Evaluation of Prayer Spaces in Schools

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The Contribution of Prayer Spaces to Spiritual Development

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Executive Summary

	Findings		Recommendations
F1	The findings can be regarded reasonably generalisable for English schools (i.e. applicable to schools in general, and not just to the schools participating in the research), as a large quantity of data was collected from a wide range of pupils and adults, with the range broadly reflecting the wider population and the range of schools. (See especially p 6, p 43.)	R1	Further research might be carried out in other jurisdictions in the UK and internationally, to see if prayer spaces have the same roles in other countries.
		R2	Further research might be carried out (in England and/or internationally) on other evaluation criteria – such as the contribution of prayer spaces to learning in religious education, to religious commitment, to the understanding of prayer, or to moral and social education. Of these, we would suggest the priority be moral and social education.
		R3	Evaluation could be built-in to prayer space initiatives.
		R4	We would recommend that schools considering setting up prayer spaces should have a copy of this report made available to them, to inform their decision.
F2	There was generally a very positive response to prayer spaces, although there were many different reasons for valuing the activities. (See p 8-30.)	R5	We would recommend that schools engage either with prayer spaces or with appropriate elements of prayer spaces in order to enhance the spiritual development of their pupils.
		R6	Although prayer spaces were seen as valuable, we do not recommend that they be used to fulfil *all* the school's requirements to develop pupils spiritually (or morally and socially). Prayer spaces might lose some of their value if they were too 'institutionalised'.
F3	In terms of spiritual development, the biggest influence of prayer spaces appeared to be their influence on pupils' relationships with themselves. This was a complex and significant influence, especially with respect to stress, guilt, and becoming a better person.	R7	Schools should consider the potential contribution of prayer spaces (or appropriate elements of prayer spaces) to moral education, as well as to the self-development aspect of spirituality.
		R8	Pedagogy across the curriculum might take account of the value of pupil-directed activities and the

	Findings		Recommendations
	(See p 8-13.)		opportunities for self-reflection evidenced in this report.
		R9	Schools should develop more opportunities for helping reduce pupil stress.
		R10	The opportunities for solitude provided by prayer spaces could be reproduced by schools in other ways.
F4	The second biggest influence of prayer spaces appeared to be their influence on relationships with other people (including with dead people). (See p 14-18.)	R11	Schools should consider the potential contribution of prayer spaces (or appropriate elements of prayer spaces) to social education, as well as to the aspect of spirituality related to other people.
F5	The influence was not just on individual relationships, but on community-building (at local and national and international levels), too.		
F6	Opportunities for pupils' spiritual development in terms of their relationship with the 'world' were also provided by prayer spaces, notably opportunities for considering non-human animals, and for being influenced by material objects (food, stones, bubbles, and so on). (See p 19-24.)	R12	Schools should learn from the educational value of a kinaesthetically-engaged pedagogy, across the curriculum.
F7	Prayer spaces provided distinctive and valued opportunities for pupils to develop their relationship with the sacred and divine, over and above the opportunities provided by collective worship and religious education. (See p 25-30.)	R13	The structure of prayer spaces (involving pupil choice and many individual or paired activities) could be used to develop more effective exploration of the sacred and divine in collective worship and in religious education.
F8	Prayer spaces were valued for their promotion of pupil agency (e.g. pupils choosing how to engage). (See p 30 and throughout.)	R14	The educational value of promoting pupil agency could be exploited across the curriculum.
F9	In various ways, prayer spaces	R15	We would recommend further

	Findings		Recommendations
F10	were valued for being inclusive, notably for recognising and being sensitive to the various religious and non-religious positions of pupils. There remained some aspects of prayer spaces that were, or that were perceived as exclusive, for example in some cases making some pupils feel excluded themselves or as potentially excluding other pupils. (See p 31-35.)		consideration – in training programmes, and in schools hosting prayer spaces – of how inclusive prayer spaces are (and how inclusive they are perceived to be) and the implications of the degree of inclusion. (This even includes the use of the term 'prayer', as noted on p 35 and p 38.)
		R16	Information and consent issues (for pupils and for their parents/carers) might be further considered.
F11	There were interesting findings with respect to the borderline between the sacred and non-sacred, and between the religious and non-religious. (See p 26-30, p 33-35.)	R17	Schools should avoid over-simplified categories with respect to the sacred/non-sacred and religious/non-religious.
F12	Prayer spaces provide a viable complement to collective worship and to religious education in schools. (See p 31-35, p 38-39.)	R18	We would recommend that schools engage either with prayer spaces (or with appropriate elements of prayer spaces) that could complement the engagement in collective worship and religious education of their pupils.

Introduction

it was startling what questions a lot of them came up with
(Adult in a primary school)

The prayer spaces evaluated in this report are temporary events (perhaps for one or two weeks of the school year) set up, typically, in a school classroom, with various activities – mostly led by children and young people – that 'enable children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore … life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way' (https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/). There is 'a range of creative activities that encourage personal reflection on issues such as forgiveness, injustice, thankfulness, big questions, identity and stillness', and the prayer spaces are 'run by a trained team of local Christians from a church or an organisation as a service to the school' (Phil Togwell, personal correspondence 2018) [1]. The activities may include 'prayer walls', 'thankful play dough', 'fizzy forgiveness', 'forgiveness stones', 'letting go', 'name that feeling', 'mirrors', and 'cardboard home' (from the 'top ten' prayer activities, at https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/topten). Such activities have been used in different ways in schools, over many years, and exemplify the history of 'experiential' work in RE (as in Hammond et al 1990) and spiritual development (as in West-Burnham and Huws Jones 2007).

In April 2016, Phil Togwell – who coordinates *Prayer Spaces in Schools* – invited Julian Stern to propose an evaluation project. In June, the proposal was agreed, subject to finance and ethics approval which subsequently came good. Julian appointed Rachael Shillitoe as co-researcher and Natalie Maunder as research assistant. Julian has extensive experience of researching education and religion (e.g. Stern 2007, 2017), spiritual development (e.g. Stern and James 2006, Stern 2009, Stern and Backhouse 2011), and the need for schools to facilitate solitude (e.g. Stern 2014a, b). Rachael has extensive experience of researching school worship (at the University of Worcester), and religious and non-religious childhood (at the University of Kent) (Shillitoe 2017). Natalie has herself completed research in theology and has acted as research assistant to a number of projects in theology and religious studies. A reference group was also created, being independent of the research team and of the *Prayer Spaces in Schools* organisation, to support and advise on the development of the evaluation tools and the process of the evaluation, and to act as a reference group on the evaluation report. Tim Abbott, Olivia Seymour, Jane Whittington, and Lat Blaylock agreed to form the reference group, with Julian Stern and Phil Togwell also attending meetings.

The agreed proposal set out to evaluate the contribution of *Prayer Spaces in Schools* [2]

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[1] Some schools 'take over' the running of prayer spaces from those who originally set them up, once the structures and activities are familiar.
[2] The evaluation was of 'prayer spaces', the facilities in schools that were supported by (not run by) the organisation Prayer Spaces in Schools (http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/). Not all of the facilities contributing to the evaluation were called by the name 'prayer spaces', as other terms such as 'Sanctum'

to the spiritual development of children and young people[3]. Other possible contributions – such as a contribution to learning in religious education, to religious commitment, or to deepening the understanding of prayer – were considered but not taken up for the evaluation, and, given the proposed size and scale of the evaluation, they were not viable additional items for evaluation. (They could be returned to later, of course.) In evaluating the contribution to spiritual development, the approach to spirituality was one described as 'relational', connected to the work of David Hay on 'relational consciousness' (Hay 2007, p 14, and Hay with Nye 2006) and to the advice given by various UK-based curriculum and inspection bodies such as the work on children's 'relationships with one another, with the natural world, and with God' (QCA 2004, p 14) along with '[a]n awareness of oneself' and '[r]ecognising and valuing the worth of each individual' (SCAA 1995, p 3-4). This approach is summarised in a working definition of spiritual development as helping to enhance relationships with (a) the self, (b) with other people, (c) with the world (in constituent parts or as a whole), and, as appropriate, (d) with the sacred and divine (Stern 2009, p 1-21). Where other important issues were raised in the questionnaires or interviews, these would be addressed.

Along with consulting the literature on prayer in school, on education and religion, on spiritual development, and on religion (all of which were already familiar to the researchers), and reviewing the reports already written on *Prayer Spaces in Schools* (mostly dissertations for undergraduate and master's degrees), there were initially two linked research tools:

● One was a questionnaire offered to pupils in all schools involved with *Prayer Spaces in Schools* initiatives during 2016-2017, responded to by 555 pupils aged 7-16. The questionnaire is described in *Appendix 1* of this report, and quantitative analysis is summarised in *Appendix 2* of this report.

● The second research tool was an interview (with the interview schedule in *Appendix 3* of this report). In total, 71 pupils and 15 staff in seven schools were interviewed. There were interviews with six pupils and four staff (two teachers, two teaching assistants) in one primary community school, 31 pupils and three staff (teachers) in three primary schools with religious foundations (six of the pupils were in an independent prep school), 24 pupils and four staff (three teachers, one headteacher) in two secondary community schools, and 10 pupils and four staff (three teachers, one chaplain) in secondary schools with religious foundations (six of the pupils and two teachers were in an independent prep school). Of the pupils interviewed, 32 self-identified as Christian, 39 as either belonging to other religions or non-religious or preferring not to say.

This final report is a development of the interim report from September 2017. The interim report was based on initial analysis of the questionnaires and of transcriptions of some (not all) of the interviews in all of the schools, a total of roughly 64 000 words. The interim report was presented at the two *Prayer Spaces in Schools* conferences in September 2017, and a third research tool in the form of further questionnaires (*Appendix 4* of this report) were presented at those conferences. This final report is based on all the questionnaires (with some quantitative reporting from the pupil questionnaires), and all the interview transcripts, a total of more than 107 000 words.

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were used in certain schools. In this report 'prayer spaces' refers to the facilities in schools, whilst 'Prayer Spaces in Schools' refers to the organisation supporting these facilities.

[3] The children and young people are referred to as 'pupils' throughout this report. Children in primary schools are most often referred to as 'pupils', whilst young people in secondary schools are more often referred to as 'students'. The word 'pupils' is used here (except in quotations), as two-thirds of the respondents were from primary schools.

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Julian and Rachael are both enormously grateful to Phil Togwell and Tandia Hughes of the Prayer Spaces in Schools organisation (who not only commissioned the evaluation but supported the whole research process, and supplied the photographs used to illustrate this report), the advisory group (for their advice), Natalie Maunder (for her assiduous support for the research), and, most of all, all the pupils and adults across all the schools participating in the research.

A: Relationships with the Self

I think it's like a conversation that you're having with yourself because it sort of saying one thing in one half of your mind and you're saying it again in your other half which I quite like
(Pupil)

There was a significant set of responses that described activities which helped pupils to think about themselves. Often, reflection on your own is reflection about other people, but at times it involves a dialogue with yourself. Hannah Arendt describes it well. 'Thinking, existentially speaking, is a solitary but not a lonely business; solitude is that human situation in which I keep myself company' (Arendt 1978, p 185). She continues:

> Nothing perhaps indicates more strongly that man exists *essentially* in the plural than that his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself, which we probably share with the higher animals, into a duality during the thinking activity. It is this *duality* of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who asks and the one who answers. Thinking can become dialectical and critical because it goes through this questioning and answering process. (Arendt 1978, p 185.)

In this way, our self-consciousness becomes more significant when we 'talk with ourselves', deepening our self-understanding. In the questionnaire responses, here are some highlights related to the 'self'.

● There were more pupil responses referring to themselves than to others[4]. Of the four categories used in this report (self, other people, 'the world', and the 'sacred and divine'), 46% of responses refer to the self[5].

● Responding to 'these are the people I met or thought about', 10 pupils (8% of the total responses to this question) referred to themselves (and sometimes other people), saying for example 'I thought about how to be a better person' or 'my worries'.

● 25% of the responses to 'this is what I was thinking about' referred to themselves, along with 22% of responses to 'this is how the conversation went'.

● 'These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas' gained 55% of responses that self-referred, and 37% of positive responses to 'I have changed in these ways' did the same.

● Most significantly, when asked what 'the best thing was' about the prayer space,

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[4] The two researchers checked each other's categorisation of responses, and we are reasonably confident that we could defend the quantities derived from this categorisation. But it is worth saying that categorising responses is not an exact science, as the questionnaires asked open questions. For example, a response like 'my mother loves me' clearly refers to the self and to another person, but 'I am loved', which refers to the self, could also be referring to other people, to non-human animals, and/or to the sacred and divine.

[5] This figure, as with equivalent figures throughout the report, is a percentage of positive responses, ignoring absent or neutral (e.g. 'don't know') or negative (e.g. 'none') responses.

88% of responses referred to the activities that were primarily (if not entirely) self-reflective – of which 21% of the total responses referred to the 'bubbles' activity[6] (by far the most popular), with 5% referring to being quiet, 4% referring to the 'beads' activity and the same proportion referring to the tent.

● On why the best activities were good, 72% referred to themselves, of which 17% of the total responses mentioned 'fun' and the same proportion mentioned being 'relaxing'.

Quantitative breakdown on 'the self'[7]:

Meeting and thinking about people. *These are the people I met or thought about …*	10 (8%)
When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about? *This is what I was thinking about …*	33 (25%)
Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? *This is how the conversation went …*	20 (22%)
Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space? *These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas …*	47 (55%)
Can you describe any other ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space? *I have changed in these ways …*	No or not sure: 57 (39% of all responses); Yes: 37 (42% of positive responses)
There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why? *The best thing was …*	105 (88%) of which bubbles 25 (21%), quiet 6 (5%), beads 5 (4%), tent 5 (4%)
It was good because …	78 (72%) of which 18 (17%) fun, 18 (17%) relaxing
If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even better? *The prayer space could be even better if …*	44 (71%)
Total:	374 (46%)

The pupil quoted at the start of this section described the prayer space as 'like a conversation that you're having with yourself because it – sort of saying one thing in one half of your mind and you're saying it again in your other half which I quite like'. As well as such a 'conversational' form of self-reflection, there is a reflective state of settled 'oneness', described in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions as *enstasy*[8]. (Enstasy is the opposite of ecstasy: withdrawing into yourself, in contrast to going beyond yourself, for which see Stern 2014a.) The whole range of self-reflection was found in the research data.

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[6] Details on this activity online (at https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/resources/39), along with other activities (at https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com).
[7] The complete set of quantitative data is in Appendix 2, below. In this table and all other tables, the first number represents the count of responses in that category, the second number (in parentheses) represents the responses in that category (i.e. self, other people, world, or sacred and divine) as a percentage of responses in all categories.
[8] There are similar ideas in other religious traditions, such as Meister Eckhart's Christian contemplative approach.

Experience of self (Arendt's *consciousness* of self, shared with other animals) was occasionally mentioned. By its nature, this very fundamental 'self-consciousness', which is – in a sense – content-free, would be unlikely to be mentioned often, as respondents attempted to explain their responses more fully.

Pupil: I was feeling like I had some ants in my body and after my body was relaxing and it felt like I was falling but I wasn't.

Adult: Having just a chance to just sit there and reflect your own thoughts and feelings I thought was really good and that's why all these comments have come through it gave them the chance to just be introspective whereas, I don't think they would normally be at home either playing on Xbox, doing homework or doing some form of chores they just don't get much and also it's quite meditative almost essentially it's like a form of meditation which I thought was really good because I'm quite big into meditation and how good it is for your wellbeing just taking ten minutes out of the day to relax and kind of breathe and think about things I think that definitely helped with that

Pupil: we normally went round in pairs or in a group but I think it would be nice if we added an activity where it was just by ourselves and we could just sit and relax

Responses acknowledging a relationship to oneself, a 'self to self' relationship (Arendt's *duality* of the self), was more commonly described.

Pupil: I can't remember what it was called but it had lots of mirrors in, and it was asking us questions about ourselves and what we thought of ourselves. … I think that helped a lot of people, and it helped me because … it made you think of the good things about you. … A lot of the time you think about what's bad about you and what's good about other people, but it helped you think about what is good about yourself.

Pupil: You just sit there and just think. [Interviewer: … When you're thinking … is it a conversation that you're having with yourself, is it just thoughts in your head, or is it – ?] Pupil: I think it's like a conversation that you're having with yourself because it – sort of saying one thing in one half of your mind and you're saying it again in your other half which I quite like. [Interviewer: Sure, and afterwards how do you feel is it?] Pupil: I feel much more relaxed about everything, yes.

Questionnaire responses often referred to this 'self to self' relationship, including in such simple ways as thinking about 'my worries'.

Pupil: Me when I get older

Pupil: what is it laya [like] being a lon

Pupil: I was talking to myself.

Pupil: I was having a conversation in my head about what peace is and what forgiving is all about.

Pupil: I felt like I could question everything

Pupil: I could really think about things whilst being partly occupied with something nice like beads or the wooden balls, I wasn't as distracted as I usually am.

The ways in which prayer spaces can help pupils overcome stress is an important feature, often commented on by adults and pupils. 'Destressing oneself' was a common experience, either referring only to the self, or through other people – such as remembering that your mother loves you.

Adult: Their concerns for GCSEs which when you are dealing with year seven and eight [aged 11-13] … you shouldn't be worrying about your GCSEs but it's obviously something that is already on their mind

Pupil: It's quite stressful school sometimes, so I thought that [the prayer space] was really relaxing and it kind of helped me think about things that are more important than what I have been worrying about and it helped you focus on the right things that I need to do to become like a better person

Pupil: I thout about me setaling in nicely at secondry school.

Pupil: my mum loves me

Pupil: people who help me

Pupil: how lucky I am that I have a loving family and caring friends

Pupil: How he would have loved me f he was alive

Pupil: how I should respect the things I have and not the things i dont have.

Pupil: I said in my head "what a nice Peaceful Place to be in".

Pupil: To let things go and don't cling on to things from the past.

Pupil: That we have so much more than we realise and we just need to reflect on how we need to appreciate how we have things we take for granted that others don't have

Pupil: I felt relaxed and freed because I could let out all my emotions … because … on that day I had a bad day and I felt stressed but when I got to the prayer space I felt my self being calm for once in a while.

Pupil: I felt calm because it was silent.

Pupil: I should not get strested so quickly and relax more

Pupil: I have became less stressed.

Pupil: I have become calmer and lose my temper less.

Pupil: that I feel less stressed from holding the beads.

Pupil: I take things less seriously and stay calm in arguments.

Pupil: I have changed my atachud [attitude] to learning and learnet to calm myself down in school and at home.

Pupil: Not to argue with people Be peaceful Sieze each moment Truthfulness Be more selfless

Pupil: I am now more calm about things.

Pupil: to be relax, calm and think on positive side.

Pupil: being scared to not be scared

Pupil: I gave my fearsaway

Pupil: I felt like I was free to have my say and I wasn't under the pressure I constantly face to be cool and funny

Pupil: it is calming and after you have done it you won't feel stressed

Pupil: It kept me undepressed and calm.

Related to 'destressing' is what might be called 'de-guilting' oneself. That is, forgiving yourself or becoming a better person. Although the contribution of prayer spaces to moral education is not a feature of this evaluation, there is plenty of evidence of such education having taken place. (Research evidence of schooling resulting directly in moral development is rare, so this aspect of the research might be built on in the future.)

Pupil: So there was one … that you got like a tablet and you put in water and it like fizzied fizzed and then it like got rid of all your sins or something but yes. [Interviewer: And why did you like that?] Pupil: Well I don't really know because you just, it's all like the sins like just go away and it's just I don't know it just sort of made me feel lighter because I knew all like my my bad things disappeared like they – not disappeared – like they've gone in that sort of way so yes

Pupil: I thought about how to be a better person.

Pupil: I was thinking about forgiving and telling the truth.

Pupil: How I can be a better person in the future

Pupil: I thought about being sorry to my mum and Dad

Pupil: I was thinking about saying sorry to everyone I might have been disrespectful to.

Pupil: The things I need to say sorry for and regrets.

Pupil: The times i said sorry to people and thinking about all things in life that are hard but can be solved.

Pupil: saying sorry and forgiving someone.

Pupil: I wanted to say sorry to [name] for shouting at her.

Pupil: making peace with everyone

Pupil: I didn't talk I just thought and reflected on lots of the stuff around me and what I could have done better in my busy life

There was some evidence of what might be called simple 'enstasy', the sense of being comfortably alone, without striving for others. It is in some ways like the first category of self-consciousness, but at a higher level, an *achievement* rather than simply being conscious. In the examples given below, one pupil talks of having no thoughts. This might be interpreted negatively (i.e. the experience of the prayer space was wholly insignificant or forgettable), but we have chosen to consider it an example of enstasy, of having 'emptied the mind'.

> Pupil 1: I quite liked when you sat on the sofa and just relaxed and thought about – just – well what's... Pupil 2: nothing. Pupil 1: Yes

> Pupil: I had none because it was my alone time.

> Pupil: I did not have any thoughts or feelings or ideas.

Self-awareness, in its various forms, can – and in this research often did – suggest action beyond the self. These respondents suggest that the self-awareness involved getting ready to do more:

> Adult 1: There were a couple of activities like … the ones where they were supposed to just sit and reflect silently – they found that very difficult. And there … [were] tents where they had to go inside and just sit and be calm and quiet, and of course at that age they just wanted to play … and make up games. … But some of the activities like .. the 'worries' one, and the one where they had to come up with a real big deep question … It was startling what questions a lot of them came up with.
> Adult 2: Yes it does surprise you … for children so young
> Interviewer: What sort of questions?
> Adult 1: Well, questions about God, and existence. Not everyone: there were some questions there that were quite trivial. … But there were some very deep questions … [such as] 'why does God let this happen?'

Such deep questions, with implications as to relationships – in this case with God – were also described by pupils.

> Pupil: How I could do things differently and how I could do things that help other people

> Pupil: telling someone why I was angry

> Pupil: I asked myself: What mistakes have I made in the past and how can I make sure I don't make them again?

> Pupil: I said I will have to be brave when I go secendry school.

> Pupil: I know that I can't be that perfect and not make any mistakes , it just can't be done . But I would really like to be a better person , so I will try very hard

> Pupil: my life to be a Good person.

> Pupil: by being good at home and at other places.

Of course, reflection is often dialogic, a reflection that involves other people, the world, and/or the sacred and divine. These responses therefore link to the responses in sections B, C and D, which follow.

B: Relationships with Other People

Dear ~~gra~~ mum I just whant to say sorry because I said I hate you.
(Pupil)

In the questionnaire, the responses indicated most concern with the 'self' (46% of responses, as described in the previous section) and second most concern with other people (35% of responses).

- In responses to the first three questions ('I met or thought about', 'this is what I was thinking about', and 'this is how the conversation went'), the majority of responses (between 55% and 56%) mentioned other people.

- On 'these were my thoughts', 32% of responses mentioned other people, and 38% of responses mentioning 'new thoughts or feelings or insights' mentioned other people.

- The 'best things' about the prayer spaces more rarely mentioned other people (just 7% of responses, with 13% of 'why this was good' responses mentioning other people), whilst 21% of responses to how prayer spaces might be even better mentioned other people.

Quantitative breakdown on 'other people':

Meeting and thinking about people. *These are the people I met or thought about …*	70 (55%)
When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about? *This is what I was thinking about …*	73 (55%)
Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? *This is how the conversation went …*	50 (56%)
Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space? *These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas …*	27 (32%)
Can you describe any other ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space? *I have changed in these ways …*	34 (38% of positive responses)
There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why? *The best thing was …*	8 (7%)
It was good because …	14 (13%)
If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even better? *The prayer space could be even better if …*	13 (21%)
Total:	288 (35%)

One of the most common themes raised in the research was that of thinking about and relating to the dead – dead people and dead animals. This supports findings from the research on beliefs by Day (2009), which also found children and young people, including those who identify as atheist, talk to deceased relatives, and may often prefer

to engage in this practice rather than speaking or praying to God[9]. Relationships with dead relatives were described in these (amongst many other) comments in the interviews:

Adult: I … notice the children: … they all talk about lost family members up in heaven. It's a time to reflect. … A few got quite upset actually. I remember because they were thinking about … love[d] ones that passed recently. … My favourite bit, that was … [the] reflective bit with the bubbles, because it was a quiet space where they all sat down: it was dark and you could … just reflect. … I think that was a common theme: … praying for loved ones who had passed on.

Pupil: I thought about people who I've lost who are in heaven, because it's … a time to reflect on them, and you don't – I don't – really do it when I am at home. … I'm so busy doing other things and … I don't really have time to think I think about them, but how I would when you have a space to do it.

The questionnaire responses also often referred to dead relatives:

Pupil: My Aunt who previously died

Pupil: I thought about my cousin who I see as a sister and she lives in Brazil. I also thought about my Nan [name] who has passed.

Pupil: Leah and mrs [name] my dad in heavan

Pupil: my ansesters

Pupil: my grandad who has long gone in 2015.

Pupil: I was missing my grandma because she died

Pupil: my mums dad died so I thought about him.

Pupil: missing my mums unkle because he is dead.

It was not only thinking about people, though, that mattered. Mending relationships with others – forgiveness and saying sorry – was also a common theme:

Adult: I think it was because they realised that they could forgive and it was making the decision they were going to forgive someone and let go

Pupil: I was missing my grandma because she died and I was making peace with one of my friends because we shouted at each other.

Pupil: my Nannies because I am really sorry for not listening to her and I was really sorry.

Pupil: I my friend would forgive me when I walked away

Pupil: forgiving lucy for always falling out with her

[9] We use the term 'God', as a proper noun, rather than 'god' as a common noun, unless respondents specifically refer to 'god' or 'gods', as most uses of the term appear to be identifying a named divine being.

Pupil: forgiving someone who baddly bullied me and my best friend and I was thinking about all the times I forgave my bestfriend when we got into arguments.

Pupil: First I thought about my parents and how I've let them down sometimes

Pupil: when I talked to someone I would say sorry because I didn't do anything with them like play them and I was really upset so I would say sorry to them and hug them.

Pupil: Dear ~~gra~~ mum I just whant to say sorry because I said I hate you.

Pupil: ~~My~~ Where I was talking to my parents and telling them how sorry I was for all the bad things I've done.

Several talked or wrote about generating cohesion and fostering a sense of community with others, or, through relationships, improving our self-image, sometimes within a religious context:

Adult: it really is amazing and it really unites people as well, and … even those that aren't Christians come and look at the space, and … go up at break time or maybe lunchtime and … see what we are doing. … It does definitely – even amongst the staff – it definitely sparks … conversations. … People were questioning things, which is brilliant.

Adult: I just think it's so important and so valuable, and it's just an amazing opportunity to communicate it – to … open the communication with staff, parents, [and] pupils, and actually give them that time. … So I'm wholeheartedly for it, definitely.

Pupil: my favourite was talking with your friend about what … [the] best part of your personality were, because it made me understand how people thought I was, and it made me happy because they pointed out things that were good about my personality

Pupil: the one where two people can sit down and there was a suitcase with lots of different adjectives in it to describe each other and you kind of had to pick up five or so that you think best described your friend … and me and my friends … we never have really sit down and have a serious conversation about what we think about each other so I think that was a good way to kind of find out what people think about you and maybe get a bit of reassurance about who you are and what you think about yourself as well

Pupil: there is a lot of times in especially teenage life where there's points where you can have a downfall, and your parents can just let go and really get angry at you. … The Prayer Space kind of helps you let go of everything, and come into reality of 'I've done something wrong: I need to apologise', and it just helps you go home and face what you have done, yes.

Pupil: I thought about my parents and how I have let them down sometimes, and then I thought about how to be a better person. That's what I did because no one's perfect but all of our Christian faith is forgiveness, and if you ask for forgiveness God will give you forgiveness.

Pupil: The children around the world, my family in Ireland, people who help me

Pupil: the feelings I had were feelings of joy, when we were asked to talk about what communities we're in it made me think that I'm doing so many things to help the people around me and that makes me happy.

Care and compassion in relationships was mentioned, with the first a comment about actively caring and the subsequent ones more about compassion generated by reflection:

Pupil: I personally think that the little love hearts are the best, I've got one in my pocket … because it shows somebody if they need it that they have someone to go to, that they have someone that they can trust and that actually cares about them. … I think … in secondary … they gather a lot of emotions, and they gather a lot of stress, and knowing there is someone they can go to, and that someone cares about them, is better than knowing that teaches care about them and having friends.

Pupil: I thought about those in other parts of the world that either do not have anything to eat or house to live in … It makes you feel quite grateful for what you have and what others don't

Pupil: I thought about my Nan who has Alzheimer's and … those who don't have as much as me and my brothers and sisters

Pupil: I was feeling mixed emotions like sad emotions, angry ones, but the main one was grief for people that aren't as lucky as me.

Relationships were not simply with relatives and friends, of course, and there were some comments that were explicitly political:

Adult: lots of Donald Trump prayers going on

Adult: We did one about justice and it was talking about … what is not fair in the world and things and I thought that was really nice – that they got to think about things like that, because sometimes we sort of assume that maybe the little ones don't think about things. But they came up with some really good things and we made little … boards to do … and they stuck them in the sand. It was really nice: they liked doing that.

Pupil: some of you were worried about like what Donald Trump is going to do and some people worried about like the terrorist attacks in England

Pupil: some of them were about other things like … the world around us. … I feel … there should be more activities like that, because as well as knowing yourself you should have knowledge of what's around you and what's happening in the world.

Pupil 1: Well I was thinking about my family and then I was also thinking about like events that have been going in the world so like Manchester and London Bridge. Pupil 2: Grenfell? Pupil 1: … Yes.

Pupil: I was thinking about how I can help the whole of our community

Pupil: Peace, war, homeless, Rich,

Pupil: how reefguess had no home like my old cat patch

Pupil: People in wars and people who don't have houses or food.

Pupil: I Pray that to god that he will bring peace to country's like Syria.

In the interviews, some pupils were concerned that other pupils might have trivialised such big issues:

Pupil 1: Another bad thing was like on this one here people were writing like like … Donald Trump. Pupil 2: 'I love Donald Trump', 'I love ISIS'. Pupil 1: Yes people actually put that. Pupil 2: Yes, because some people I don't think they engaged with it properly … And I don't think they actually understood it properly because I think if there was somebody … here … at the start just to say like please don't … do anything silly and actually think about what this means then I think it might have been better

As well as contributing to relational spirituality, in terms of relationships with other people, the evidence provided in this section might also be framed as 'social development' – from the four-fold UK policy promoting 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' development (DfE 2012).

C: Relationships with the World

I was wondering about saving the world. saving animals and dog, cat.
(Pupil)

'The world', in this category, is taken to mean animals, nature (things that exist in the natural world, e.g. plants, trees, water) and non-human objects (e.g. manufactured materials), which fall into the broader such as 'the environment', 'nature', and, of course 'the world'. In this section, core themes in relation to the world emerge and have been categorised into 'animals', 'food', 'nonhuman objects' and 'the environment'. A discussion of the data related to such categories will be provided in conversation with the theoretical frameworks which underscore the analysis. Subsequently, the findings of this section go to highlight the significance of a 'relationship with the World' within pupils' experiences of prayer spaces and how such acts support children's development in this area.

- In the questionnaire, 8% of responses mentioned such items, of which 13% of responses were in response to the question about 'people I met or thought about' and 12% were responses to the question 'this is what I was thinking about'.

- The conversations describing the new thoughts or feelings or insights, and the changes, more rarely mentioned these things (3%, 4% and 7% of responses respectively).

- Only 4% of 'the best thing' about prayer spaces mentioned 'the world' category, although a higher proportion (11%) mentioned such items responding to the 'it was good because' question.

- 3% of responses to how prayer spaces could be improved mentioned these items.

- Within the first two questions, 'people I met or thought about' and 'this is what I was thinking about', the majority of 'world' related responses were in relation to animals, particularly pets and continuing relationships or thinking about deceased pets.

Quantitative breakdown on 'the world':

Meeting and thinking about people. *These are the people I met or thought about …*	16 (13%)
When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about? *This is what I was thinking about …*	16 (12%)
Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? *This is how the conversation went …*	3 (3%)
Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space? *These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas …*	3 (4%)

Can you describe any other ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space? I have changed in these ways	6 (7% of positive responses)
There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why? *The best thing was …*	5 (4%)
It was good because …	12 (11%)
If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even better? *The prayer space could be even better if …*	2 (3%)
Total:	63 (8%)

The link between children's spirituality and pets has been established by a number of scholars, particularly in relation to death and the afterlife (e.g. Higgins 1999, Adams 2001, Champagne 2008). Champagne highlights the marginalised discussion within the study of religion on children's experiences of death and dying, and notes that this issue will resonate for many children in relation to the death of pets. 'Children's lives are already affected with the deaths of pets … [b]ut not all adults take seriously children's expressions of loss' (Champagne 2008, p 259). A project which investigated children's perceptions of world-relationships, found that loss, including loss of pets, was a main source of unhappiness for children aged between four and eleven (Higgins 1999, p 79). Adams, in her research on children's dreams about God found that in such dreams, children 'were comforted by meeting deceased pets and relatives' (Adams 2001, p 104). Animals and pets also emerged as the most significant of the 'world' themes in our research on prayer spaces. They were mentioned by pupils in the questionnaires and in the interviews. In the questionnaires, when asked about the 'people' they met or thought about, a number said that they thought about their pets:

Pupil: my mum my dad my whole family and of course my friends and cat!! I love my cat

Pupil: Family and pets

Pupil: god Mum dog x 3 Dad cat

Pupil: my mum my german shepard

Pupil: my grandmas mom god, my dog, my mom

Pupil: my grandad polo. lily, poppy the ~~popp~~ dog.

Pupil: my cat

Pupil: my pes [pets]

Pupil: I was thinking about my pet dog.

Pupil: shaddo and all of the happy moments with shaddo the dog.

Pupil: Jet my cat

Pupil: my pet horse Pedro.

Pupil: My old dog

In relation to pets, pupils also reflected on this in terms of animal wellbeing or expressing the grief or loss of a pet.

> Pupil: I met my friends and prayer space people my dead cat and my in Northen Ireland
>
> Pupil: mrs [name] my oldcat patch
>
> Pupil: My Dog and my radit [rabbit] died 5 years ago but I stil love them
>
> Pupil: god [previous word crossed out] Jet that passed away Jet my cat that died.
>
> Pupil: My dog getter better
>
> Pupil: my 3 hamsters that died. and my cat that died and one that ran away i had 4 cats so now i have 2.
>
> Pupil: how reefguess had no home like my old cat patch
>
> Pupil: I prayed about god bring my cat back.
>
> Pupil: I was wondering about saving the world. saving animals and dog, cat.
>
> Pupil: Saving animals and not just pets.
>
> Pupil: sad because when the music came on and it reminded me of Jet.

Some pupils reflected on this particularly in relation to the 'bubble tube activity' and how this enabled them to think of their pets.

> Interviewer: So what did you think about then?
> Pupil: Erm I was think about erm, erm my families pet cat and that got really ill-
> Interviewer: I'm sorry to hear that.
> Pupil: and when we went into the … bubble tube bit –
> Interviewer: Your favourite one right?
> Pupil: yes … and I also thought about, our rabbit and my hamster

However, the significance of pets in terms of pupils' experiences of prayer spaces was not felt by all participants with one pupil reflecting sceptically on the idea of pets and spirituality, 'I don't think you would really think about cats whilst trying to look at something spiritual'. During an interview, one teacher, when asked to comment on a sample of questionnaire responses (which included one about pets), also recognised the significance of pets, 'I recognised the questioning ones and I like the one about the pet you do get that sort of thing but they are children there will be a children's perspective on things'. Pupils also reflected on pets during the interviews, with pupils also thinking about the importance of such relationships and caring about their pets' wellbeing.

> Pupil: Instead of an old cat it's my old hamster … who I just thought about because he was a really really sweet hamster, and he'd been through quite a few things that probably shouldn't have happened. …I accidently dropped him down the stairs once, and he he [laughs] he didn't break anything but he managed to survive and still be strong which I found was really – amazing
>
> Pupil: I thought about my … gerbils I had when I was little

We can situate such findings within scholarly work on belief. Day's (2009) work on young people's belief demonstrates how belief is performative, in that her respondents' reflections on belief stresses their social and relation dimension. Within Day's work, a theme of 'believing through bereaving' emerged and found that 'belief in the continuing presence of deceased relatives is unrelated to the beliefs in religion or spirituality, or to religious affiliation' (Day 2009, p 274-275). Preferring to call such experiences 'the secular supernatural', Day says that belief in the afterlife can transcend religious boundaries. Pupils' experience of prayer spaces facilitated a continuing relationship with deceased pets which was not only understood within a religious worldview. Notwithstanding Day's description of this as unrelated to beliefs in 'religion or spirituality', the relationships with living and deceased pets might reasonably – for this evaluation – be categorised as a significant dimension of spirituality.

In the past, the study of religion and spirituality focused more on belief than on the lived, experiential and material dimensions of (religious or spiritual) life. More recently, however, the study of materiality has gained an established place within the study of religion (Meyer et al 2011). We therefore considered how the various materials and objects within prayer spaces affected pupils' experiences, and how this may inform their spiritual development. In interviews and questionnaires, pupils reflected on the significance of the objects found within prayer spaces. From the questions 'it was good because…' and 'the prayer space could be made even better', pupils often reflected on the material dimensions of prayer space noting the various objects which were particularly important to them. Food used in activities was mentioned by a number of pupils.

Pupil: I thought how delicious the bread was

Pupil: the choclate was really nice

Pupil: it had chocolate.

Pupil: it was taste

Pupil: it is ~~yumey~~ the chocolate because yummey

Pupil: I got to eat chocolate and I love chocolate.

Objects such as beads and stones were also highlighted as what made prayer spaces good for them.

Pupil: I liked the stone activity because I wanted to keep my thoughts and that way I was able to keep them.

Pupil: the beeds were a good stress reliver and the sand helped me think

Pupil: I liked it because I liked it when the stone disapeia [disappeared]

Pupil: When the man from the headphones was talking and when I looked at the glitter jar it made me relax and made me calm.

Pupil: You didn't expect them to do what they did

Pupil: I really liked when it dissappeared

The acoustic and spatial dimensions of prayer spaces were also reflected on by a number of participants.

Pupil: on the music it was peacefull and the tents because me and [name] could calm down, wipe the tears away and could think of happy thoughts.

Pupil: I was in a tent on my own and had headphones, enabling me to focus more

Pupil: you got to lisen to a track in the head phones and share it by put in a it in the boxes

Pupil: you got to listen to music

Within the questionnaire, pupils also focused particular attention on how the objects and space of prayer spaces could be improved. The spaces would be better if:

Pupil: there was a calming corner with headphones and it told you to write your feelings on paper

Pupil: you had some stressballs and beanbags to sit on. :)

Pupil: • more tents • more glitter Jars • and more [previous word crossed out] put some music on for eveyone to hear.

Pupil: Calming music space : time to reflect

Pupil: There were calming music in the back.

Some pupils during an interview mentioned the brightness of the prayer space, noting that dimming the lighting might improve the space.

Pupil: Yes, because I think like it should be a bit more, like, … not *too* dark [but] because it was right by the window like there was loads of light coming in.
Interviewer: What is it about this darkness the fact that darkness seems to have?
Pupil: It's more comforting … Like it makes things atmospheric -
Interviewer: It's comforting, it's atmospheric?
Pupil: Maybe it's just because like you focus more on the activity … [if] it's really bright that kind of has your attention more than what's actually going on, but if it's kind of dim especially for the bubbles thing [that] was the only source of light so it was like all you would look at.

A number of children reflected on nature and the natural environment when discussing their thoughts on prayer spaces. Unlike in Hay with Nye (2006), few children mentioned the environment or concern for the natural world when discussing what they thought about during the prayer space. However, a small number of pupils did mention how engaging with nature could improve their experience of prayer space.

Pupil: You could … do it outside, say it was … a nice day, you could go outside and … just be with … the trees and the birds and animals

Pupil: like natural music, … music taken from nature. [Interviewer: So music like wind?] Pupil: Water and birds. [Interviewer: And why would you like that?] Pupil: it might calm people down

It is worth noting that there was no mention of manufactured 'possessions' – phones,

computers, money, clothes – it was all *personal* or *natural*. Hay with Nye (2006) also observed an appreciation for the natural world with their participants, noting the importance of children's sensory connection with the environment which our findings would also support. The pupils suggested being with the birds and the animals, listening to natural music or sounds from the natural world itself. According to Hay and Nye, the natural world may be the primary context for children's spiritual consciousness. They say that within a child-world consciousness, a child-nature consciousness can also emerge.

> Poets have often drawn our attention to the powerful and profound sense of the natural world that one can experience in childhood. Children themselves perhaps need more opportunities to articulate this. A vehicle for spiritual development may exist in experiences of sharing their sense of value and meaning arising in this kind of context with others. (Hay with Nye 2006, p 117.)

This view was supported by some of the pupils in our research.

A number of pupils also reflected on 'the world' more broadly. These findings overlap with 'relationships with the other', as pupils' reflections on the world often, but not always, related to supporting other people. However, occasionally these took on a more environmental concern, and some pupils spoke about the world without reference to persons. The following pupil distinguished ways to help the world from ways to help the community, and considered these to range from small to big, and to religious and non-religious ways:

> I had a conversation in my head with myself thinking about what I can do in the world. I asked myself: What can I do to help my community and the whole of the world? My response was endless some small things, some big things, some religious, some not and some of them I realised that I do any way for example: give money to the homeless, sponsor people for runs or charity events and even as small as picking up mine and other peoples litter.

The physicality or embodiment of the participants themselves was also at times mentioned (as in the earlier quotation about 'feeling like I had some ants in my body'), and such comments might be included here:

> Adult: I've had like comments and remarks from my RE class oh why are we learning about stories again this is boring blah this is actually something almost like a kinaesthetic learning children like doing things this is actually doing something they had a task to do I think that resonated really well with them because it allowed them to do something a bit different and really kind of engage with religion a lot more than they are able to just in a normal lesson in the classroom it's definitely something which I would happily do with them more often on a regular basis I think especially the lower years it was really good I really liked it

D: Relationships with the Sacred and Divine

it was like that feeling and holy like you are stepping on holy ground
(Pupil)

Mentions of the sacred or divine, God or gods, were reasonably common but certainly did not dominate either the questionnaire responses or the interviews.

● Somewhere between 6% and 16%[10] of pupils made mention of the sacred or divine, with roughly a quarter of pupils (just over half the number who self-identified as religious) mentioning God in response to questions about who they met or thought about.

● In the questionnaire, 11% of responses, overall, mentioned the sacred and divine (most usually 'God' or 'god').

● Almost a quarter of pupils (24%) mentioned the sacred and divine in response to 'these are the people I met or thought about', though they were more rarely mentioned in response to 'this is what I was thinking about' (8%).

● 18% of conversations mentioned the sacred or divine, although a smaller proportion of 'new thoughts or feelings or insights' did so (9%).

● Amongst those saying they had changed as a result of the prayer spaces, 13% of responses mentioned the sacred or divine.

● Only 1% mentioned the sacred or divine as 'the best thing' about the prayer spaces, although 5% mentioned the sacred or divine as a reason *why* it was the 'best thing', and a similar 5% suggested something to do with the sacred or divine that could make the prayer space even better.

Quantitative breakdown on 'the sacred and divine':

Meeting and thinking about people. *These are the people I met or thought about …*	31 (24%)
When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about? *This is what I was thinking about …*	11 (8%)
Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? *This is how the conversation went …*	16 (18%)
Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space? *These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas …*	8 (9%)
Can you describe any other ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space? *I have changed in these ways …*	12 (13% of positive responses)
There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why? *The best thing was …*	1 (1%)

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[10] 31 students mentioned God in response to the first question, which is 6% of all students, but 24% of those responding to that question. There were 87 mentions of God in responses across all questions; if this (improbably) represents 87 different students (rather than, as is more likely, a smaller number some of whom mentioned God in response to several questions), then this would represent 16% of the total.

It was good because …	5 (5%)
If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even better? *The prayer space could be even better if …*	3 (5%)
Total:	87 (11%)

It should also be noted that the divine and sacred may be understood in both religious and non-religious ways. Many sociological studies of the sacred, at least since Durkheim, approach the sacred as culturally and historically contingent: the sacred is what it means to a particular culture at any given time and is not restricted to being a purely religious phenomenon (Lynch 2012). This is a useful way of approaching the category 'relationships with the sacred and the divine' as it allows us to consider how the sacred exists across religious, non-religious and spiritual categories (e.g. sport as sacred, or childhood as sacred) (Lynch 2012, Shilling and Mellor 2014).

Many people might have assumed that activities supported by *Prayer Spaces in Schools* would be dominated by praying to a transcendent God. This was mentioned, although relatively rarely.

> Adult: one of my favourite zone was the one with the … coloured bubbles floating up. You … put a sticky note on and you[r] … prayers all … go up. I liked the symbolism of that, because … you saw [the bubbles] all floating to the top. … The … symbolism was that you … put the prayer on the bubble and it … floats up to God.

> Adult: The bubble zone: they … said it was … quiet and reflective. It was still quite noisy … even though I was trying to keep the noise down, but they seemed to engage with that. They would say … they could put their worries and it was like their prayers going up to God.

Stringer, in his work on prayer in contemporary society, explores the nature and variety of individual's experience of prayer. He observed how his participants spoke to the 'non-empirical other' and how this non-empirical other may at times be God and at other times, a deceased relative or other being. Stringer found that the communication style of such prayers is often informal, intimate and conversational, so he wants to move away from analyses of prayer that suggest 'that intimacy inevitably leads to immanence, or that transcendence implies intensity' (Stringer 2015, p 79). The pupils' relationship with the sacred or divine in prayer spaces also demonstrates such complexity, with their experiences of prayer being both 'everyday' and transcendent in nature. Pupils experienced both a relationship with God as transcendent and as an active doing God with whom you can have a conversation.

The different ways in which children (and adults) described the sacred and divine are significant for all concerned with facilitating prayer – whether in school-based worship or prayer spaces, or in religious communities. A distant (and more obviously 'transcendent') God was rarely mentioned, but there were more mentions of what Stringer refers to as less formal and more 'immanent' practices[11]. For example, many pupils, when referring to God, would do so in relation to a communicative (speaking and listening) God. Reponses typically reflected an 'everyday' relationship with God which was informal with some pupils reflecting on this as being relaxing.

> Adult: I suppose for me I thought about [the prayer space as] … a chance to speak

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[11] A detailed theological consideration of immanence and transcendence is more than this evaluation report could consider.

with God and to feel heard … because … there was there was … a space for me to pray in … creative ways … – but yes it was very definitely that sense of space set aside for prayer … and because there was a focus I didn't get quite so distracted

Adult: I've definitely heard, that they can actually sit still and they feel they can speak to God … – and that maybe he's listening.

Pupil: [best part of prayer space] so mine would probably be like it's there every year probably, … you write down a question that you would ask God if He could actually answer back to you … Why did you pick some people instead of the trillions of others that could have been placed onto earth? And like – what was the creation of jellyfish for, because they do nothing … What's the meaning of life so a question you would ask God if you could really ask Him and He could answer you.

This pupil's response also overlaps with the category 'relationship with the world' in that their experience of prayer as a relationship with God is also tightly bound up with ideas of awe and wonder regarding the earth, contemplating its mystery. More 'everyday' descriptions of the sacred and divine include these:

Adult: on the last one we did … big questions so … the kids were having coffee with God, if you like, what big question would you ask them – which is always good, it's always interesting to see the different types of questions. Some of them are you know quite generic but then you get the odd one that's like oh my goodness, it's like wow, you know what I mean, they have thought about that one.

Pupil: it's just like you and God are just like you can relax and you can then just go out feeling more relaxed about things.

Pupil: [best part of prayer space] A conversation I would have with God a question you'd actually ask if you could ask Him something.

Pupil: Because God was listening to my prayers

Pupil: I felt God touch me.

Pupil: I felt like talking to God

One pupil reflected on how the prayer space encouraged a different way to communicate with God.

Pupil: It's like you don't you're not necessarily putting your hands together and praying normally you find different ways to show that you are talking to God a bit like more active ways of doing it, so it's not necessarily just sitting in your room all night and praying before you go to bed, it's basically if you need it in schools it's there for you.

Similarly, when Cornelio examined young Catholic Filipino experiences of prayer, he found that his participants spoke of a communicative God: the 'image of God being revealed is that of an immanent, personal and creatively experiential divine being' (Cornelio 2015, p 14). Pupils' reflections on prayer spaces also support Mason's findings that prayer 'rarely concerned seeking of worldly advantages, but the expression of a personal relationship with God' (Mason 2015, p 35). For Mason 'prayer is relationship' and most of his young participants 'understand prayer as the key element in a relationship with a personal Other whom they love and trust' (Mason 2015, p 34). This would resonate with the findings from our pupils' experience of prayer. The

pupils who did speak about prayer in relation to God, spoke of it in terms of generating a close and personal relationship, one when they can talk to God and God can listen. In this way, we can observe how for some pupils, prayer space in school encouraging the development of a relationship with God through prayer. We would repeat, however, that this experience was described by a relatively small minority of those who took part in the questionnaires and interviews.

An active and timely relationship with God was also mentioned, expecting God to be *doing* something:

Pupil: I prayed about god bring my cat back.

Often it was simply the opportunity to take time for God or to think about God that was mentioned.

Adult: Some of them say … being less stressed. I can definitely relate to that one. They were sat down on bean bags and it was kind of nice to just … take … five minutes out of the day and … reflect on what we … want to … communicate with God, and … pray for things that sometimes you're just so busy you don't get a chance to think about

Pupil: I was with God, thinking about how he has made the world

Pupil: It calmed me down and made me think about myself and thank God for making me.

Pupil: I have realised how God given the whole world and we should be grateful.

A small number of pupils also mentioned how engaging in prayer spaces has changed their practises or beliefs, noting they may attend church more, prayer more, or confirm their faith.

Pupil: I have changed by going to church more and by praying every night before I go to bed.

Pupil: I have started to think about god.

Pupil: I now think about other people's feelings, I believe in god, Jesus.

Pupil: Ive got on better with my sister, not argued so much and really feel like I understand the bible a bit better

A number of participants talked about prayer space as a way to encounter God in a different way and in particular, drawing a distinction between RE and prayer spaces.

Adult: I think it's a really good experience overall because it … took … a lesson out [from] what was [a] normal … teacher-led RE lesson, … for them to see God from a different perspective, almost, and [to] see prayer and religion from a different perspective.

Pupil: some of time RE is okay, but then some of the time it gets a bit dull. … If you wanted to just spend time with God in it, rather than … 'doing … a religion' or something else, then I think that would be good.

One teacher also spoke of negotiating the religious dimensions of prayer spaces in

relation to God, noting how 'Jesus' was removed in order for the concept of God to be broadened out from only referring a Christian God.

> [Interviewer: Is there mention of Jesus or God … in the materials or something else that would identify -] Adult: It used to be yes. … It was like very much Jesus … but … it's really evolved. I mean we talk about prayer, we talk about thought, we talk about … spirituality, but not *this is Christian*. It might say 'ask God a question' [or] 'if you could write to God what would your letter be', but it's not overtly Christian.

A number of pupils used the activities to reflect on their beliefs and question God's existence.

> Pupil: when you're there it's all about God not all about God but … to me it's about your beliefs and you question 'is God really or not?'

> Pupil: Number seventeen … – the one 'in my head is God real or is he not', … I feel like you can't really judge that, because some people would say he is and others will say he's not. So you … can't really say that no one will know, because to some people he is real … and he was alive at some point.

> Pupil: hoq many gods are there? Are all of the gods watching us? were does all of the gods

> Pupil: I were wundering abbouut noo[12] gods.

> Pupil: my new thoughts were who is God and why is God ~~here~~ alive. and here.

A relatively small number described other aspects of the sacred or divine, including one comment on holiness more generally:

> Pupil: I quite like the part when you took your shoes off and you went in. You felt … that you were stepping into somewhere which you wouldn't normally be – like when you step into church. It was like that feeling, and holy, like you are stepping on holy ground.

However, one pupil also expressed some frustration with the openness of the prayer spaces. For some pupils, it seems the flexibility and 'permissiveness' of the space results in a lack of serious engagement.

> Pupil: [on what could be improved] The only thing about prayer space is that some people just take it for granted, a …place to lay down in, … and a place to have a rest. They don't really take into account the fact that it's a place of God. And obviously there are atheist and agnostics like me, and there are some people that don't take into account anything – … they will lay in the tent and they will stay and they will get out, and they will be asked … 'how has that benefited you?', and they will be like 'I don't really know' … because they haven't thought about it. … They are not taking the real … insight of what the prayer space is for.

A way to think about the sacred qualities of pupils' experiences of prayer spaces is in terms of 'existential cultures' (Lee 2015). As we have noted, pupils' reflections on prayer spaces often reveal issues and questions such as concerns about life after death, relationships with God, and talking to deceased relatives and pets. These give rise to existential concerns, the 'ultimate questions' of life and death. Lee takes an

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[12] We have interpreted 'noo' as 'no', but it is possible the student intended 'new'.

everyday approach to such existential cultures. This also resonates with the classification offered by Hay and Nye, who wrote of 'child-God consciousness', as children's reflections on God 'need not be confined to children committed to religious faith and therefore able to speak from a standpoint of being 'in' a relationship with God' (Hay with Nye 2006, p 115). They explain that '[s]pirituality may be explored in the ponderings of atheists and agnostics as they consider how their views shape their denial of, or uncertainty about, the possibility of relating in this way' (Hay with Nye 2006, p 115-116). In this way, pupils' reflections on prayer spaces also demonstrate that the prayer spaces can be understood in terms of existential cultures that transgresses religious, non-religious and spiritual boundaries.

Other Issues Raised

As the focus of the evaluation was on spiritual development, we did not set out to explore the relationship of prayer space activities to policy and practice relating to religion in schools, the views of parents, or the significance of how children self-identified.   Nevertheless, a number of such issues were raised by the research.

Relationship of prayer spaces to policy and practice on religion in schools

Prayer space are intended (by *Prayer Spaces in Schools*) 'to explore … life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way' (https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/, quoted in the introduction to this report), and not as forms of (collective) worship or religious education. Nevertheless, there were issues raised that connected the prayer spaces to policy and practice on religion in schools – especially policy and practice related to collective worship and religious education.

The legal requirement in community schools for collective worship (usually taking place in what is called 'assembly') is controversial. It is also something of an outlier, internationally. Some – such as influential scholar John Hull – have argued that the requirement of community schools to hold daily acts of collective worship should be replaced by 'acts of collective spirituality', which would 'remove the controversies' (Hull 1995, p 69). The intention that prayer spaces contribute to spiritual development therefore provides an example of what Hull wanted for collective worship. Similarly, research by Richard Cheetham explored the ways in which collective worship was practiced, and found a number of features similar to those described of prayer spaces. These included 'inclusivity', or the 'strong desire expressed by … teachers to keep the whole school together … despite the manifold beliefs of pupils and staff' (Cheetham 2000, p 73), the 'individual thing', characterised by 'freedom of choice' and 'personal integrity' (Cheetham 2000, p 75), making collective worship into 'an act of spirituality … that is collective' (Cheetham 2000, p 77), and the 'desire for inclusivity' that focused more on 'common moral values' or 'shared human experience' than explicitly 'religious belief' (Cheetham 2000, p 79). Cheetham's themes were reflected in a number of responses quoted earlier in this report, e.g. '[i]t was like very much Jesus but it's really evolved [so] we talk about spirituality, but not *this is Christian*' (p 29). Other examples:

> Pupil: I find it difficult to believe in prayer but it made me look carefully at me and my life so you don't necessarily have to link it to religion you can just look at yourself
>
> Adult 1: I don't think our children associated it with a particular religion – Adult 2: No. Adult 1: I think they did associate certainly some of the activities with God rather an idea God and a supreme being but that I don't think any of them came away thinking oh that was about Jesus or Christianity or anything particular religion
>
> Adult: perhaps just the name 'Prayer Space': I think for some children that does need unpicking … because obviously it has different meanings to different people and some associate it immediately with a particular religion and for others it's more general

Both Hull and Cheetham, along with these respondents, may have hoped to 're-enchant' collective worship (see also Pirrie 2005), but prayer spaces may be an alternative approach to this. Some see a positive value in spirituality not tied to religion at all:

> Adult: It's always the spiritual part. … I think that gets lost because we live in a

world of accountability measures, and this changing and that changing, and there is so much – … you forget … the[re] are things that are going to get people through life. … If we are about character development, or about giving people inner strength, we need to give them a full repertoire. … In terms of all those things you can measure, the children need for the future that matters. So I think that's where we are coming from isn't it?

Some note prayer spaces as avoiding the disadvantages of being statutory and of being formal, as 'what do we do so the chapel normally is quite a formal space and prayer space is a point where it becomes more informal' (adult). A pupil said 'I just liked how [the prayer space] was very informal, you could just relax because it was informal'. The following adult describes how collective worship being statutory may be the source of its 'formality':

> Adult: I often think that in some ways, … being statutory … was not a good move. … What … happened at one stage is everybody was obsessed with making sure they had a the collective acts of worship every day, and this happened and that happened. There was lots of box ticking but … not the spirit. … I think … spirituality was the worse for it.

As Yeaxlee says, '[l]iving religion in children and young people is a sensitive plant which finds no nourishment in what is formalised' (Armstrong 1948, p 47, quoting Yeaxlee). A number of adults and pupils considered prayer spaces ways of overcoming the 'formalised' character of a great deal of collective worship and schooling in general. Pupils were, instead, allowed to encounter prayer in a way that did not privilege more formalised practices. One adult described this in terms of prayer spaces creating a 'neutral space':

> Adult: one of the most valuable things and things that works really well is having that support from …outside. … It's really important. … We normally have a member of staff in the space, but we … try and take a back seat. The kids … feel that they can … access the space without being judged, or without … feeling like … 'that teacher thinks I'm that', or 'I don't like that teacher'. … So … it's *neutral* when them come into the spaces, it's a safe space and it's a neutral space.

Adults spoke of the freedom and autonomy that prayer spaces afford. They allow pupils to engage with and encounter prayer in their own way and on their own terms. This was in striking contrast to the school's practices of assembly, which did not allow the same freedom or flexibility.

> Adult: Assembly is very formal: … we've got three hundred people in together and it's much more formal. We all sing a hymn, and a prayer will be said, and they will answer Amen. Whereas in the prayer space it's about them owning what they are doing … and … they've got a variety of activities they can choose to access or not access. They can choose to sit quietly and think, they can choose to do something creative or not. So it's that freedom of engagement – whereas in assembly, 'this is what you do' and 'this is how you behave'.

> Adult: there were loads of positives. … The only negative – but I don't think that necessarily something to do with the prayer space – is just that we have got children of different religions and their parents – or they – didn't feel that they could perhaps join in, just because it was in the church. I don't think that it was … particularly … just for Christians, I do think it was … generally talking about being good people as well, but … some of them didn't feel they could take part in it – … which is obviously a little bit sad, because you want as many people as possible to take part in things.

And I think they would have really benefitted from it.

One adult said 'I guess it is … kind of forced prayer – but at the same time it's good in the sense that … if you're not really that religious at home … it … gives them the opportunity to take part and actually reflect on their own lives'. What makes it 'good' is that it involves 'self-reflection' in an otherwise unreflective world. (The adult's use of the phrase 'kind of' and the later use of the word 'opportunity' moderate the sense of 'forced', and it would be unfair to characterise this adult – or prayer spaces – as encouraging 'forcing' prayer.) What might otherwise be regarded as a somewhat embarrassing 'forced prayer' now becomes a more acceptable form of 'meditation' and 'self-reflection'. In this way adults working in schools have negotiated and reconstructed their understanding of prayer to one that includes meditation and self-reflection, and with this, a greater sense of agency on the part of the pupil in that they have 'five minutes to think about your own thoughts'. Yet in the following case, it was more clear that the pupils who were not religious divided into those who were happy to try 'praying to God' (as a 'novelty'), and those who objected to the activity but might have been persuaded to take part simply to see how *other people* prayed.

> Adult: Some of them weren't particularly religious did also engage really well because – I think – it was almost kind of a novelty. Because they don't come from particularly religious backgrounds, they don't often get the chance to use those kind of activities and so it's kind of opposite. So … the kids who aren't religious went into two brackets. They either really loved it so they were at times was completely novel and they want to kind of reflect and think 'oh yes this is fun praying to God' and stuff. Then you had the other kids who were more disengaged because they are like, 'I don't believe in God why am I here?'

It is interesting that these comments are said of prayer spaces by adults (both teachers), whilst the adults seemed unaware of – or did not think it worth mentioning – the legal requirement to start every day with an act of collective worship – a genuinely (legally) 'forced' experiential worship activity. (Although there is evidence of many schools breaking the law related to collective worship, the legal requirement is widely known.) The following adult contrasts the 'experiential' character of prayer spaces with the presumably non-experiential RE lessons, with no mention at all of collective worship.

> For me – in RS [Religious Studies – the name of the GCSE subject] or RE, kids are taught about religion, and the *Prayer Space* … allows them to practice something of whatever they choose to believe. So it allows freedom of practice – … every other lesson … will 'teach you about it', … [whereas] we are going to 'practice' and we are going 'to do a bit of it'.

One of the pupils was similarly ambivalent, seeing the activity as not *always* religious. The prayer space was described as 'helping you think about your beliefs' rather than requiring you to compromise a non-religious position. Yet the pupil also notes that 'some things were obviously' religious.

> Pupil: I didn't really necessarily think about it as being like totally religious … I'm not necessarily religious. I'm not atheist but I'm not religious. So … I didn't think of it as being particularly religious. … Some things were, obviously, but some things I just thought of as being calming and just a nice activity to do not necessarily religious.
> Interviewer: Yes, so you [were] surprised that they seemed to see it as more religious than you did?
> Pupil: Yes I'm surprised they thought of it as trying to change their beliefs because I don't think it was at all. I think it was just to help you think about your beliefs

whether you believe in the religion or whether you believe in anything really. I don't think it was trying to change. I think that's the *point* of it.

This pupil's reflection on prayer also reveals the ambiguous nature of prayer, in that it is not always treated as an exclusively religious practice. In this way, the pupil's reflections speak in conversation with sociological research on prayer which demonstrates the highly complex and nuanced nature of prayer in contemporary society which can transgress more simplistic definitions (Giordan and Woodhead 2015).

This sense of simultaneously moving towards *and* away from more 'religious' interpretations of prayer spaces is given a further twist by the adult who refers to how the school – over several years of running prayer spaces – has gradually taken Jesus out of the activities, quoted above (p 29). One of the participants in the *Prayer Spaces in Schools* conference was 'taken aback by the comment … by one adult, 'it was very much Jesus but ... it's really evolved'', but this movement away from the explicitly Christian was a mentioned several times. One adult said that the organiser – someone external to the school, trained by *Prayer Spaces in Schools* – was 'very very clear about the fact that it's not Christian, it's actually about thinking'. That adult also said 'I don't see it as being religious: I see it as spiritual':

> We recognise that there is a spiritual dimension to life, and it's a dimension in our society for all sorts of reasons and in all sorts of backgrounds. It isn't explored at home … We would like to [do] more at school but actually there isn't time, and I think it's also an area that I think staff are sometimes … uncomfortable

Another adult talks about crossing religious boundaries and the boundaries between religion and non-religion:

> The religious … aspect of it crosses religion: … [it] is really important that it goes beyond the boundaries of one particular faith. … Our counsellor, who is not a Christian at all, … says that [the prayer space] is a really valuable space for mindfulness, which … has … Eastern religio[us] bases

Yet one adult seemed to recognise the discomfort of some non-Christian pupils:

> I think some of them find it quite … challenging but they all … access it. …If we have got anybody who is feeling uncomfortable about it, we can have conversations about it before. … We had one child who didn't come in because there was a lot going on in the news: … she's a Muslim. … She was year three [aged 7-8], and she was feeling anxious about … her understanding of her own faith, and not wanting to do something that wasn't within her faith structure. But she was just at that age: it was easier for her to stay out of the space. But everybody else goes in, whatever, they all go through the [prayer] space

Another noted that 'I guess it's you know it's even though they [i.e. the pupils] know I guess essentially it's Christian as in like you know we run it at school and we are a Christian school'. But the adult continued:

> but we are actually very open with our pupils: … they need to form their own opinions, they need to form their own beliefs and that we are … there to help guide them. … We can tell them … what we believe or what's in the Bible but then they … have to make decisions for themselves. … Some … pupils go [to] church, some pupils don't go to church, [and] we've got some Muslims at school, and you know we are very open with them to actually discuss and debate it. We … encourage them [all] to explore and to think about things. We're there to … guide them and …

show them different things but … they need to find it for themselves. … In prayer space … we are very open about it, [and] say it's … a time to sit and reflect and … question. … This is *your* time so we are not … saying you need to think about *this*, or *this is what you should believe*. It's … *their* time to explore and think.

A number of adults argued for 'prayer' to be excluded from the name of the space and, in several instances, from the activities too.

I must say … I know it's coming from a Christian perspective, but I would much prefer it if it was in terms of personal reflection rather than prayer. I think that immediately turns some of the students off. … I don't really like pushing them towards any one religious leaning. [Interviewer: Perhaps a way to overcome that would be just to use the word[s] 'personal reflection'?] Yes.

These quotations reveal values akin to liberal individualism, in the sense that it is individuals' rights that should be considered and catered for, before considering the wider needs of the group (Madge et al 2014). Religion and prayer are also viewed in terms of choice rather than obligation. Some pupils described the activities in the same way, for example saying the prayer space 'doesn't really … specify one religion, it's more just spiritual and you can just turn everything in your life and reflect'. Another, though, noted that 'most of the time it is based on a … mainly Christian theme', but the pupil continued to say 'the stations themselves aren't exclusively Christian, they can be for absolutely anyone to just have time and think about their life and everything that is happening'.

It was a small number of the participants in the *Prayer Spaces in Schools* conferences who provided the most staunch support for prayer spaces as explicitly Christian. They were asked what should be *added* to the *Interim Report* to make the final report most useful to schools and practitioners, and one said: 'That prayer spaces are rooted in Christian faith and relate to the bible, in the end'. Another was surprised by the 'absence of God' in the *Interim Report*: 'I was expecting God to be included in the conversation'. Clarifying that comment, the respondent continued: 'Clearly this is more of an academic exercise', perhaps revealing the respondent's 'secularised' view of our findings. Those taking part in the conferences belonged to, or expected to belong to, the 'trained team of local Christians from a church or an organisation' who would run prayer spaces 'as a service to the school' (quoted from the introduction to this report), so such concerns were not surprising. Another conference participant explained it by noting 'volunteers from churches may/will want it to be *Christian* prayer, and the tensions this may cause in community schools'.

In providing this account, our intention is not simply to suggest there are many different interpretations of prayer spaces. Rather, it is to note that many research participants, including both adults and pupils, expressed an ambivalence when reflecting on prayer spaces. This ambivalence may be better described as a 'creative ambiguity', a rich ambiguity as described in literary studies since Empson (1961). A number of respondents are straddling the Christian and non-Christian, the religious and non-religious, the religious and the spiritual, the experiential and the (more distanced) educational, or the voluntary and the compulsory. This can – legitimately – be evidence of their *anxiety*, an anxiety to please everyone (especially colleagues, pupils and parents). But it can also – we suggest – be evidence of forms of *resistance* and the *subversion* of expectations.

Issues raised by parents

Of the parents or carers whose permission was sought, less than 1% contacted Julian

Stern (as named lead for the project). However, those conversations were interesting. Julian was asked by a parent whether the research had had ethics permission, because the parent was sceptical about whether it could have been approved, and did not think it was 'educational' (which it claimed to be on the consent document). (It had been approved by the relevant ethics committee, and the researchers were convinced the activity was also educational for the participants: after the discussion, the parent was content.) One parent questioned the value of the research as the parent's daughter 'isn't religious' but is 'polite' and so might fill in the questionnaire in order to 'please' us, but might not mean what she said. (Julian mentioned the possibility of answering negatively, throughout the questionnaire; after discussion, the parent said they would give consent.) The questionnaire asked how the activities could be made 'even better'. One parent said that this was a leading question, as it implied the activities were already 'good' if they were to be made *even* better. (Julian agreed, and explained that the word 'improved' would be less likely to be understood by younger respondents, and the word 'better' on its own implied an 'illness' for many – especially younger – respondents; the parent said he was content with this explanation.) One issue remains, which is that parents concerned with their children's involvement in the research were – it seemed – really concerned with the children's involvement in the *prayer space* activities, but the consent form for the *research* activities had simply stimulated an understandable reaction. Do parents know whether their children take place in the activities supported by *Prayer Spaces in Schools*, and have they given consent to that participation?

Religious or non-religious self-identification of respondents

Of the pupils responding to the questionnaires

- 40.4% of the pupils self-identified as Christian,
- 2.9% Muslim,
- 1.4% Hindu,
- 0.7% Sikh,
- 0.4% Jewish,
- 15.3% Atheist,
- 7.2% Spiritual But Not Religious,
- 5.8% Agnostic,
- 2.2% Humanist,
- 10.1% Prefer Not To Say, and
- 13.6% identified as 'other'[13]:
  - Atheist [crossed out] actually, I don't know whether to believe it or not
  - Baptised a Christian but gradually morphed into a Humanist/Agnostic
  - Buddhist and Christian
  - Catholic
  - Catholic because I was baptised but I dont believe in God or any God. I'm a person who doesn't believe of any of it
  - Don't know
  - Don't know?
  - Don't know yet
  - Don't know yet & not sure
  - Don't know yet/ not sure
  - Either Christian or Muslim
  - Half Christian (not christened)
  - I am not sure

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[13] A small number of respondents filled in the 'other' box with a word indicating membership of one of the earlier groups, e.g. 'Hindu' or 'spiritual but not religious', and these have been put in the relevant group.

- I don't know
- I follow some of the Buddhist principals but not religious
- In the middle of believing in god and not believing
- Jewish by blood, Atheist by belief
- Methodist
- No religion
- None
- None of the above, no religion
- Non-religious
- Not sure
- Nothing
- Spiritual but not religious / only believe in some things religious
- Strong Catholic

This range of identities says something interesting about how children and young people are thinking about identity – such as the fluid and ambiguous nature of many of these stated identities. The variety of responses from pupils and their desire to highlight the richness, diversity and unfinished nature of their religious or non-religious identities, is reflective of a wider issue of how to understand religious and non-religious identity. Day and Lee (2014) note the issues relating to measuring such identity across populations, particular in relation to how some categories are included while others are not, and the need for qualitative research to give meaning to categories used in surveys. The pupils' self-classification is also supportive of Day et al's (2013) research which showed how secular and sacred identities might be dependent on each other. This can be seen in examples such as 'Catholic because I was baptised but I dont believe in God or any God' and 'In the middle of believing in god and not believing'. Lee's (2014, 2015) research argues for the expansion of the non-religious category, especially in quantitative research such as surveys, and Lee goes on to argue that over-simplified categories distort the distinctions between religious and non-religious identities. We can observe a more substantive non-religious identity in one pupil's self-identification as 'Atheist by belief'. Here the pupil's classification is not empty or negative.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion[14], we can report that the evidence suggests that prayer space activities do indeed contribute to the spiritual development of children and young people who participate. The majority of respondents reflected on prayer spaces contributing to their 'relationship with the self' and 'relationship with other people'. Responses relating to 'relationship with the world' and 'relationship with sacred and the divine' were significantly fewer in number. However, overall, the data gathered do show that prayer spaces contribute to all aspects of relational spirituality. The smaller proportion of pupils demonstrating a 'relationship with the sacred or the divine' can only partly be related to the number of pupils identifying as something other than religious, as fewer than half of those pupils who selected a *religious* identity referred to the sacred or divine in response to questions about who they met or thought about.

The variety of responses to different aspects of spirituality is reflected, also, in the variety of responses to different activities carried out. The physicality of the activities (the movements, sounds, tents, and so on) make for a powerful learning environment. The materiality of prayer spaces, the objects used and the way the spaces are constructed had a significant bearing on pupils' experiences. Activities such as the 'bubble tube', 'fizzy forgiveness' or the use of tents, were mentioned by many pupils as activities which helped to cultivate and generate the spiritual dimensions as explored above. It is encouraging that the most common response to the question about making the events even better were to give them more time. A number of pupils also suggested the inclusion of natural objects or having prayer spaces outside as ways to improve them. This may encourage the development of 'relationship with the world'.

One of the perceived strengths of prayer spaces was the flexible and (with some exceptions) inclusive way in which schools could allow pupils to encounter religion and prayer, overcoming some of the difficulties associated with more formal and structured experiences in collective worship and in religious education. By encouraging pupils' agency, prayer spaces were better received than might be expected of many other engagements with religion[15], and were therefore able to encourage spiritual development. Allowing prayer spaces to be open and flexible can encourage experiences that transgress religious and non-religious boundaries[16].

There is a rich ambiguity in how activities supported by *Prayer Spaces in Schools* are understood by pupils and adults in school and by others outside school such as parents and carers of the pupils. The issues raised are important, and should not be ignored. There is a variety of practice across schools, some more narrowly religiously identified (by participants), some more identified as spiritually developing without any ties to religion. It is important to note, however, that the whole range of views can be found within *one* school. These issues need to be admitted and discussed – with staff, pupils, parents and carers, and perhaps governors.

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[14] These conclusions and the findings of the research as a whole – along with a summary of recommendations – are also presented in the 'executive summary' (above, p 2-4).

[15] For example, although Ofsted is not a particularly reliable or research-based organisation, their comments on RE note that 'the way in which RE was provided in many of the primary schools visited had the effect of isolating the subject from the rest of the curriculum' which 'led to low-level learning and missed opportunities to support pupils' learning more widely, for example, in literacy', and 'the quality of teaching in the secondary schools visited was rarely outstanding and was less than good in around half of the lessons seen' (Ofsted 2013, p 5-6). There is indicative evidence that collective worship is perceived as even less effective, with a recent report on religion and schooling suggesting (not for the first time) that the legal requirement should be abolished (Clarke and Woodhead 2015, p 27).

[16] The very term 'prayer' was considered a barrier to inclusion by some adults, and this is worth considering further.

Many research reports conclude with a recommendation of further research. We are confident that our findings in this report are robust, but further research might yet be valuable if carried out in other jurisdictions in the UK and internationally, and into other possible influences of prayer spaces – such as the contribution of prayer spaces to learning in religious education, to religious commitment, to the understanding of prayer, or to moral and social education. Of these, we would suggest the priority be international studies, and studies into the influence on moral and social education. Further evaluation opportunities might also be built-in to prayer space initiatives. This report could be made available to schools thinking of setting up prayer spaces.

We would recommend further consideration – in training programmes, and in schools hosting prayer spaces – of how inclusive prayer spaces are (and how inclusive they are perceived to be) and the implications of the degree of inclusion – and what is meant by inclusion. This is also related to the issue of consent raised by three parents, suggesting that schools might consider the information given to, and consent received from, parents and carers of pupils, with respect to prayer spaces. And, related to issues of inclusion, schools should avoid over-simplified categories with respect to the sacred/non-sacred and the religious/non-religious.

Overall, we would confirm that the evidence collected for this report indicates the value of schools engaging with prayer spaces as a way of enhancing the spiritual development of their pupils. Although prayer spaces were seen as valuable, we do not recommend that they be used to fulfil all the school's requirements to develop pupils spiritually (or morally and socially), as prayer spaces might lose some of their value and their vitality if they were too 'institutionalised'. Nevertheless, schools might learn from prayer spaces to inform their pedagogy across the curriculum – notably the value of pupil-directed activities, the opportunities for self-reflection, and the materially-engaged pedagogy evidenced in this report. This might have the added value of helping reduce pupil stress and fulfilling pupil wishes for more opportunities for solitude in school. A number of pupils found prayer spaces helpful in exploring the sacred and divine, and these opportunities seemed to complement (and were additional to) those made available in collective worship and religious education. It was pupil choice (and therefore 'agency') that seemed to be one of the most valued 'structural' elements of the prayer spaces – for primary as well as for secondary pupils.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire Questions

Some people take part in the prayer space, some do not.

a **Did you take part in the prayer space?** Yes ☐   No   ☐

b **If you *did* take part in the prayer space, could you answer questions 2 to 7?**

c **If you *did not* take part, please say *why* you didn't take part?**

I didn't take part in the prayer space because …

Meeting and thinking about people

a **When you were taking part in the prayer space, who did you meet or think about?** (They may be people who were in the room, or people far away or long gone; they may be human beings or divine beings such as God or gods.)

These are the people I met or thought about …

b **When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about?** For example, some people might have thought about forgiving someone, or asking for something, or explaining why they were angry, or making peace with someone, or missing someone.

This is what I was thinking about …

Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? (These may be conversations with yourself, with other people near or far, with God or gods, or anyone.)

This is how the conversation went …

Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space?

These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas …

Can you describe any *other* ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space?

I have changed in these ways …

There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. **Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why?**

The best thing was …   It was good because …

If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even *better*?

The prayer space could be even better if …

Appendix 2: Quantitative Analysis of Responses to Pupil Questionnaires

In total, 555 pupils (232 male, 323 female) aged 7-16 (368 in Key Stage 2, 164 in Key Stage 3, 23 in Key Stage 4) in 24 schools across England completed questionnaires. There were six primary community schools, ten primary schools with church foundations, one prep school (covering Key Stages 1 to 3) with a church foundation, three secondary community schools, one independent school with no religious foundation (an all-age school, but with only secondary-age responses), two secondary schools with religious foundations, one independent school with a religious foundation (an all-age school, but with only secondary-age responses).

40.4% of the pupils self-identified as Christian, 2.9% Muslim, 1.4% Hindu, 0.7% Sikh, 0.4% Jewish, 15.3% Atheist, 7.2% Spiritual But Not Religious, 5.8% Agnostic, 2.2% Humanist, 10.1% Prefer Not To Say, and 13.6% were 'other' (e.g. 'either Christian or Muslim', 'Buddhist and Christian', 'don't know yet', 'none', with more details in the 'other issues raised' section of this report, p 36-37 above.)

Questions	Responses[17]			
	A: Self	B: Other People	C: World	D: Sacred and Divine
Meeting and thinking about people. These are the people I met or thought about	10 (8%)	70 (55%)	16 (13%)	31 (24%)
When you met or thought about people, in the prayer space, what were you thinking about? This is what I was thinking about	33 (25%)	73 (55%)	16 (12%)	11 (8%)
Can you describe any conversations (in your head or out loud) that you had when you were involved in the prayer space? This is how the conversation went	20 (22%)	50 (56%)	3 (3%)	16 (18%)
Can you describe any new thoughts or feelings or insights you had, any new ideas, when involved in the prayer space? These were my new thoughts or feelings or insights or ideas	47 (55%)	27 (32%)	3 (4%)	8 (9%)
Can you describe any other ways you have changed, because you have visited the prayer space? I have changed in these ways	No or not sure: 57 (39% of all responses); Yes: 37 (42% of positive responses)	34 (38% of positive responses)	6 (7% of positive responses)	12 (13% of positive responses)
There are lots of different things to do in the prayer	105 (88%) of which bubbles	8 (7%)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)

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[17] In this table, as in all tables in the report, the first number represents the count of responses in that category, the second number (in parentheses) represents the responses in that category (i.e. self, other people, world, or sacred and divine) as a percentage of responses in all categories.

space. Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why? The best thing was	25 (21%), quiet 6 (5%), beads 5 (4%), tent 5 (4%)			
It was good because	78 (72%) of which 18 (17%) fun, 18 (17%) relaxing	14 (13%)	12 (11%)	5 (5%)
If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even better? The prayer space could be even better if	44 (71%)	13 (21%)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)
Totals[18]:	374 (46%)	288 (35%)	63 (8%)	87 (11%)

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[18] These figures are percentages of positive responses, ignoring absent or neutral (e.g. 'don't know') or negative (e.g. 'none') responses.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions[19]

1 There are lots of different things to do in the prayer space. (Can you tell me about some of them?) **Of all the things you saw and did, which one was the one that you think was the best, and why?** [The best thing was: …] [It was good because: …]

2 **If you could help set up a prayer space, can you think of how it could be made even *better*?** (E.g. anything you didn't like, that could be taken away, or anything you'd like more of.)

3 **Here are some things that other people said about prayer spaces.** (They are the views of different people, and we are not saying they are 'right' or 'wrong'.) **Can you say whether these are things you thought about [and why]?**

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1 I felt like I could question everything.

2 I haven't really changed.

3 I thought about forgiving someone who bullied me and my best friend.

4 I thought about how delicious the bread was.

5 I thought about God because I thought it was a chance to speak so god can see me and hear me.

6 I thought about those in other parts of the world that either do not have anything to eat or do not have a safe house to live in.

7 My old cat patch.

8 I thought about my dad in heaven.

9 I thought about my parents and how I've let them down sometimes, so then I thought about how to be a better person.

10 I find it difficult to believe in prayer but it made me look carefully at me and my life.

11 I thought about God and my loved ones.

12 I didn't have any new thoughts or feelings.

13 I have become less stressed.

14 I have changed by going to church more and by praying every night before I go to bed.

15 I thought about what it is like being alone.

16 I thought of God the Christian God because I saw the Holy Spirit, then when you talked about forgiveness Jesus said to forgive others or he won't forgive you.

17 In my head: is god real or is he not? No one will ever know.

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[19] The same questions were asked of adults and pupils.

18 The prayer space could be even better if people could move their bodies while being calm.

19 It hasn't changed my beliefs because I am atheist but I respect others' beliefs.

20 The best thing was being able to have a rest.

4 **Do you have any other reflections on the use of the prayer spaces that you would like to tell us?** (These could include positive or negative things that you want to say.)

Appendix 4: Questionnaires Used At *Prayer Spaces* Conferences

You have a copy of the *Interim Report* of the evaluation of *Prayer Spaces in Schools*. From your own knowledge of *Prayer Spaces in Schools*, could you answer the following two questions:

What was most surprising in the *Interim Report*?

What do you think is most important to *add* to the *Interim Report* to make the final report most useful to schools and practitioners?

Please add (on the other side of the paper) any other comments about *Prayer Spaces in Schools* that you would like the evaluation team to know.
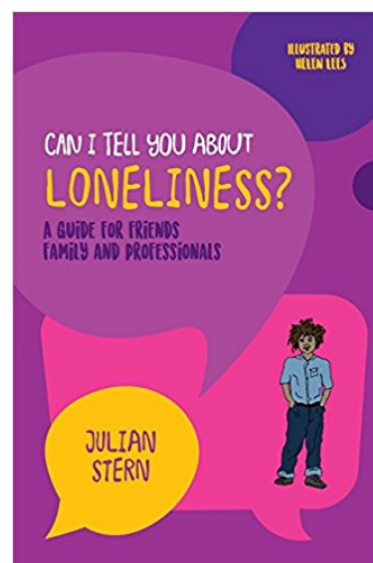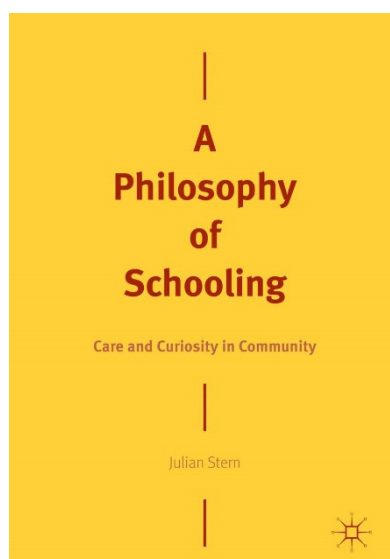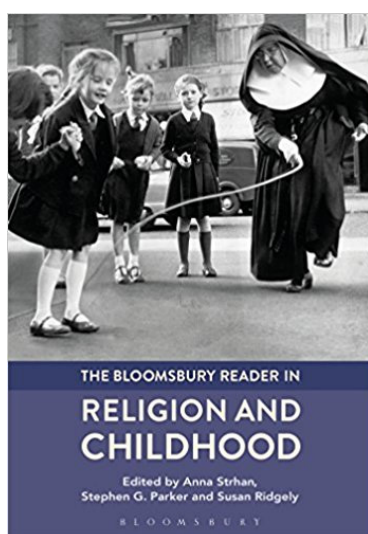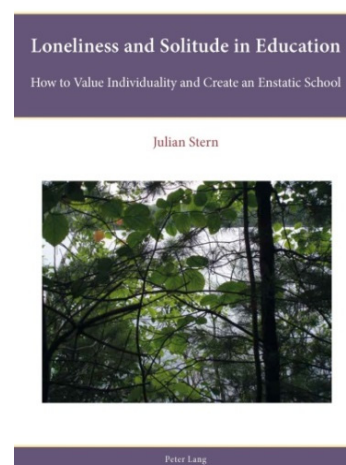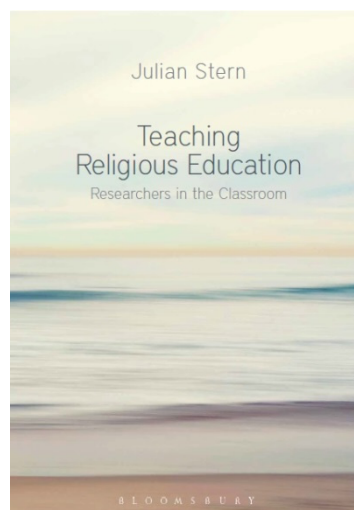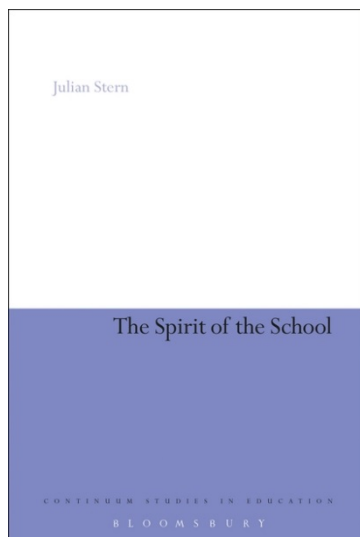
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