

FAITH IN THE NEXUS



How are we providing reflection time and space?

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The Faith in the Nexus research project.

In the Faith in the Nexus research, the term nexus refers to the connections between home, church school and the local church community. Our project investigated the ways church primary schools, working in collaboration with churches and interested key groups, facilitated opportunities for children's exploration of faith and spiritual life in the home. It involved 20 church primary schools, a cross-section of Church of England and Catholic primary schools. Focus group interviews were held with 187 pupils and 267 adults (parents, staff, local clergy, and other interested key groups) and an online survey was completed by 1002 people; 730 pupils and 272 adults.

Key questions raised by the research:

How do we address children's need for reflection space and time?

How can we translate children's experiences of reflection in school into the home and church environment?

Key findings from the research:

Reflection was about quiet space and time for thinking about big questions of God, the world, concerns for others and for self.

Prayer was about praying to God or for relatives, and prayers could be written down or read.

Parents were more likely to talk about children praying at home than reflecting.

Children actively seek out spaces and times to be alone to reflect, think and pray.



Church primary schools provide several spaces such as reflection corners and spiritual gardens.

What emerges through analysis of children's responses to the research questions, is a need for space to reflect, think and pray. In the church primary schools, these spaces were in classrooms and in the playground; at home the children made their own times and spaces.

Few children mentioned church as a place to reflect.

This space and time is essential for spiritual wellbeing. Many children, like adults, had no or little quiet time in daily life.



Watch

View our animation explainer at [nicer.org.uk](https://www.nicer.org.uk)

Conversation Starters.

The spiritual garden is a place to reflect and it's a place where people enjoy to go and pray and it would be the first [place] I would take a visitor. (Pupil)

I would go in the reflective garden because I want to rest... (Pupil)

Me and my sister set up this little worship table. We put a blanket on [a box] and we put our bowl of lavender on it. (Pupil)

It's really important because, if we feel sad [and] just want to be alone we can pray up to God to please let us feel happy again. (Pupil)

Sometimes in a way I talk to myself and because I sometimes think that I'm talking to God ... my great Nan is 94 and I pray about her. (Pupil)

We had the reflection garden made because we've lost children and members of staff. (Governor)

I find it hard to find time and sit down and have quiet time. (Parent)



REFLECTION TIME AND SPACE

HOW ARE WE PROVIDING REFLECTION TIME AND SPACE?

Why do children value reflection spaces?

- Children seek reflection times and spaces as essential for their wellbeing.
- They describe such space as a time for talking with God.
- Children use this time often when they feel sad.
 - It is in this space that children place some of the most serious things in their lives.

Children expressed a need for space to think, reflect and pray. There may be differences in language and framing of prayer and reflection between home and school, but pupils' appreciation of this time and expressions of need was common across all schools.

You can always go to these places and just relax.

It is for when people have died. We send balloons.

Where can children find space and time to reflect, think, and pray?

Children highlighted a need for spaces to be alone, and to sit and think.

- In church primary schools, these spaces were in classrooms and in the playground.
- At home children made their own times and spaces.
- Few children mentioned church as a place to reflect.



How to Make a Spiritual Garden

by Ronni Lamont.

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A 'Spiritual Garden' is one way to enable people of all ages to access their interior thinking and facilitate prayer and contemplation.

The process

Develop a working party that consists of families and children.

If you are a school, ask for help from the local church. If you are a church, ask the school for help.

All churches have gardeners in the congregation, and they are usually willing to share expertise and will probably donate plants.

This is a fantastic opportunity for older Church folk to engage with school children in a highly

meaningful way, especially for children whose Grandparents are geographically distant.

NB. Safeguarding requirements must be met.

Consider

Attracting many more animals by including 'bug hotels,' and a water feature/pond (with suitable safeguards). Pollinating insects often sting.

If it's to be sited in a dry area, think about including some gravel that the visitors can rake, as in Japanese zen gardens.

The garden needs to be multi-sensory- consider scented plants and herbs.



Identify Available Space

- What already grows here?
- Trees can be included and provide shade and a source of wonder.
- What sort of plants like this type of soil?
- Ask the children/users what they would like to see within the space. ('The People of God', from Godly Play, can be used to facilitate this discussion. [A6 - People of God – St. Michael's Workshop.](#))
- Use diocesan advisors to network with others who have developed such a space locally and ask them about contractors/planning/suppliers.

Creating a sense of inclusion and belonging

- Check the plans with the children all the way through the development process. Don't let the adults take over.
- Ask congregation/school families for help. If the garden includes the chance to donate memorial plants, many families will 'own' the space and use it.
- Consider the balance of plants- will you include vegetables to enable children to grow their own food?
- Remember this space must affirm those of 'all faiths and none'.

Upkeep

- Who is going to tend the garden after it's been made?
- Where/how will you store gardening tools? Or will 'caretakers' need to bring their own?
- Will you include a 'prayer box', where local people can drop off prayer requests? If you do- how and when will these prayers be collected by the school or church?
- You may be able to access funding from your local council for a community garden.
- You may be able to access help from the RHS: [Gardening tips & advice for growing your own plants, fruit & veg / RHS Gardening](#)

FURTHER READING

For the full Faith in the Nexus report: Faith In The Nexus (nicer.org.uk)

Report references:

Reflection spaces. pp. 50-55

Prayer. pp. 56-60

Who knows about children's spiritual life? p.61

Spiritual wellbeing. Pp. 62-63

Conclusion. pp.84-91

