

Jargon

and Christian Values

Chris Westgarth outlines the resources available at SMSC online.

Abbreviations R GR8!

Life is full of jargon and abbreviation. *Brilliant* becomes *brill*; *bicycle* is shortened to *bike*; *great* is written as *GR8*; and *are* is, simply, *R*! Many would have us believe that the human propensity to truncate and encode language has been dramatically accelerated (if not actually instigated by!) the texting thumbs of twenty-first century teenagers. But this phenomenon is not new – as the writer of Ecclesiastes says: ‘there is nothing new under the sun’.

After all, the fish symbol used by first century Christians was a shorthand way of communicating an entire statement of faith: ‘ichthus’ (the most commonly used word in the New Testament for ‘fish’) proclaimed: **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **U**ios **S**oter – Jesus Christ God’s Son, Saviour.

SMSC

In educational circles we love acronyms too. We have: IEPs, PSHE, RE, PE, RME, Ofsted, DfES, QCA, ASL, SATS – the list could go on ... and on. But, for now, I would like to focus on the four letters that are so often expressed at a time of Ofsted school inspections. I am, of course, referring to SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development across the whole school curriculum).

The two broad aims for the school curriculum are reflected in Section 351 of the 1996 Education Act which requires that all maintained schools provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society
- prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

SMSC online has been providing an invaluable service to teachers, pupils and all associated with education



All National Curriculum subjects provide opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Website fun

SMSC online, launched in January 2003, has been providing an invaluable service to teachers, pupils and all associated with education. Through this innovative information portal visitors are free to access a vast database of resource-providing organisations, many of them offering free services. Visitors to the site are free to download lesson ideas, read thought-provoking articles in the library, go to the forum and, when faced with a moral dilemma, ask Morag – the resident moral agony aunt – for helpful advice.

Most schools welcome the offer of support and resources from their local churches

Research shows that when a school is committed to a holistic approach to education – ie when the values of SMSC are given the importance and the budget they rightly deserve – pupil self-esteem is raised and, as a consequence, levels of achievement are improved.

Moral training

Again this is nothing new. Back in 1897 John Dewey wrote:

'I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of communal life. It conceives of the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed ... I believe ... that the best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others in authority of work and thought.'

To my mind, school is more than literacy, numeracy and targets. Surely, it is also about community, ethos, values and all-round development.

Pupils' SMSC development involves the growth of their sense of self and their unique potential. Pupils need to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes to foster their own inner-lives and non-material wellbeing. Pupils also need to acquire an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of moral conflict, a concern for others and the will to do what is right. Through SMSC, pupils obtain an

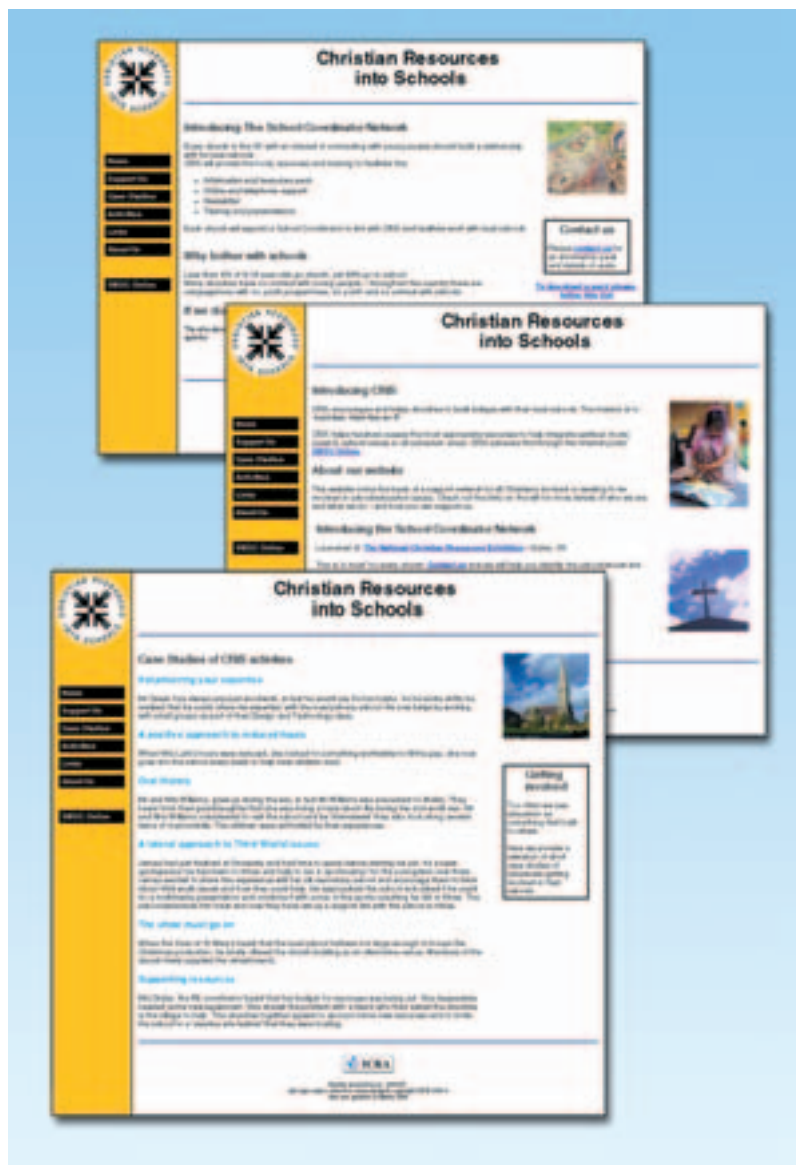
understanding of their own responsibilities and rights as members of families and communities (local, national and global) and are thus better able to relate to others and to work with them for the common good.

Through SMSC, pupils grasp an understanding of cultural traditions and are able to appreciate and respond to a variety of aesthetic experiences. They are helped to develop a respect for their own culture and for the cultures of others; an interest in others' ways of doing things; and a curiosity about (rather than a fear of) differences.

Wonder and diversity

Professor Terence Copley, in the governor training video 'Educating for Spiritual Growth', says:

'Spiritual Development is the development of the awareness that there is: something more to life than meets the eye; something more than the



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material; something more than the obvious; something to wonder at; and something to respond to.'

If we are going to be effective in promoting SMSC development we need to recognise the diversity of spiritual traditions and give pupils access to alternative views. We must provide opportunities for pupils to look inwards and reflect on beliefs, values, feelings, hopes, dreams, ideals and aspirations. Schools should be encouraged to awaken, enliven, inspire and challenge as well as to tend, comfort and nurture pupils' spirits.

Help and guidance

Schools are actively encouraged to work with the wider community (and this includes churches). There was a time when churches and schools were intimately linked – in fact, the education of children in the UK really started with the Church (hence there are still many official church schools in existence). But, whilst 99% of 5–16 year-olds attend school, only 8% go to church! Are Christians in danger of losing touch with a whole generation?

With this concern very much in mind, SMSC online has been actively engaging with schools and offering the kind of help and guidance schools are desperate for. This service is provided by Christian Resources into Schools (CRiS).

CRiS was formed as a charity with the clear aim of helping teachers to access the most appropriate resources for the integration of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values across the whole curriculum. But the work of the charity does not stop there. Schools are keen to have support from Christians in a non-threatening way; they want genuine support with no hidden agenda. Some churches often feel daunted by this, but CRiS provides help, resources and basic training in order to foster good links between churches and schools.

An open door?

Not only is the school door open to churches, but young people of all ages are keen to discuss and

get involved in a wide range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural topics.

Although 'going to church' currently seems to be an irrelevance in the lives of many young people in the UK today, this does not mean that they are not interested in the origins and meaning of life, the existence and nature of God, morality, relationships, the environment, poverty, war and a host of other vital issues.

But the door is also open to other influences, and schools and churches need to be aware of the potential dangers from some fine-sounding organisations that have their roots firmly bedded in some not-so-wholesome practices. There is also mounting pressure from The National Secular Society to close this open door and to remove everything remotely connected with religion or faith from the school curriculum.

Church-school partnerships

In May 2003, Christian Resources into Schools launched The School Coordinator Network. This network was set up to help churches develop approaches that succeed for all concerned.

Most schools welcome the offer of support and resources from their local churches. Examples of successful church-school partnerships include:

- voluntary classroom and general assistance
- support with assemblies
- educational visits to churches
- provision of resources and facilities
- talks to children by church members
- church members acting as school governors.

CRiS aims to keep educational issues on the church's agenda, resourcing the 'ordinary' person in the congregation and continuing to support, encourage, advise and inspire schools through SMSC online.



Ms Chris Westgarth

Until 1997 Chris worked extensively in education, specialising in Early Years and Special Needs. She is currently the Project Manager for both CRiS and the information portal SMSC Online.

Chris believes that Christian involvement in education issues should be seen as a very valid form of mission.

She is a member of the Becta (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) focus group, the Schools Ministry Network and the Association of Christian Teachers. She is a governor at a local primary school, Chair of the Scripture Union support group for Cambridgeshire and Chair of her village Parish Council.

More information

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