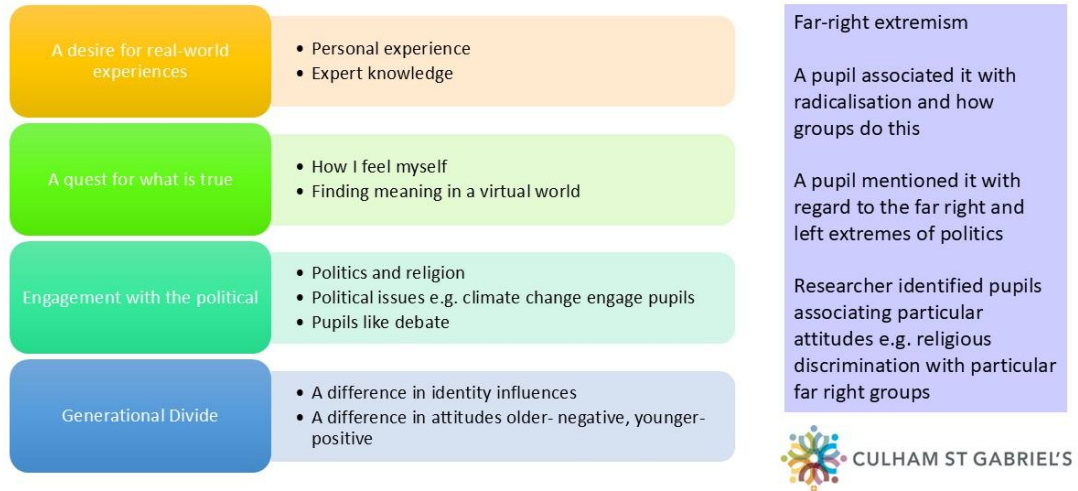
Q4. How could school better help you to make sense of information presented to you about religions, cultures and communities

Visitors
 Visiting places
 Real life examples/case studies
 Debates
 Watching movies



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Themes from Qualitative Data Analysis



Questions for discussion

Whether the RE community thinks far-right extremism should be taught about explicitly/ and in RE?

How far-right extremism might be taught within the RE curriculum/ in lessons?

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