

# Jehovah's Witnesses:

## inclusion and investigation



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Mount Pleasant Primary School, Clayton le Moors, Lancashire, is a successful primary school in an industrial town. As with many schools in the country, it strives to do its best for the pupils and community. However, this is a school with vision, led by a headteacher who passionately believes in valuing the individual and representing the faiths within her school.

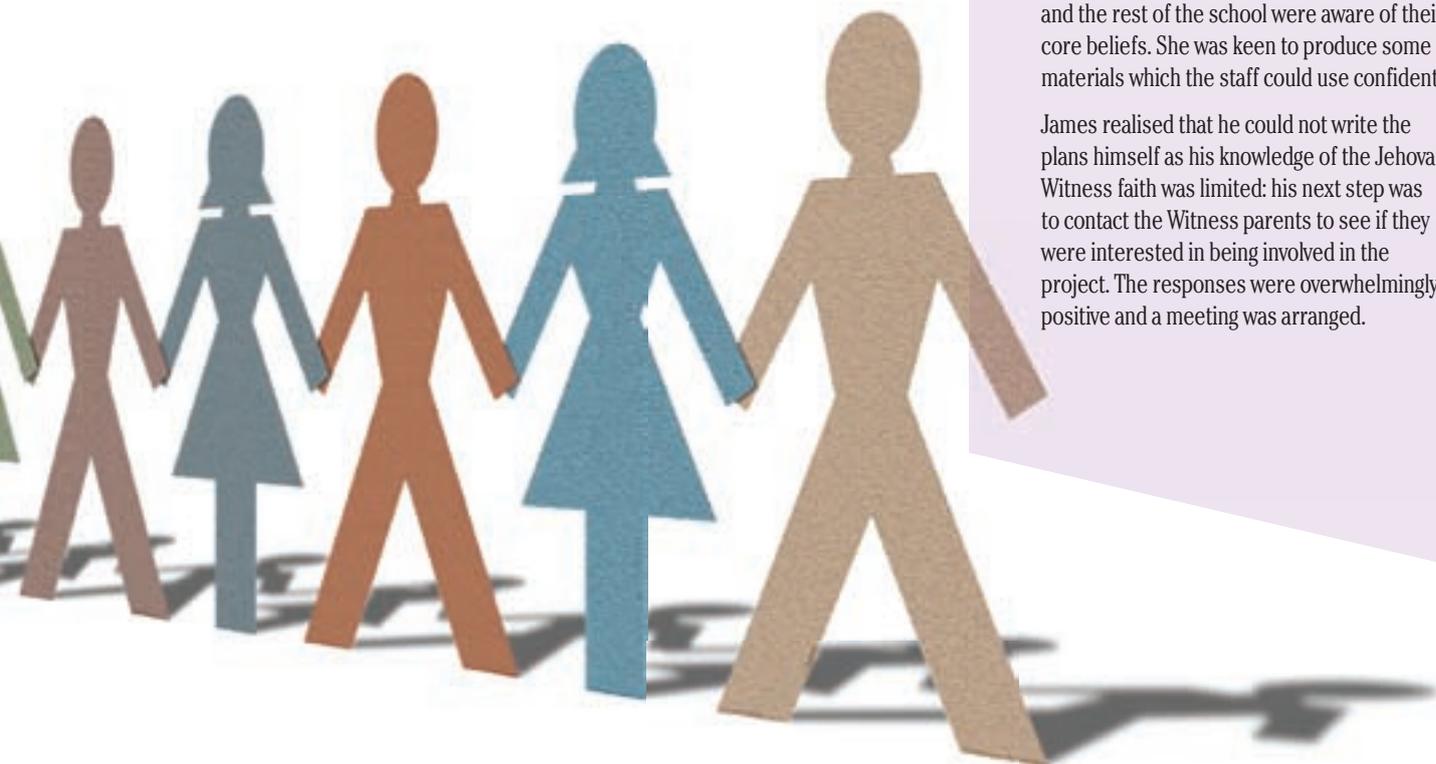
Anne Duke saw a gap in the RE provision and, along with her RE Subject Leader, James Richardson, was eager to make sure the children understood each other more. They then embarked on a project which would lead to writing and delivering investigations about the Jehovah's Witness faith.

There are currently five Witness families in the school which makes it the second largest religion in Mount Pleasant. Anne feels strongly that the school is doing something positive for its children and their future:

***My motivation was that of inclusivity. I want all our pupils to gain knowledge and understanding from receiving education in their RE lessons on other religions including Jehovah's Witness beliefs.***

Her idea was to build the Jehovah's Witness faith into the RE planning for the school, making sure that the Jehovah's Witness children felt valued and the rest of the school were aware of their core beliefs. She was keen to produce some materials which the staff could use confidently.

James realised that he could not write the plans himself as his knowledge of the Jehovah's Witness faith was limited: his next step was to contact the Witness parents to see if they were interested in being involved in the project. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and a meeting was arranged.



What followed was enjoyable and enlightening. The atmosphere in the room was one of openness and trying to do the best for the children of Mount Pleasant. Stereotypes were shattered and new knowledge was discovered.

Initially they looked at what RE was currently done in the school and the method of planning and delivery. This was of particular interest to the parents as they were unaware of just *how* RE is taught. Lancashire follows an enquiry model which encourages children to search for their own answers to life's big questions.

There are four elements which needed to be addressed for the plans to fit in with the Lancashire Agreed Syllabus: this is referred to as The Field of Enquiry. At the start of an investigation there has to be a 'Shared Human Experience', something which all children everywhere share and can relate to. Then just one 'Belief or Value' is identified and a 'Living Religious Tradition', which demonstrates that belief today, is found. Finally children are given the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt and for their own opinions about it: this is the 'Search for Personal Meaning' section.

The parents were happy with this enquiry approach as they felt it was in line with the way their own faith was taught. One of them said:

***Prior to the meeting, and a subsequent one held some weeks later, we knew that our children were learning about the beliefs of mainstream religions, but didn't know about the new curriculum for RE. We found the enquiry-based approach interesting as it encourages the children to think about underlying principles.***

Once everyone was familiar with how Lancashire RE is planned, they moved on to the actual plans which were going to be delivered in school.

The parents were given the chance to choose which of their core beliefs they wanted taught and which misconceptions they wanted correcting. With the beliefs decided upon, the main questions for the investigations were chosen. The group then found a living religious tradition which showed this belief in action today. These two sections would give the children at Mount Pleasant religious content and something for them to respond to at the end of the investigation.

Here's an example of the planning process:

**Investigation Question:** Should we celebrate special times in our lives?

**Shared Human Experience:** What special times do we celebrate?

**Beliefs and Values:** Some events/ occasions are pleasing to God.

**Living Religious Tradition:** Jehovah's Witness conventions which are held three times a year.

**Search for Personal Meaning:** What celebrations do I think should/ should not be celebrated and why?

Once the grids had been written, the families then started to gather information to pass onto the school. This was often a family affair, giving children ownership of their own and their friends' learning. One of the parents reported: 'In some cases, some of the children were able to contribute to the composition of the grids/information sheets. This meant that couples and families were able to work on these projects together.'

The parents were clear that the information had to be written for an audience that had very little knowledge of their faith. What they wrote was clear, easy to follow and full of weblinks which teachers could research before lessons and was really appreciated.

The impact of this project has already been wide reaching but as yet cannot be fully measured. It seems that learning has happened in every corner. Teachers have learnt from parents, parents from teachers, teachers from children, children from children, and it shows no sign of slowing down. James feels he has 'gained a better understanding of the Jehovah's Witness faith during this process which has allowed me to open up the lines of communication with the Jehovah's Witness pupils in school'.

Most importantly, it has had a positive effect on the Witness children's lives in the school. They feel more accepted, valued and able to talk about their faith openly. Staff also now have a greater understanding of why Witness children cannot be involved in certain activities. One of the parents said that of his faith's beliefs and teachings: 'For children to gain an insight into the Scriptural basis for these would promote understanding and greater tolerance of our beliefs.'

Communication has become more open and flowed between the school and parents. James, the subject leader, claims that the parents 'have been incredibly open, helpful and supportive throughout the whole project'.

Mrs Duke is very optimistic about the new RE plan and she anticipates 'a very positive response from everyone involved in our school community'. The investigations are being put into practice as we speak and will be rolled out to the whole school in September. There will be one Jehovah's Witness investigation done in each year group.

It would be hard not to enthuse over the work done at Mount Pleasant. It is uplifting to see all parties working together for the good of the children and the wider community. With such attitudes the sky is the limit for the future of the town of Clayton le Moors.

**Jo Crabtree**, NATRE Executive Member and teacher of RE

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