

Visions for Educational Leadership (VfEL)

Heythrop Institute: Religion & Society and the Catholic Education Service

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NCTL Learning and Conference Centre, Nottingham

Thematic Paper 2: Leaders' experiences and normative/policy positions

This paper is divided into two parts, the first descriptive of the data gathered from school leaders on the above theme and the second analytical.

Please read the paper carefully and reflect on the following three questions:

- (i) What resonates?
- (ii) What would you add?
- (iii) How does this relate to practice?

We would like you to share your thoughts on the paper during the opening session of the conference. Your participation will be essential to shaping the conference's outcomes, as we determine what is needed to build theological, ethical and spiritual capacity for leadership in Catholic schools.

The data quoted in the papers was collected through interviews, focus groups and surveys participated in by school leaders. All contributions have been anonymised.

If you have any questions about the conference please contact Robert Ivermee (r.ivermee@heythrop.ac.uk). More information about the VfEL project is available here: <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/heythrop-institute-religion-society/hirs-visions-educational-leadership>.

Part A: Description of the data

(Written by Robert Ivermee on behalf of the VfEL research team.)

A number of tensions or gaps may be identified between school leaders' experiences and Church normative or policy positions. This paper focuses on three key areas:

1. Who and what are Catholic schools for?
2. Life-style issues encountered by leaders
3. Who should lead Catholic schools?

Considerable overlap exists between these three areas. For example, approaches to lifestyle issues impact in differing ways on leaders' understandings of who should lead schools and their consequent ideas on succession planning. An attempt is made to map these linkages and overlaps in what follows.

1. Who and What are Catholic Schools For?

A handful of the 100+ leaders spoken to thought that Catholic schools are exclusively for the education of Catholic children. In the words of one acting head, responding to the declining number of Catholics in Catholic schools:

We are going to have to concentrate the schools. Where we have ten, we need five. I think we need to support the community. I have primary schools feeding 40-50% non-Catholics. There are a lot of ethnic minorities and English children who have never been baptised in the faith. It is a residual echo of the faith, but there is not much. I think we could do with instead of having five primary schools, having one which is Catholic, instead of having three secondary schools, having one which is Catholic. Then the schools would be staffed with Catholic leaders, with Catholic governors, and Catholic parents who will support it.

The vast majority of leaders suggested, however, that Catholic schools should not be exclusively for Catholics – and that the success of schools should not be measured by the proportion of Catholics:

Some people say that if the school is not educating baptised and practising Catholics it should close. I disagree. The school is a gift to the local community with a particular vision of education and humanity, and you don't actually need any Catholic children in the school, you just give a gift from Church to community.

I think I have the proud distinction of having the least Catholic Catholic school in the country. I have a lot of non-Catholics and non-Christians in my school, students of other faiths and students of no faith and I fully endorse that. There's a particular ethos and mission that we offer to our community and it's really important that it is, if you like, branded or corporatised as Catholic. I know it's an ugly term, but I think it's actually the world we're in and it is exactly that; it's a gift of ethos and love and spirituality to a community that probably needs it.

It's interesting isn't it, you have got all these non-Catholic, un-Church families who are desperate to get their kids into Catholic schools and we see that as a limitation. You can turn that round can't you and say 'how fantastic.' What makes our schools profoundly Catholic is not how many Catholics come into them.

Of course, much depends on context. In areas where schools are oversubscribed with baptised Catholics, Catholics have priority and governors may not be able to admit other than Catholics.

Even in these circumstances, however, some leaders have taken proactive steps to include non-Catholics. Take for example this primary school head:

Who are we here for - just the baptised Catholics? I have questioned some of our practices and responded in ways I may not have. When I was unable to take 9 siblings into our Foundation year because of the number of baptised Catholics wanting a place, I created a bulge year and admitted enough for another class.

Why do most leaders favour the inclusion of non-Catholics in their schools? They certainly believe there are difficulties determining which children are Catholic, noting that being baptised often does not correspond to having and practising faith:

Although the majority of our children are baptised Catholics, they don't practise the faith: when they come to us at four, they don't know the story of Christmas; we show them the picture of a priest, they don't know who that person is; we show them hands joined together, they don't know what that is. These are baptised Catholics – so yes, I mean for me, simplistically, but profoundly, we're walking with Christ, that's how I see it, we're walking with Christ, our school community together. We see Christ in the face of those children that we teach, the people that we associate with in our community, and I feel that more and more we have become the church and so much of what happens in our parish revolves around the school not the church. The church is an ageing population with an ageing clergy, so so much of what happens in terms of evangelisation, in terms of fostering the faith, comes from the school. We're blessed in the north of the archdiocese, there are lots of Catholic schools, so somebody did a good job in the past and through that, I think the church is still alive and kicking.

There are declining numbers of Catholic pupils and varying backgrounds; the word 'practising' means quite different things. School might be the first experience that some of those children have with the Catholic faith which may make them feel that they would like to deepen their own faith, find out a bit more and make the choice to become Catholic themselves at some point in the future, because of the experiences they've been enabled to have in your school. They may never get that opportunity otherwise. So surely if you didn't allow children that didn't have a particular faith or background to come into your school and experience that, they may never get that opportunity to learn.

Although practically all of our pupils are Catholic on paper, we have a real mission to church them as we go. We feel that we are the parish for many.

It is clear from the above that leaders' concerns to see non-Catholics included in Catholic schools are about more than the difficulties determining who is Catholic and who isn't. Leaders consider it a part of the mission of Catholic schools to offer instruction to a diversity of people in society, and in particular to educate the poorer or more vulnerable. Admitting children from diverse backgrounds is considered beneficial both to society and the Church.

Is it about the people who need the Catholic schools the most or is it about the families that we need to support because they haven't got any back up? We often have families come in when they want to apply for a reception place and they can't get anyone to sign their forms and they say, well I can't go to church every week because I'm working and I often think that they're the families we should be supporting. The others actually don't need it because they can manage without us really.

A church school is an inclusive school – we reach out to the community and we try if you like, to live out the ethos in terms of reaching out to other people, which is very different to some schools. I can't understand the concept of a selective church school or a fee paying church school or a private church school – it's just anathema to my understanding of what church is about; it's about being inclusive, bringing everybody in and bringing the best for everybody.

If Catholic schools are schools for Catholics, which is a widespread view amongst clergy, then we can close down four-fifths of them, and then it's a middle-class suburban church that we're talking about, isn't it.

We have a school that's about two-thirds Catholic by baptism and most of the rest are from other Christian denominations, but we have a good number of Sikh and Hindu and Muslim students as well, and when I ask parents why they want to send their children to a Catholic school, they say it's because they value a school that takes faith seriously, and we're not there to convert them, and they understand that. I really love having the other faiths within the school and the fact that we're not 100% Catholic. I think it's something that we can be a witness of in the local community and live out. We are unashamedly Catholic in all that we do and we're not seeking to change that in any way, but people of other denominations and other faiths are very welcome. That openness is something that I think is an important part of what Catholic schools can be about.

My school has a minority of Catholic pupils. The majority faith, about 70 odd percent, are Muslim pupils. And some of our Muslim pupils now are in school because their parents came to our school and they enjoyed their Catholic education and they want that for their children. I think that the bridges that we are building in school are of phenomenal importance for society.

I feel it is the greatest strength of our school that we're diverse. We're most probably 78% Catholic. We've got a lot of Muslim children and a lot of Hindus. We've got over seventy-two languages now. I feel that we have a little community that reflects the world that we live in. We are breeding tolerance and respect for each other.

To admit young people from a diversity of backgrounds into schools means opportunities for evangelisation – as a number of the extracts above have already outlined. Many leaders elaborated on this point:

I've been tremendously privileged, I think, in that I was brought up in a Catholic family where the faith was practised, where we were taken to church and it was practiced in the home. I don't feel cynical about families where that's not the case because God decided for all of us our journey, but I do feel that it's very, very important to educate children as much as possible about the faith because for some children it is through school that they are learning about their Catholic faith. Perhaps in my generation, more children in Catholic schools were educated through the home and churches than the school. I think that the missionary service of Catholic schools is very important because we must use every opportunity. The schools need to be strong and must stand up against the pressures placed on them by passing governments. We must make sure that we know what Catholic education is and we must be able to say: 'we are going to educate children in faith.'

I think that we need to be there for all children. We're 60% baptised Catholic in our school, but baptised in name, not particularly practising, and if we don't give them the principles and the spirituality then who will? Because the parents don't, they feel that by handing them over to the school it's our responsibility. And if we weren't there....I think we have an absolutely essential role in the Church's mission.

Vocation for me is spending time towards mission as well isn't it, because I think the more our schools are not Catholic in the conventional sense, full of baptised Catholics...I think I have developed more of a sense of mission than I have of a sense of preservation or straight forward provision for baptised Catholics. That is just the realities of geography and the society that we live in isn't it really and I think what I try and get hold of is this sense of mission really. It is a difficult mission because, actually, we are not using our own resources and money, we are using the state's resources and money and we have to travel that road very, very carefully. But we are on a mission and we are offering something of the church, of Christian, Catholic faith to those outside.

Many of our parents will happily engage in a conversation about football, but they can't talk about their relationship with God, because it's almost alien to them. So our job is to develop the child's relationship with God as an all loving father and through that engage with the parents more. If the parents can't articulate, or they just have a relationship through formal prayers, and they can't talk to the child about it, then it's our job to help the child on their spiritual journey with that developing relationship.

I think that because we are convinced of our mission, it really does help. We can be confident in the way forward. There are people who say that if there are not enough Catholics in our schools, maybe we should close some of them. That is the expression of fear, the expression of the ghetto, the expression of pessimism.

Leaders noted that admitting non-Catholics into their schools has a knock-on effect in terms of the evangelisation of parents and the wider community:

The priest and I were talking the other day about the low proportion of Catholic children in the school and we came to the conclusion that we were missionaries. We were just doing it here rather than somewhere else. The children who are Catholic and are being brought up as practising Catholics, they're having their faith reaffirmed and are having the strength to say 'I'm a Catholic' in the microcosm of the world in which they live, where they wouldn't necessarily need to say that if it was a totally Catholic school. But also for the children and parents who are not Catholic, they are seeing us practising our faith and are slowly joining us. So in mass all the children are blessed and it's quite a time consuming process. At first the parents would sit at the back of the hall and think 'I'm not doing that, bit scary, you know, what's going to happen?' But now they're joining in and they are becoming part of what's happening in the school. They are having the confidence to go to the church and that surely is developing the faith. Surely that is leading faith with the priest, isn't it?

A lot of our children in the school do not go to church regularly. Their families might be nominally Catholic but they are not practising any more. School is the first opportunity for the children to be part of a Catholic community, bringing children back to the church. If you can get into the children and get that enthusiasm and the keenness, you also drag the parents back in.

We certainly get an awful lot of other Christians applying to come into the school and I sometimes feel that if the church schools aren't there, they wouldn't have anywhere to go. As for the un-churched parents, they don't practise and that's like a different kind of idea to look at, but they do want a Christian upbringing for their children, even some that actually aren't really sure what their own background is, and I think that is quite important. I think parents are also, especially at primary level, looking for support and for guidance which I think sometimes the Church in its establishment won't give them, but they can get through the school. When you get children as young as three coming in, they are researching their own faith and at the same time their parents and the family are on a spiritual journey. I think it's very important that we are there for those families.

Catholic schools, then, are for most leaders defined not by the number of Catholic pupils, but by their particular nature as institutions and communities. Documenting leaders' understandings of this in full is beyond the scope of the paper. It is worth noting, however, that explanations of what Catholic schools are for were often framed by leaders with the idea in mind of the Catholic school as a place for the education not only of Catholic children:

I think that as a church school you are tending a community that is not necessarily a church community. Therefore our beliefs, our vocation, the way we are, has to permeate out through the whole community.

There has been a huge change from Catholic schools that serve a Catholic population

towards Catholic schools that serve the wider community, but still try to maintain the ethos and the values. Hopefully, because of the way we deliver the education and because of what we do, people buy into it and want their children to come and be part of it. And I think, surprisingly enough, more people do want that than you think. They might not be baptised or christened in any faith, but they still want a little bit of what is going on in the Catholic school because of the feeling of community and the sense of worth that their children get.

The success of Catholic schools, for most leaders, should not be judged according to the proportion of pupils attending church each week. Rather – leaders repeatedly suggested – the school is church for young people: schools are engaged in evangelisation (with major implications for what church is and should be):

We are the church for the majority of our children. In this school we are in a comparatively privileged situation in that we do have quite a number of families who are practising Catholics, and go to church, but we have a sizeable majority who do not. I think that we have worked very, very hard to make children feel part of this community – to have this identity, spirituality, a prayer life, an understanding of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Catholic schools today are not the Catholic schools that I went to as a child. When I went to school it was 100% Catholic and the parents were all Catholic. Every Monday morning we were all told to stand up if you didn't go to Mass on the Sunday. The priest would come in and do lessons. It was very different. Today you are dealing with a lot of children with minimal experience of church. For a lot of them the only relationship they have with the church is through the school.

I am very conscious of the fact that I have got children some of whom will have been to Mass on the Sunday, and will have church very much a part of their lives, but others who won't have been and do not. I want them to be aware if you like of where we are at and what it is that we are all about.

I've got 20% Catholic in my school, 40% no religion whatsoever and about 39% Christian. And to see the impact that a faith school can have on those children that have no experience of any spirituality at all, to be able to sit with four year-olds yesterday and watch an act of worship, it brought tears to my eyes actually. It was so thought provoking and so poignant. I thought yeah, we do have to accept these children into our schools, because we're spreading the Word of God in such a powerful way.

My first school was virtually all Catholic and if you weren't practising you didn't get in, so in that sense it was very different. My gut instinct is actually I've got the better job now...it's a little bit like being a missionary I think. I don't see our mission as getting bums on seats in the church, I think it's a bigger mission than that. It's not about 'we've got eight more children in this church.' I don't think it's about that. I think it's about the way they're taught the ethos and way of life.

You need to be very mindful that people have had very different experiences of church. We've got to be aware that everyone's coming from different backgrounds and different starting points and their experiences of church or the Catholic faith are vastly different.

Ten percent, twelve percent of my children are practising Catholics. I've got to balance that type of traditional expression of Catholic faith with something that all of my school can aspire to and get involved in and enjoy and that's a leadership challenge because if I say to someone who's never been, who doesn't understand the principal of exposition, there's absolutely no chance. One thing I've done in my school was tie an awful lot of our initiatives to Catholic social justice teaching, which everyone can understand.

2. Life-Style Issues Encountered by Leaders

When asked in a survey to identify theological and ethical challenges encountered in Catholic school leadership, many leaders pointed towards lifestyle issues concerning staff, students and other members of school communities. For example:

- *Unmarried members of staff living with partners.*
- *Divorced Catholic colleagues remarrying*
- *The issue of homosexuality: what stance do you take when a student or member of staff is homosexual?*
- *Offering appropriate advice to students relating to their sexual conduct which remains faithful to the teaching of the Church.*
- *Support for charities who are also involved in abortion.*
- *A single Catholic teacher becoming pregnant.*
- *A member of staff requesting time off for an abortion.*
- *A member of staff asking for advice about having IVF and wanting time off for this.*
- *An extra-marital affair between a member of staff and a parent.*
- *Catholic teachers marrying in secular venues (stately homes/exclusive hotels)*

Many of these issues revolve around the management of staff whose lifestyle is not in keeping with Church teaching. Responses to the issues have major implications for the future of Catholic school leadership – particularly when members of staff involved are Catholic and talented professionals. One head teacher noted:

A major challenge is the problems surrounding career progression for young Catholic teachers who are not in full communion with the Church due to their marital status. The resulting dilemma facing me as a Catholic leader is the conflict experienced in encouraging exceptionally talented practitioners to further their careers when their personal circumstances are in total contrast to the teachings of the Catholic Church and my own beliefs.

By and large leaders do not feel particularly well-equipped to deal with lifestyle challenges. On the question of divorce and remarriage one leader noted:

There are no simple answers to these issues. They are all much talked about and debated by fellow professionals and clergy. To that extent that I do feel equipped to deal with them it is because all leaders in Catholic education are grappling with the same issues. In practice, we can only deal with issues on an individual basis and in doing so ensure that we not only reflect and pray for guidance but seek the support of colleagues and the clergy.

Some felt that the support of clergy, dioceses and the Catholic Education Service to deal with lifestyle issues was forthcoming while others did not:

I was informed at 4pm that a 17 year old student was due to have an abortion the next day. I met with her at 6.30pm to give pastoral care. I did not feel very well-equipped. I telephoned agencies like Life and our school counsellor for support and they were unable to give it. The school policy was of no help. I asked the Diocese after the event for guidance on clear policy. They recommended a school. I sought their policy but it was no better than my own. I finally sought advice from a priest who was a personal friend who talked through with me possible ways the discussion would go and my responsibilities and ability to care and the responsibilities of the individual.

The world is changing, okay? I have a situation I'm confident that no other predecessor in this school has come up with. A member of staff involved in a civil partnership who is going to become a parent. Right? The challenges that is going to present her with working in a Catholic school, and me, and whatever. An absolutely fascinating one. She gave me my line – you said to me 'if we're not about families what are we about?' I will go

to somebody on the staff for advice and discuss it with my Senior Leadership Team. I wouldn't discuss it with the Catholic Education Service because they might not give me the answers that I want to hear. The Director of Education in the Diocese is a personal friend. I wouldn't take it to him either because he would have to give me the answer that he would have to give to me as the Director of Education of the Diocese and he might not give me the answer that I want to hear. Society is changing and it is an ethical issue.

If the Diocese led and produced effective policies, sex education would not be an issue.

One of the most recent occasions on which school leaders felt let down was on the question of gay marriage where, they suggested, support was not forthcoming. One leader said:

That was completely badly handled by the Catholic Education Service. It was awful. I didn't know what to say to the children. I wanted a crib sheet to say 'Right, the Catholic Church says this, here's a simple language letter that tells you what they're doing and why.' It was very, very difficult and lots of young families left the Church because of it. It was a very difficult time to be the person standing up saying 'I'm the face of the Catholic Church.'

Another added:

I think it was outrageous when the archdiocese sent out letters saying 'you do an assembly'. Experienced heads put it in the bin, because you deal with that in the context of a lesson on marriage, not in an assembly. There were loads of complaints and then the diocese didn't support head teachers. So I think the Catholic Education Service in terms of being a role model on whatever issue is coming up politically needs to be very much aware about how that is put over. And for the priest who reads out the letter in church about gay marriage when you had five, six, seven, eight year-olds in without any medium of explaining it was bad as well. It's not exactly the role model issue, but I think how the Church politicises...and it was a politicisation. I'm fine with that, I think we ought to be politicised, but how we do that, it needs to be tempered with looking at unintended consequences I think.

On the question of the Church's approaches to homosexuality more widely one leader recounted:

Quite recently we have been working with the local area partnership of schools with a local organisation called DEED to develop global education. This is focusing on the Rights Respecting Schools' Award, Global Education and the development of the Millennium Goals. During in-service with teaching staff the DEED trainer introduced staff to a range of book-based resources, which included stories about family life and in particular homosexual family life, e.g. daddy and daddy and the children and mummy and mummy and the children. I was not present at the training due to another pressing engagement. The DEED trainer was promoting these books under the equality framework and was questioning whether these types of books were available for children to have access to in school. Many of the staff felt uncomfortable. This took place just prior to the vote in the House of Commons over the issue of whether 'Gay marriage' could legally be celebrated in a church. My Deputy Head explained that homosexuality was an area which the Catholic Church was not comfortable with and that she did not feel the Governing body, myself and our parish priests would wish to see it promoted in school. The question of homosexuality and how it should be dealt with is a challenging one. As a headteacher, how would I be expected to deal with a situation where a same sex couple applied for a place for a child at the school and openly presented as a same sex couple? When ethical difficulties present themselves I draw on advice from others. In the above situation my Deputy Head represented the school and acted I feel appropriately. Whilst our governing body has adopted an equality policy which recognises that those who are homosexual should have their values and opinions respected and not be discriminated against because of them, our parish priest also indicated the opposition of the Catholic Church to the celebration of marriage for same sex couples. These are issues which need to be

reflected upon, where prejudice and ignorance should not be allowed to colour judgement. However at the same time our underlying beliefs make us what we are and as a leader of a Catholic school I feel it is important to promote and uphold our Catholic teachings. Our school community reaches out into the parishes and vice versa. We reinforce the underlying Christian values on which we are based.

Some leaders expressed more of a desire and confidence to make their own theological or ethical decisions about lifestyle questions – and potentially to depart from Church teachings – than others. On the question of abortion, for example, one head teacher of a girls' secondary school said that what she required was “the ability to use a moral compass and reflect on decisions, the ability to make decisions based on the common good and an up-to-date understanding of Catholic social teaching.” Decision-making processes for leaders facing lifestyle-related questions were elaborated on as follows:

Sometimes it depends on where you are personally when people approach you, in terms of location and your own faith journey. There are times when I feel confused and conflicted about my own empathy and understanding for others and their feelings, which may be quite different to what I will be aware the Church teaches about these issues. I sometimes feel well equipped and try to keep up with theological and ethical issues – I know I can always talk to our parish priest, Bishop or Diocesan staff and am comfortable in doing so – but other days it can cause me some great consternation about how uncomfortable I may make others feel about their own situation or those close to them. Dealing with challenges can so easily leave people feeling as if you are judging them in some harsh way and can leave them with negative feelings about working in Catholic schools, which I believe should never be the case. I try to offer love and understanding even if the message I am giving may be hard for them to hear. I also try to encourage healthy debate and deep questioning amongst the staff when we meet with our parish priest each term to discuss any issues arising from our RE teaching.

It depends on what the issue is. I am confident that I know what the official church teaching is. I am also clear that it is my role to support and nurture a love of God not just among the children but with the parents too. Sometimes there is little support from parishes as they can stress the need for bums on seats. So it is often the case that in school we are striving for an ideal that we know ordinary parents and staff cannot reach. I think it's important to focus on these difficult decisions as the truth is sometimes in the middle.

Staff living in irregular relationships is a difficult one. I don't think we can interfere with that, or pass comment, and certainly, in this school, we never have done. I think there have been tensions, at times. I think, sometimes, where it's been R.E. teachers that, maybe, are living with their partners, maybe with a view to getting married, the previous Head of Department found that difficult and might have passed comment. But I know that the previous Head and current Head would not pass comment on that.

It is perhaps on the question of sex education and sexual advice for pupils that leaders feel most confident to make their own theological or ethical decisions, and to depart from Church teachings. In the words of one: “You start from your own personal, moral position and values and apply decisions fairly and consistently in light of this.” Another outlined in more detail:

As a Catholic leader I've got to be flexible. To give you an example, we have students at the age of 13/14 years old who disclose to us that they're sexually active. Now from a doctrine perspective, from an explicitly doctrinal perspective there are ways that we should behave and I can assure you we don't behave in those ways, we give them advice that will ensure their pastoral care. And that has to be our first role as Catholic educators; it has to be, because otherwise it puts them at grave risk, at risk of death in some cases. So that's a degree of that flexibility, but I see that action as being actually central to my role as a Catholic leader. I support my students. I support them no matter what. I'm fully aware of the doctrine of our Church regarding contraception and regarding sexual activity

before marriage; I'm fully aware of it, but I'm also fully aware that God has charged me to look after this community. I don't see that as being liberal. I view it as being the rigid application of what I view as my vocation in the school.

One leader questioned a number of Church 'rules':

I know the rules and I know what I signed up to but I don't necessarily believe in all the rules. I don't care if people are living together unmarried. I don't see why people who are lesbians or gays can't feel accepted in the Church. I might as well tell you everything: my sister is actually a lesbian and my dad doesn't know. She feels really overlooked by the Church but she is a good person and I know she believes in God, and I sometimes feel that things... You know, I don't and probably 99% of the people in the Catholic Church also don't want to exclude anybody and I sometimes think that there are a lot of manmade rules. I would want our Church, our school to be the sort of place that reaches out to people. I would always want the school to be open, with Jesus at the centre, and some of the rules contradict that or seem to.

She continued:

Encouraging people to go to confession. I do not think it is going to engage the people who are disengaged. The people who generally go to mass and are part of the church community may well feel obliged or moved to then go to confession, but you are not actually going to draw back all those people who were on the outside and that is what we really need to be doing. If there is a move to go back to the old tradition as a way of revitalising the church I do not think it is the way forward. I think we have got to actually reach out to people where they are and sort of revitalise the feeling of community and belonging rather than this idea that for the Catholic you have got to do A, B and C. I know as a Catholic as a Christian that there are certain things that we should all be doing and certain things that we should all not be doing, but the way to win people is not by telling them 'this is what you should and should not do'. It is actually getting them to question what they are doing and look at the values and move forward from there. I think Catholic schools have been moving in that direction for a long time. We are the church for the majority.

And on marriage:

Couples who are either not married or who are married with a civil ceremony rather than within a Catholic church, even if they have then made a decision to bring up their children as Catholic. Single parents. Parents who have two children and are not married but are Catholic and have really tried hard to raise Catholic children. I am not saying that as a Catholic church we should not be encouraging people to be married and to be married in a Catholic church, that is the ideal, but it is not black and white is it. For a whole range of reasons people can find themselves in different situations. Actually we should be saying 'great, of course you are welcome'. If they then at some point feel moved that they want to get married in church that is great, we have succeeded.

A number of the lifestyle issues outlined above were also present in discussions over who should lead Catholic schools.

3. Who Should Lead Catholic Schools?

One of the major factors informing the VfEL project has been the declining number of candidates to take up senior leadership roles in Catholic schools and resulting concerns about succession planning. These concerns have provoked many leaders to raise questions about who should be permitted to hold leadership positions in schools.

Most heads and deputies suggested that school leaders would ideally be committed and practising

Catholics with knowledge and understanding of the faith. Responses to the survey question “Indicate the skills and resources especially needed to be an effective and characteristically Catholic leader in education today” included:

Personal drive to challenge and deepen my own faith.

Knowledge of theology, church teaching and scripture. Understanding of how to apply that in a leadership situation.

A full knowledge of Canon Law.

Personal reflection – Catholic leadership or perhaps any faith-based leadership challenges you morally and ethically.

A committed and practising Catholic.

You need to be a practising Catholic because you set the tone and expectation/direction for the school.

Understanding and knowledge of the Church’s teaching on various issues – not just what is written, but the day-to-day interpretation in real life. The ability to understand, develop and deliver liturgy within the school setting. An understanding of how daily routines and decisions are linked to your beliefs as a Catholic. The use and place of prayer in decision making. Leadership requires regular spiritual input and development from Catholic leaders – it is easy to lose sight of the Mission in the day-to-day running of a school.

What should happen, however, when candidates for leadership possessing these qualities cannot be found? Most leaders felt that the problem begins with the recruitment of Catholic teachers. Ideally teaching staff would possess similar qualities to those outlined above – and would at least be practising and committed Catholics – but recruitment difficulties are experienced with respect to teachers too:

This town is very Catholic and there are lots of Catholic schools and high schools. But we have found in recent years that just recruiting Catholic teachers let alone leaders is increasingly difficult. We might get quite a lot of applications from people who are baptised Catholics, but when you probe a little deeper you find that they are very much relying on their Catholic upbringing, but they're not actually practising their faith at the time. And then you're faced with a bit of a dilemma because you think it's not unusual for people in their late teens, early twenties not to practice their faith and you'll sometimes take a little bit of a gamble and think that maybe the fact that they're coming back into a Catholic school, they're sort of growing and maturing, they're going to come back to it. But it's no guarantee and we've had some instances like that when it's been very successful and the move back into a Catholic community has prompted the person to become very active again but not always. So the pool of people that you're potentially nurturing leaders from is a diminishing pool in my experience. We have got to a point now where we have recruited quite a number of people who are practising Christians but not necessarily Catholic and we've found that that has actually worked very well in terms of delivering RE. But then of course it does create a problem in terms of leadership, because to be a leader in a Catholic school you've got to be a practising Catholic. I'm now going to contradict myself and say that amongst the Catholics that we've got, the practising Catholics, I feel we've got some very good potential for leadership though there is a reluctance on the part of people to take on leadership roles, but then I think, well, I'm probably quite reluctant and maybe in the fullness of time we'll bring these people round. So there are pros and cons, but one of the things that does go through my head quite regularly when I look around is whether just as the Catholic Church is not able to sustain all of its parish communities in the same way that it did, whether there will come a time when we have to make some quite difficult decisions about our schools. Maybe less is more, but we're going to have to decide that we either run pure schools that are truly Catholic or we accept that maybe

we're not going to have the same pool of Catholic teachers in our schools as we have at the moment.

If you have a short fall of people who are committed Catholics, young committed Catholics, and when I say young I talk about through university and the other side, beginning career time, twenty two, twenty three, if you are not a committed Catholic then, when you work in a Catholic school how much of that commitment or lack of is starting to cut through into your RE teaching and your own leadership capacity or exercise of leadership as a class teacher? I think to myself, what is their commitment to the faith? Why are they taking up positions in a Catholic school? This is the body of young people who are going to then stream into Catholic leadership positions. The field of choice for Catholic head teachers is going to be limited and governing bodies then have to make decisions with the diocese as to whether they can appoint a non-Catholic or, probably the worst scenario, appoint a Catholic head teacher who is maybe not as effective as the other person who wasn't Catholic. I think there you have real issues.

I think we are increasingly challenged by secular sorts of influences. It is very hard to recruit teachers in Catholic schools who share ethics. Being Catholic is one thing but being a practicing Catholic is another. The head teacher and deputy need to be Catholic to restore and keep that ethos, the Catholicity of the school, going. There are Catholic teachers here who I know do not go to Mass on Sundays. I cannot challenge that. I know that they would really benefit from going to Mass more regularly or even studying the CCRS, for instance, but you have to give up your Saturdays to go there and do it and if you do not have that strength of faith, why are you going to want to do that? When I look for new teachers I look for Catholics. I am looking to develop people who are local, who went to a local school and who are like-minded. But you cannot guarantee people's faith.

What happens when the outstanding candidate for a teaching or leadership position is a non-Catholic? Leaders have given this question a lot of thought:

Do I employ practising Catholics who are weak applicants or non-Catholics who are good applicants? How does this impact on the ethos of the school over time, my ability to minister to them and to develop the charism of the school?

Should I appoint non-Catholic staff who are expected to teach RE? Can they deliver sex and relationships education within the Church's teaching?

Just because a person is Catholic by name, by being baptised or possibly by their practice, it doesn't necessarily make them the best leader or the best teacher. In my school we have several non-Catholic teachers, some are Christians, some do not belong to a particular faith, but they are fantastic. They're incredibly supportive of the ethos, they've taken it on themselves to do things, for example the CCRS. They're very passionate, very supportive. The Catholic teacher in a field of applicants isn't always automatically the best person. Is that something that we support? Because the field is getting smaller and smaller and if people are willing to be incredibly supportive of the ethos and passionate and may have a lot of the same moral values as a practising Catholic...How do we support staff of other faiths or that haven't had the same Catholic upbringing as us?

On my leadership I have got two people who are not Catholics so therefore they are not going any further. They are absolutely fantastic, totally committed, incredibly hard working, and very frustrated that they have gone as far as they will go in our school. They do not want to go anywhere else, but probably will have to if they want to progress. That is a tension because it is unfair: they are seeing people moving up who perhaps do not have the same commitment that they have. I have not got an answer for it, but it is a tension.

Leaders have also thought a great deal about how to manage Catholic staff who are not fully practising or who live lives not entirely consistent with Church teachings:

Many of my good Catholic staff don't actually believe that to be a good Catholic you have to go to church every Sunday. That is a completely different experience to mine as a child when the feeling was that if you didn't go to church somebody would know and something terrible would happen to you. Now what does that say for our future? For our school leaders? Because they genuinely believe that they are people of faith, that they are good Catholics, that they are evangelising our children, but that they don't have to go to church every Sunday, that you have to go sometimes but not every Sunday. Where does that leave us with our next deputies and head teachers?

I have got superb, really superb staff, and there is an issue where we have a member of staff who will not be able to move on into leadership because of some information we got from the diocese that they are not in full communion. That is really difficult because this person is so committed in every single way. It is a very hard one to deal with.

A significant number of school leaders have been personally affected by Church normative or policy positions about who should lead Catholic schools. In many instances this has led them and their peers to question those positions.

There's the immense hurt that becoming headteacher can do to your personal life and I'm aware of colleagues who are having to live their lives very quietly or who have been told that 'you're okay for that school but you won't get a promotion because you are not quite right.' We say we are a church of sinners and we should be authentic, meet Christ where we are, be the face of Christ for each other, but all of a sudden you get this huge hypocrisy of 'but you're a little bit divorced, you're a little bit gay, you're a little bit not quite married'. I find it an abomination and I find that part of the construct of the Catholic Church opposed to Gospel values. It genuinely astounded and shocked me coming in and hearing people's stories of that and it makes it very hard for many people to want to step up. There is genuine hurt for people.

There are things I don't agree with and I find hard being in a Catholic school because I'm still quite young. It's a strange position for me to be in because I'm single and if I did meet somebody I would be in a really difficult situation. Because obviously I couldn't live with somebody before I got married. I do think about it quite a lot. I think that I'm a good person and that I'm in this school for the right reasons but if I was in a situation where I wanted to move in with somebody or I got pregnant I would have to step down. It's an uncomfortable position for a young leader to be in.

One primary school leader told her story in the following way:

As a divorced person who has been in and remains in a loving and stable relationship with my husband, and also the mother of two children, I consider that I have lived and continue to live my life adhering to the teachings and ethos of the Catholic faith. I bring all of these virtues to my role as Acting Headteacher in a primary school, where there are many disadvantaged children within our school family, and it causes me great sadness that due to the stigma which the Church attaches to me as a divorcee, I am not permitted to take the title Headteacher. This sets me apart from my peers and unfairly 'announces' to parents and parishioners that I am somehow not 'worthy' of recognition. I am now in my third year as Acting Headteacher. I have no conflict with my beliefs, they are the mainstay of my life. However, I want someone to understand how the treatment of divorced Catholics does affect not only their 'Catholic' life but also, as in my case, their working life within the Catholic Church. Through prayer and belief in the love of Our Lord I am able to face the challenges this brings. I am fortunate to have the full support of our Bishop, the diocesan education personnel, my parish priest and the Governing Body and this enables me to have faith that I have been chosen for this special ministry in the school.

When interviewed, she made the following recommendation:

To get good Catholic leaders in the future, I think it must be realised that people sometimes go through other experiences in their life that aren't so great and things have to be done in a different way. The Catholic Church is beginning to realise that because they are taking in priests now who have been married. They need to look at the education side as well and think 'What do we really need?' We need good leaders and I think they've got to look a little bit wider. If there's any message to send back it's that one really.

Another primary school leader recounted:

It was difficult going through a marriage breakdown and divorce when I was a deputy in a Catholic school. The teachings of the Church suggested to me 'well you haven't done what you said you would do – marriage vows and things like that'. I felt like a bad person in a way. Because I had the wrong leader at the time it was not dealt with well. It affected where I was, but I wouldn't let it affect where I was with my own faith in the church. So I carried on going. I think it's made me a stronger person and a stronger person for the staff because I can genuinely walk alongside them if they're doing something or behaving in a way that is against church teaching. It's helped me be a better person for them because it comes down to individual, to how we are. Yes the church's teachings say something but you can interpret it differently. If you truly believe in reconciliation, what you did yesterday is different to the person you are today. If you've done something that you shouldn't have done well okay, now's your choice, how do you make it right or are you going to keep turning away from the church? It's easier for me to share that stance with members of staff because I think there are still some people who think 'how did she get the job as a head, she's divorced?' I've gone out of my way to find out about difficult issues, how to present them to staff. It's difficult but people have their lives and they can still be a strong committed Catholic while making their own choices. For instance, IVF or any of those issues, it's very much a personal choice.

Later she added:

I've learnt that applying Gospel values is one thing but the black and white of the right and wrong is so different depending on where your stance is. There's been a lot of assumption and I think some of that comes from the problem of people not negotiating on a deeper level with theology and really what the church's teachings mean and what the Bible is about. Really engage with it on a different level, don't assume. In Catholic schools we have a lot of people who have been brought up in Catholic families who have gone to church and gone through their journey but actually have ended up knowing very, very little about their faith. They've read stuff in the paper, 'the church is against this, the church is against that' and they've formed the opinion that this is actually what it says. But there are choices and there are options and there are other ways of looking at things. Actually the church is about love for all and forgiveness and redemption and all of those important things that mean so much more. Your staff might never come to know it unless you engage with them because they just think that the church is about the ten commandments and about judging you, and it isn't. I'm really hoping that our new Pope is going to help us grow more towards that and I hope that we'll get some good press for a change instead of the beating that we seem to get on a regular basis.

On the question of divorce and remarriage another leader said:

I am sure there must be an increasing number of school leaders in that situation and I do think that the Catholic church needs to look at that and find some way of getting over it. It all comes back to the same thing doesn't it? It is almost as if being married and divorced and then remarried is the one sin that you can never recover from, if it is a sin and I do not actually believe that it is a sin. I am not saying that it is an ideal scenario and I still uphold that being married and staying married is the ideal, but life throws things at you when you find yourself in a situation. One particular head teacher I know was actually told to stay living with their new partner and to be discrete about it. Provided they did that they could still come to communion. But the moment they actually married and it was known that they

were married the situation became very difficult. They basically could not be seen to go to communion. That is hypocritical. The whole issue of annulment is a very difficult one. I know two people who have been persuaded to go down that route, one successfully and one unsuccessfully. They found it difficult because they said in their heart of hearts that they were married. It is like jumping through hoops just to satisfy the rules of the church. I was married and I had two children and intended to be married forever and ever. My husband let me down and we ended up being divorced but I do not want to be on my own forever and ever and I have found somebody else that I really want to be with. We are now together and that is right and we are doing a good job together bringing up the child. As far as my relationship with God is concerned that is the right thing for me to be doing.

One head teacher interviewed explained that he was leaving the Catholic school sector at end of the year because of pressure exerted on him by governors and the wider school community following the break-up of his marriage.

Some head teachers have sought legal advice over Church rules regarding the appointment of Catholics only to school leadership positions, while others have side-stepped rules by appointing "directors" instead of appointing 'deputy headteachers'. (What was less clear was the actual contractual status of those 'directors' who may well have been appointed formally as deputy headteachers, with the commensurate contractual obligations whatever their public title.)

If it is ok to have non-Catholic staff, what happens when you end up with fantastically capable non-Catholic staff who, due to their practicing Christian background, are wonderful supporters of the ethos, yet are not supposed to be made Deputy Head? Do you make them a Director of...? You make a judgement based on your own ideas because if you go by the letter of the law you can have an adverse impact on your school.

I had difficulties recruiting a Catholic Deputy resulting in the appointment of a Christian teacher who could not hold the title "Deputy Head". Our solution was to designate her as Director of Studies. An RE coordinator is the deputy in respect of religious affairs. The issue of Deputy was difficult as the staff member concerned felt that she should be able to take the title of Deputy as she was applying for Headships in other schools. This was not possible as our school is a designated Catholic Independent School through Statutory Instrument No 354 February 2004. This proved to be difficult at the time but we overcame it having taken advice from a barrister who agreed that the designation of Catholic status could not be broken.

Other leaders are convinced that changes to the Church's approach are required:

I think the diocese needs to look at it. Where there are schools that have got two Deputy Head Teachers they should consider the possibility that one of them could be a non-Catholic Deputy, because we are really seriously reducing the field of candidates that we can employ from by advertising only for Catholics. And that's a concern for me as a Head Teacher who's probably at some point going to be looking for a Deputy Head Teacher.

The demands for a head are so high that I think there needs to be dialogue. I am sure there are people out there not in Catholic education who would love to run a Catholic school and have all the qualities we need but they do not feel worthy under what they see in the media and the press and what goes across from churches that they can't apply and even if they are told they can apply they think it's going to be a problem if they are divorced or something like that. There are people out there but they are not being attracted and it's building up that trust which is important with staff and it needs to be within the Catholic community.

Succession planning worries me greatly. I still firmly believe that we should follow the church's teachings and that everybody should meet someone, get married and live happily ever after but we live in a very different world, you know, and I know from my own children that it doesn't work like that anymore. In my schools I have outstanding young,

bright stars who are talented, their teaching is outstanding and they actually are churchgoers, they are practicing Catholics but they are not what would be considered to be in full communion with the church. They might be living with a partner, they're not in what the church would say is a regular relationship. So we are faced with a dilemma. I've got to encourage them to go forward because we need them as senior leaders. So in regards to their irregular relationships, all I can do is point them in the right direction and say that you're in conflict with the church's teachings and you're in conflict with expectation and you need to make decisions about what might impact on your future. They do worship regularly, they're totally committed to the school and I know they want to progress in Catholic schools and Catholic education. I was at a diocesan meeting recently where it was emphasised that to be a senior leader, i.e. head teacher of a Catholic school, you need to be in full communion with the church and I could feel myself going cold thinking, we're going to lose so much talent and I'm not saying we should...I think we've got to get it balanced somewhere. I think the message at the meeting was 'don't tell us if they're not.' That goes against everything we believe in, doesn't it, about honesty and truth. It concerns me greatly because we've got a recruitment crisis. So, it's one that I hope that the hierarchy will listen to and I'm not saying break the rules but maybe bend them. If we bend the rules, in twenty years' time we will have lots of head teachers who are from different types of irregular relationships.

Part B: Analysis

(Written by Margaret Buck on behalf of the VfEL research team.)

The data reveals a number of tensions between leaders' experiences and what could be considered as normative or formal policy positions of: the Church's teaching on Catholic education and schools; the requirements of Canon Law; the national policy of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; and the local policy of the Diocesan Bishop and his Trustees.

1. Who are Catholic Schools For? What are Catholic Schools For?

Generally, leaders' responses raise questions about Catholic leaders' knowledge, understanding and personal response to: the Church's teaching on education and Catholic schools; the legal framework in civil and Canon Law that underpins the provision of Catholic education; and the policies of the Bishops' Conference for England and Wales and their local Bishop and Trustees.

Although leaders were *not* explicitly asked the questions in a planned and structured way, implicitly they provided answers to the following:

- a. Who are Catholic schools for?
- b. What are Catholic schools for?

There is a subtle difference between these two questions when used as filters to tease out what leaders were saying about Catholic education and Catholic schools.

Some responses focused more on *who* Catholic schools are for, and these often led to reflection on matters related to the supply and demand for Catholic school places to cater for differing local populations of Catholic children. Overall, this type of response raises some initial questions about leaders' knowledge and understanding of various related matters, why they think the way they do, and what evidence there is to support their beliefs. For example:

- a. Do leaders believe the proportion of Catholic children attending a Catholic school determines the nature of its Catholic character and defines its Catholicity? What is the evidence?
- b. Do leaders believe there is a threshold percentage of Catholic children above which a Catholic school is needed and stays open, or below which it is no longer required for a dwindling, nominally Catholic population and therefore may be closed? What is the diocesan policy?
- c. What do leaders know and understand about the legal context of Catholic school place provision as set in civil and Canon Law and how do they draw on it to form their thinking? For example, their diocesan strategy and policy on providing schools; the legal framework of the strategic partnership between Church and State for the provision of schools places in England and Wales; the underpinning legal framework and obligations in Canon Law; and the legal requirements of the School Admission Code, et cetera?
- d. What do leaders know and understand about the policy of the Church nationally and locally, as well as the diocesan strategy, for the provision of Catholic school places and how does it inform their thinking?

Other responses centred more on *what* Catholic schools are for, and often led to reflection on matters related to the changing nature of the social, political and economic context of Catholic education in England and Wales in the 21st century. Overall, this type of response also raised some initial questions about leaders' knowledge and understanding of various related matters, why they think the way they do, and what evidence there is to support their beliefs. For example:

- a. What do leaders know and understand about the Church's formal teaching on the rationale for and purposes of Catholic education and schools, including the diocesan Bishop's canonical obligations? How does it inform their thinking?
- b. Given that Catholic schools and academies are funded through the ownership of buildings provided by dioceses or religious orders, maintained with public money by the State, and

enjoy certain legal rights and protections under statutory legislation as schools or company law as academies of a religious character, what do leaders consider justifies their existence and funding as distinctively Catholic schools by the Church and the State? What is the evidence?

- c. What do leaders know and understand about the implications for Catholic schools of a secular framework for inspecting and regulating schools, which expresses itself in judgements of effectiveness, performance and standards? What do leaders think about the fact that Catholic schools are held to account for the use of public money? What is the evidence?
- d. What do leaders know and understand about the policy of the Church nationally and the diocese locally regarding what Catholic schools are for and how does it inform their thinking?

A small number of the 100+ leaders spoken to expressed the view that Catholic schools should focus primarily, if not exclusively, on providing education for Catholic children and families. This line of thought led to reflection on the decline over time in the number of baptised Catholics attending Catholic schools.

These same leaders understood the provision of Catholic school places as relative to serving the needs of baptised Catholic children. In other words, the number of Catholic school places made available by the diocesan trustees (and religious orders) in partnership with the State should match the number of baptised Catholic children requiring places in Catholic schools.

This focus on provision to balance supply and demand may reflect local diocesan policy or diocesan officers' formal or informal conversations with leaders. The strategic work of 'Diocesan School Commissions' centres on school place provision and the management of diocesan funds and government grant in order to provide and maintain school buildings.¹

Over the last two decades, the work of providing school places has increasingly involved managing the implications of published performance data and Ofsted judgements, as well as the deeply significant changes to the organisation and funding of school place provision brought in by government. This applies particularly to the Coalition Government's shift to academies rooted in company law, accompanied by Ofsted's regime of robust inspection of standards and performance followed with DfE intervention to address underperformance. These weighty factors raising the bar of accountability in Catholic schools have been further exacerbated by:

- A declining Catholic population, certainly in terms of practice of the faith;
- Growth in the number of aspirational or middle class Catholics moving to the suburbs and leaving older inner city Catholic schools to more diverse intakes of children and often with small and declining numbers of Catholics;
- Difficulties in recruiting Catholic teachers, especially effective teachers of RE;
- Difficulties in recruiting Catholic leaders who meet the requirement of being practising Catholics in order to be appointed to senior posts;
- Less money 'on the parish plate' from smaller and aging congregations to maintain or expand buildings;
- Increasing pressure by the DfE on Diocesan Education Services to improve underperforming schools (although they have no statutory duties to do so), particularly as academisation removes local authority duties of maintenance, monitoring and intervention;
- A deep and long-lasting recession affecting the value of and return on diocesan investments and assets;
- Concerns about the condition and maintenance of aging school buildings, including compliance with health and safety legislation and fitness for purpose;

¹ Diocesan services were initially set up to 'commission' schools with Diocesan School Commissioners in charge. The role of the diocese with respect to voluntary aided schools was focused on commissioning school buildings to provide places for baptised Catholic children to receive an education in the faith. Diocesan services had no statutory responsibility for standards and performance in schools and this remains the case.

- The need to re-organise parishes to address the implications of an aging and reduced pool of priests to take on the running of parishes;
- Aspirational Catholic parents who primarily want access to outstanding schools in pursuit of high academic standards for their children;
- The significant changes in British social attitudes towards matters of personal life-style choices as well as changes in various aspects of the equality legislation that protect individual rights in relation to such matters; and
- Some dioceses choosing to take on accountability for standards in schools by agreeing to sponsor academies.

Some dioceses have carried out reviews of school place provision or begun to ask the questions about the need for maintaining school places in some areas of their diocese. An example being the Lancaster diocesan review 'Fit for Mission':

I have met many hundreds of dedicated teachers and thousands of students over the last six years and I am left with many questions. These are difficult, even challenging, questions to consider but there is urgency in raising them. They are questions we may have all asked at some point in our involvement in schools but perhaps we have chosen not to raise them so publicly before now.

- *What makes a diocesan school or college 'Catholic'?*
- *Are we losing sight of the uniqueness of Catholic education?*
- *Have we forgotten that Jesus Christ is the true centre of all that we do because we have become too focused on other demands of school life?*
- *Is the Catholic faith a living reality at the heart of every diocesan school and college?*
- *Are our pupils having a rich and living encounter with our Risen Lord?*
- *Are we transmitting the fullness of the faith in an exciting and creative way to our pupils and their families?*
- *If we cannot answer a confident 'Yes' to the last three of these questions, the point of keeping our schools is lost and the project of education in our diocese has failed. It is my fervent hope that we can say 'Yes' to these questions.*

Together, we need to honestly and frankly look at these questions, for the very future of Catholic education in the diocese depends on the conclusions we come to, and the practical steps we agree to take together to safe-guard the Catholic identity of our schools and colleges and serve our young people in the light of Faith.²

The leaders' views on reducing the number of Catholic schools were sometimes linked to the perceived need to recruit as many Catholic governors, leaders and teachers as possible to run and manage them as effective Catholic schools. There was a degree of implicit pragmatism expressed, which can be summed up as potentially concentrating fewer Catholic leaders, teachers and governors in fewer Catholic schools to cater for fewer baptised Catholic children, with smaller numbers of Catholic parents who will support them. One can assume this is seen as a means of protecting the transmission of faith to the members of the Church, the baptised.

The aim could be seen as providing a 'strong' Catholic education in a community of faith where the majority of adults are practising Catholics supporting children in their formation and practice, all sharing common beliefs and values. There was an implicit suggestion that this could provide 'quality' in terms of Catholic provision if not 'quantity', by creating a concentration of Catholics committed to protecting and passing on the faith. In the words of one acting headteacher, responding to the declining number of Catholics in Catholic schools:

We are going to have to concentrate the schools. Where we have ten, we need five. I think we need to support the community. I have primary schools feeding 40-50% non-Catholics. There are a lot of ethnic minorities and English children who have never been baptised in the faith. It is a residual echo of the faith, but there is not much. I think we

² *Fit for Mission*, Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, 2007.

could do with instead of having five primary schools, having one which is Catholic, instead of having three secondary schools, having one which is Catholic. Then the schools would be staffed with Catholic leaders, with Catholic governors, and Catholic parents who will support it.

It is interesting, that in the sentence, 'I think we could do with instead of having five primary schools, having one which is Catholic, instead of having three secondary schools, having one which is Catholic', the term 'Catholic' is associated with a school where the majority of children, if not all, are Catholic; by definition the existing schools not being perceived of as 'Catholic'. This usage assumes that a school is defined as a 'Catholic' school by the number of Catholic children on roll.

In Canon Law, Catholic schools are the principal means of helping Catholic parents to fulfil their role in education³ and recognising this diocesan trust deeds enable some of the charitable resources of the Church to be used to aim to provide sufficient places for baptised Catholic children and young people in the diocese. This raises the issue of admission policy and practice.

It is baptism that entitles a child to an education in the faith. To ensure that baptised Catholic children are given priority in the allocation of school places and benefit from a Catholic education, the admission criteria of Catholic schools and academies should be formulated in such a way that Catholic children and young people are given priority in the governors' allocation of school places over all other applicants:

A Catholic school is never simply a school for those who choose it. A Catholic school is always, first of all, a school for Catholics. Of course, others who seek a place at the school are most welcome as long as space permits. They are fully part of the school community and fully treasured.⁴

This principle is protected in civil law on admissions to schools. Interestingly, one leader's response illustrates the questions raised in the opening paragraphs of this paper as to the quality and accuracy of leaders' base knowledge and understanding of matters rooted in legislation:

Our longest serving governor is a local authority governor who's an Anglican and she's very good because she makes us step back and asks 'Why don't you open up your school to 50% non-Catholic? Are you afraid of doing that?' And when you look at some of the Church of England schools, which are much more open, there is something about that evangelisation to open up. I know there's always that issue that good Catholic parents won't get their children in, but I don't think we should close the doors on the idea. What tends to happen in Catholic schools is that there's 50% non-Catholic if the school happens to be in a difficult area, or hasn't got the greatest reputation. I'm not sure we do ourselves that many favours by saying 'we are going to be 100% Catholic and that's a good thing.'

Since the Academies Act (2010) and further enabling legislation (2012), there have been continuing discussions with the Church of England and the Catholic Church through their national bodies, the National Society and the Catholic Education Service respectively, to negotiate the Churches' responses to draft and statutory legislation on schools becoming academies and free schools.

The Catholic Education Service has been very concerned about the Government's policy to cap faith-based admissions at 50% in the case of opening brand new Catholic academies or free schools. This has led to a national policy statement:

³ Code of Canon Law, Can. 796§1.

⁴ Letter of Archbishop Vincent Nichols to Warwickshire Catholic schools, 21 October 2004, referenced in *Christ at the Centre*, Mgr Marcus Stock, CTS, 2012.

The Bishops' Conference restates its commitment to Catholic schools and colleges and reaffirms the principles set out in its Autumn 1996 Statement, 'Education in Catholic Schools and Colleges: Principles, Practices and Concerns'.

Education is central to the mission of the Catholic Church. Since 1850, the Church's aim has been to provide a place in a Catholic school for every Catholic child. The Bishops' Conference recognises that, in the circumstances prevailing in England and Wales, the conditions required to ensure a distinctive Catholic education remain the ownership of the school or college site, the appointment of the majority of governors, admissions arrangements, the RE curriculum and its inspection, worship, and the employment of staff.

Accordingly, the Bishops' Conference takes the view that the imposition of a 50% cap on the control of admissions is not a secure basis for the provision of a Catholic school and urges dioceses to resist any pressure to establish a school on that basis.

The Bishops' Conference mandates the Catholic Education Service to continue to press the government and politicians to modify this policy so that it no longer places a disproportionate disadvantage on the Catholic community.⁵

It is worth noting that educational legislation since the 1944 Education Act has protected the rights of Catholic schools as 'voluntary aided' communities of faith and decisions on national policy by the Catholic Education Service (CES) have sought to ensure there is no interference by the State in matters that are explicitly the business of the Church. For example, the School Admissions Code that applies to both voluntary aided schools and academies allows the use of the terms 'baptised', 'practising' and 'Catholic', but the CES and Diocesan Education Services (representing their diocesan Bishop and protecting his rights in Canon Law) would resist any attempt by the State to define those terms, since this could be the thin end of the wedge in undermining Bishops' canonical authority and 'chipping away' at the Church's rights secured over almost 150 years. It is not always clear that school leaders fully understand the legal and political background to such matters.

Having considered the views of the leaders who focused on who are Catholic schools for, suggesting that they are for baptised (and possible practising) Catholics, the vast majority of leaders expressed a different, but equally positive view that Catholic schools should not be exclusively for Catholics, baptised or practising. These leaders believed the justification for the existence and continuation of provision of Catholic schools should not be measured by the proportion of Catholics attending them but by other non-numerical 'benchmarks' of quality, if at all. For example, Catholic education was seen as 'a gift' to the wider community. Another leader saw it as 'fantastic that 'non-Catholic, un-Churched families [were] desperate to get their kids into Catholic schools'.

Some leaders also reflected on the significant cultural experiences and differences of some of the parents, which limits or prevents them conforming fully to the cultural expectations of the Church:

I spent two weeks helping parents who did not have their child baptised at the right time, for whatever reason, to get into a Catholic high school. And I thought 'maybe this is my new mission in life.' I may have to start working on criteria for Catholic high schools and what's happening because I don't feel it's right. I think the purpose is wrong because we're not recognising that people's faith journeys are different. What I am seeing with African families is a different faith journey than my journey, a western journey. It's different. I didn't have to walk from Uganda to Malawi as a refugee. I didn't think to take my baptismal certificate with me because I was a refugee. I just feel that everyone's faith journey is different and as a school we should be recognising that people who want their children in a Catholic school have that right.

⁵ Bishops' Conference of England and Wales website:
<http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/Home/News/2013/School-Admissions>

Similarly, these leaders stated or implied that neither should a Catholic school's existence be justified nor effectiveness measured by the numbers of children 'practising the faith'. Leaders reflected on the fact that though children may be baptised, receipt of the sacrament of baptism was no guarantee of practice. There was a general view that in many schools this was 'normal' for the majority of Catholic children; no Catholic leader was surprised or remotely shocked by this state of affairs. Some saw it as another aspect of the life of a Catholic school they had to manage and negotiate, acting as the interface between non-practising parents (who nonetheless want their children educated in a Catholic school) and parish priests who expect parental compliance around matters related to attendance at Mass, involvement in sacramental preparation, et cetera.

It is interesting to reflect on how these leaders understood the 'rights' Catholic children have commensurate with the sacrament of baptism as opposed to the habits of practice:

*Just as Baptism is the source of responsibilities and duties, the baptised person also enjoys rights within the Church: to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church.*⁶

It is clear from the quotations above that many leaders expressed willingness to engage Catholic children in the life of school as a faith community in a positive, non-judgemental way, wherever they may be on their journey of faith. Implicitly leaders understand that educating Catholic children in the faith is about building on their prior learning just as is the case with any good teaching. In essence, children's starting points in faith are very different from past generations of Catholics. In the past there was a greater acceptance of and conformity to the Church's expectations of practice and a more deferential home, school and parish partnership typical of society's attitudes to authority, which mapped out the stepping stones in faith from childhood to leaving school, at least for most Catholic children and young people.

Over the last 50 years or so, civil society has seen the European Convention on Human Rights (1953) and Human Rights Act (1998) as well as Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) and the Equality Acts (2006 and 2010) raise the bar on the rights of the individual and social justice. In recent years, particularly during the pontificate of Saint John Paul II, Catholic Social Teaching has gained ground as part of the Church's moral theology, which is concerned with social, political and economic charity and justice. Principles related to the common good⁷, for example, subsidiarity and solidarity, have secured serious attention among Catholics.

Many leaders clearly consider it a part of the mission of Catholic schools to offer education to a diversity of people in society, and in particular to educate the poorer or more vulnerable. Admitting children, including those of other faiths or no faith, from diverse backgrounds is considered beneficial both to the Church and society. Concepts such as social cohesion and inclusion are not seen as stemming from legislation but from the Church's teaching and leaders' beliefs about the origin and destiny of the human person.

The leaders' comments reflect the fact that many Catholic schools, particularly in inner city areas or in some dioceses generally, depending on their geographical location, have high numbers of children from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, cultures and faiths. Leaders see this through the lens of the Church's mission, providing opportunities for evangelisation, as a number of the extracts above have already outlined. Many leaders elaborated further on this point. They noted that a consequence of non-Catholics being offered places in their schools has a knock-on effect in terms of the evangelisation of those children's parents and the wider community.

For most leaders, the religious character of Catholic schools is not defined by the number of Catholic pupils on roll, but by the schools' distinctive Catholic ethos. "The word 'ethos' can be understood as 'a way of living, behaving and doing things by people who, though diverse, follow common values and are united by a shared vision of life. It is often therefore used in a way that is

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1269.

⁷ *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, CBCEW, 1997, & *The Common Good in Education*, CBCEW, 1997.

closely linked with 'culture' and 'philosophy'.⁸ Documenting leaders' understandings of a Catholic ethos in full is beyond the scope of this paper, but often leaders spoke about providing an education in the faith for the whole child, unique, special and created by God, seeing the formation and holistic development of the human person as the core purpose of the educational enterprise. And, this included children who weren't Catholic:

I spent 15 years of my teaching profession in community schools in inner London before coming over to the Catholic sector 13 years ago. People ask me often when they see me, 'What's the difference then?' In terms of the mission of the Catholic school I see it on a very simple level because I'm a very simple person basically. I've got about 55% baptised Catholic but I see every child in the school as a unique and special creation of God. Therefore they all deserve the respect and the quality that comes with that. It's the education of the entire child, not just their academic ability and progress; it's their spiritual development, the whole thing.

Leaders also expressed the view that the success of Catholic schools, for most leaders, should not be judged according to the proportion of pupils attending church each week. Rather – leaders repeatedly suggested – the school is the main if not the only experience of Church for young people: schools are engaged in evangelisation (with major implications for what Church is and should be). Leaders looked instead to helping children to learn about God and form a relationship with him.

Some leaders made reference to admitting children to school and spoke about admissions to Catholic schools on a continuum, ranging from being oversubscribed with baptised Catholic children so that the definition of 'practice' has to be applied to allocate places in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code, through to Catholic schools functioning with very small numbers of baptised Catholics.⁹

A few leaders sometimes expressed their views in ways that raised questions as to whether or not they understood fully the legal requirements of the School Admissions Code or perhaps understood it but deliberately ignored its legal nature and the restrictions it places on their actions and those of the governors. On occasion it is possible the headteacher had made a decision that must not be delegated to the headteacher and in law remains a function of the governors. (Interestingly, in doing so it is possible there were longer-term budgetary consequences and organisational issues for the school that governors had not sanctioned.)

In summary, reflection on responses that explore who and what Catholic schools are for, supports the views of researchers expressed elsewhere, that there is significant variation in leaders' knowledge and understandings of the mission, aims and purposes of a Catholic school:

Throughout, reference has been made to Catholic schools as a sector, implying a degree of uniformity of purpose and character. However, while there may be many similarities that justify doing so, it must be recognised that there will be significant variations between schools, both in their understanding of mission and the pupil population they serve; perhaps more so today than in previous decades. The degree of religious understanding and adherence to the Catholic faith shown by parents will vary. School governors, appointed by the Church to secure and develop the religious character of the school, will have varying levels of personal adherence and may differ in their understanding of, and commitment to, the religious dimension of Catholic education as defined by the Ordinary of the diocese. Catholic teachers are also likely to have different levels of faith commitment. While such differences may not impinge upon their pedagogical competence, their ability to contribute towards developing and sustaining the Catholicity of the school may be affected. In addition, not all teachers in Catholic are themselves

⁸ *Christ at the Centre*, Mgr Marcus Stock, CTS, 2012.

⁹ The purpose of the School Admissions Code is to ensure that all school places for maintained schools (excluding maintained special schools) and Academies are allocated and offered in an open and fair way. The Code has the force of law, and where the words 'must' or 'must not' are used, these represent a mandatory requirement.

baptised Catholics. This particularly the case in the secondary sector where some 46 percent of the teaching staff are not Catholics; in the primary phase it is much lower, approximately 19 percent (Catholic Education Service, 2003).¹⁰ The same will be true of the pupil population where numbers of non-Catholic pupils have risen when places become available (in Catholic schools) because of the declining birth rate. Significant numbers of non-Catholic pupils may have an influence on the nature of the school and the education it can provide through implications for pupil attainment, if any, have not yet been empirically tested to any great extent.¹¹

This theme is extended further by Professor John Sullivan:

There is gradually emerging, through the cumulative work of scholars in many countries, an intermediate discourse about Catholic education, one that is neither abstractly universal yet platitudinous (who does not want loving communities?) nor merely operating at the local and practical level of 'tips for teachers.' Head teachers of Catholic schools play an especially crucial role in developing this intermediate discourse, along with other partners, such as parents, pupils, teachers, academics, bishops, clergy, diocesan officers, advisers, inspectors and policy makers. It is not a matter of a clear philosophy and theology, complete, readily available, waiting to be put into practice. This would be a display of one-way thinking. Rather, the intermediate discourse that grows up between text and context, between principles and practice, only emerges in the light of particular challenges: for example, those thrown up by admissions policies, curriculum decisions, assessment tasks, in partnership with various groups and in response to diverse pastoral situations. Only then do we come to see the meaning and purchase as well as the weakness or incompleteness of our starting philosophy and theology. As philosopher of education Terence McLaughlin¹² says, "there is a limit to the extent to which any Catholic perspective on education (or indeed any other general educational perspective) can be abstracted from the practical circumstances in which the enterprise of education must be conducted at any particular time."¹³

Since the Education Acts of 1870 and 1944, if ever there was a time to dig deep into the questions and answer what are Catholic schools for and who are they for *in the practical circumstances of the day*, it is now.

The Coalition Government's strategy and policy for education, particularly the consequences of the Academies Act 2010 and enabling legislation, has changed forever the uniform playing field of voluntary aided status for maintained Catholic schools and introduced opportunities for variety hereto unimagined, let alone desired. In January 2011, as Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, Bishop Malcolm McMahon issued the following statement:

Since the election of the new coalition Government in May 2010 we have seen rapid changes to the education landscape. As well as the Academies Act 2010, the Government published just this week another sizeable Education Bill containing far-reaching reforms.

Let me begin by acknowledging the tremendous amount of work done on Academies by the Catholic Education Service (CES) on behalf of the Bishops. Our starting point has been one of caution given that the current system of Voluntary Aided (VA) schools has served the Catholic community and wider civil society well since the 1940s. The CES has engaged in painstaking negotiations with Ministers and officials, held symposia involving our Bishops and Diocesan officers, established an Academies Working Group and worked on the templates which form the basis of a Supplemental Agreement and thereby a

¹⁰ See the Catholic Education Service Digest of 2013 Census Data for Schools & Colleges in England, published November 2013 for updated figures: primary – just under one third and secondary 56 percent.

¹¹ Andrew B. Morris, *Fifty Years on: the Case for Catholic Schools*, Matthew James Publishing, 2008.

¹² Terence H. McLaughlin, "A Catholic Perspective on Education," *Journal of Education & Christian Belief*, 6, no. 2 (2002): 122

¹³ Professor John Sullivan (Ed.), Chapter 7, Text and Context: Mediating the Mission in Catholic Schools, *Communicating Faith*, CUA Press, 2010.

national Catholic model for conversion to Academies. At the beginning of the process we asked the twin questions: could Catholic schools become Academies and, if so, should they do so?

There have been significant changes to Government policy over the past few months on sensitive areas such as land and the rights of trustees, achieved in no small part by the diligent work of CES staff. I would like to express the thanks of the Bishops to those staff and also to Ministers and officials in the Department for Education who have been of such help. It is now our view that Catholic schools could become academies, subject to further discussion with Ministers. A more difficult question is: should they do so?

In arriving at a conclusion to that question we have reflected at length on Catholic social teaching and our responsibilities to the wider community and the poor; we are not in favour of a free-for-all in which some institutions flourish whilst others wither, for our schools are not just lone institutions, they are part of a family both of Catholic schools and the wider landscape of schools. We do not seek to turn our schools into businesses. We are also aware of the legislative safeguards that have applied to our schools for many years; we have therefore sought parity with those safeguards and protection for our assets in the foundation documents and Instruments of Governance of Academies. We are feeling more confident that this can be achieved and we expect that each Catholic Academy be entitled a 'Catholic Voluntary Academy', a reflection of the distinctive nature of our sector, its history and what it brings.

We are under no illusion about both the direction and pace of Government policy and we are taking a hard-headed look at the world as we find it. Our conclusion is that we should make conversion to Academies a ready possibility for Catholic schools, subject to the wishes of their Bishop, Trustees and Governing Body. We expect that the establishment of federations of schools may be a stepping stone on the route to Academy status, or form the basis of an Academy trust. One of the areas which we want to explore in more detail with the Government is the diverse Academy Trusts structure which may suit different local circumstances e.g. having an umbrella Trust or cluster of schools forming an Academy Trust.

The landscape is changing rapidly and we must be prepared to innovate and adapt with it, wherever appropriate to fulfil our mission in Catholic education. Our support for the Voluntary Aided sector will continue. Appropriate arrangements will be made to meet local situations, including protecting the right of schools to remain Voluntary Aided, become part of a Federation or become an Academy. We remember that the primary purpose of Catholic schools is the promotion of the Common Good through the education of children.

To these ends I have asked the CES to lead the development of a national strategy for Catholic education which meets the challenges which I have outlined above.

This statement was made three years ago and already the world inside and outside the Church locally, nationally and globally has moved on. All the main political parties in England accept the direction of travel of academisation and the fundamental changes to the provision of functions to support VA schools previously carried out by local authorities. Wales is under pressure since schools have been judged to be underperforming generally. Dioceses have broken the single shared VA mould for schools and now there are a wide variety of models of conversion to academy status, including some where the diocese in question has for the first time 'crossed the line' to take on accountability for standards and performance in some of its academies. Agreements with Government and funding arrangements have created local agreement on the specific nature of governance, accountability and admissions. Added to this context, is perhaps the potentially longer-term significance of the election of Pope Francis to the papacy; the Synod provides a particular opportunity for the Pope and his Bishops – his brothers-in-Christ – charged with the governance and pastoral care of the Church, to consider matters that impact significantly on Catholic schools.

Perhaps the key question emerging from this section reflects the one that sits at the end of above statement made by Archbishop McMahon in 2011:

- Given the recent and continuing changes to the educational landscape, how might Catholic leaders contribute to the development of a national strategy for Catholic education that meets the challenges of today?

2. Life-Style Issues Encountered by Leaders

The 30th survey of British Social Attitudes (BSA) published by NatCen Social Research in September 2013 surveyed more than 3,000 people. One of the key findings, compared with the first survey in 1983, is that British people are more likely to have a laissez-faire attitude to one another's relationships and life-styles, although this does not mean differences of opinion have vanished.

Far fewer people now feel that marriage must come before sex, let alone children, or indeed that someone's sexual orientation of anybody's business but their own. In 1983, it was impossible to imagine a Conservative Prime Minister advocating gay marriage; now public opinion suggests that wide-spread acceptance of gay marriage and gay adoption is very much here to stay. Generational trends make it likely that this shift towards a more 'live and let live' approach to other people's personal lives will continue.¹⁴

This is a significant backdrop for considering the voice of leaders in our schools. Most leaders made reference to changes in secular society that are impacting widely on the mission and functioning of Catholic schools, in particular the occupational requirements of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. There were various examples of the conflict arising between the teachings of the Church and the increasing secularisation of society, expressed in younger teachers' attitudes to personal relationships and their rejection in practice of the Church's moral teaching in some matters. Divorce, civil partnership, same-sex marriage and assisted reproduction in heterosexual and same-sex relationships were referenced as matters that leaders have had to manage.

When asked in a survey to identify theological and ethical challenges encountered in Catholic school leadership, many leaders pointed towards life-style issues concerning staff, students and other members of school communities (see the examples on page 7).

Most of these 'challenges' can be defined under the heading of 'sex and relationships'. The issues centre substantially on experiences of managing staff whose substantive life-style choices are not in keeping with Church teaching. The issues are often exacerbated by the fact these teachers may be more gifted and talented in terms of pedagogy and practice than other Catholic teachers whose lives conform to the expectations of the Church's teaching. Consequently, their qualifications and skills as a teacher based on secular criteria may fit them well for the position of leader in a Catholic school, but their substantive life-choices may prove to be a barrier in terms of the contractual obligations.

Like all employees anywhere, leaders in Catholic schools are required to sign a contract of employment. The CES model contract of employment for a teacher and those in leadership posts in diocesan Catholic schools states:

GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

4.1 You are to exercise the ministry of a teacher under the supervision of the Diocesan Bishop and to exercise the professional duties and maintain the professional standards of [...] in the School, under the direction of the Governing Body and under the immediate directions of the [Headteacher / Governing Body] and in accordance with:

¹⁴ 30th Survey of British Social Attitudes, NatCen Social Research, 2013.

- 4.1 (a) the provisions of the Education Acts and any associated regulations;
- 4.1 (b) the Trust Deed and the Instrument of Government of the School;
- 4.1 (c) Canon Law in relation to the governance and the Catholic nature of the School; [...]
- 4.1 (f) any policies, procedures, regulations or rules of the Governing Body;

4.2 You are:

- 4.2 (a) expected to be conscientious and loyal to the aims and objectives of the School
- 4.2 (b) required to maintain and develop the Catholic character of the School;
- 4.2 (c) to have regard to the Catholic character of the School and not do anything in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the same. [...]
- 4.4 Where You wish to take part in any outside activity which may, in the reasonable opinion of the Governing Body, interfere with the efficient discharge of Your duties under this contract, You are required to obtain the prior written consent of the Governing Body, such consent not to be unreasonably withheld.¹⁵

Statutory legislation in England and Wales makes provision for schools of a religious character to maintain their relevant religious ethos. Section 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 makes the following provision for schools (Section 124A of the Act contains the same provisions for independent schools and academies):

Regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school, to any conduct on his part which is incompatible with the precept, or the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified.

Thus civil law enables Catholic schools and academies to require senior leaders are 'practising Catholics'. A definition of a practising Catholic, as a 'genuine occupational requirement', is given in *Christ at the Centre*, which states:

*[Leaders] carry an obligation of office and a requirement that cannot be fulfilled by someone who does not adhere in their substantive life choices to the teachings of the Catholic Church, or by anyone who does not share the Catholic faith.*¹⁶

The purpose in publishing the definition of a practising Catholic was because:

*The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales requires that certain key posts within Catholic schools are held by 'practising Catholics'. This Supplement [to Christ at the Centre] defines what a 'practising Catholic' is for the purposes of these appointments.*¹⁷

The Bishops' Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools states:

The posts of Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and Head or Co-ordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics. Other Leadership posts that affect directly the Catholic Mission of the school should, wherever possible, be staffed by skilled practitioners who are committed Catholics. All teachers must respect and support the aims and objectives of a Catholic school.

In essence, the publications referred to above are intended to clarify and remove ambiguity from matters related to contractual obligations and definitions, in keeping with normal employment practice, and in relation to any disciplinary action that may need to be taken in an appropriate manner:

¹⁵ The CES model contract for a teacher in an academy uses similar wording, allowing for the legal differences between a school and an academy setting.

¹⁶ Mgr Marcus Stock, *Christ at the Centre*, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

*Any action that [...] governing bodies [or headteachers] may be required to take within the appropriate procedural and legal parameters should though, be measured, sensitive and exercised with charity and compassion. Working with professional associations, every effort should be made to manage, with dignity and respect, the impact of any action that needs to be taken upon the individuals concerned, their families and the Catholic school community.*¹⁸

This last paragraph is very significant; it focuses on *how* any life-style matters must be managed. Employers and managers will always have to manage employment issues; how governors and headteachers in Catholic schools manage issues that are challenging, sensitive, very personal and involving others outside the employ of the school, will be the measure of the ethos and leadership of the Catholic community.

The interviews and collection of other data was not intended to identify whether or not leaders know the contractual and procedural framework for the employment of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. Whatever the level of their knowledge and understanding and experience of managing such matters informally and formally, leaders offered a variety of observations that reveal their concern, anxiety, distress in some cases, and on occasions their disagreement with Church teaching

In reflecting on the leaders' observations, there are a whole range of aspects that might well contribute to the complexity of managing these life-style related issues. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s Catholic schools were more likely to be full of baptised Catholic children, supported by practising Catholic families and taught by practising Catholic teachers. Now that is not the case; some members of the school community will not be Catholics and will not subscribe to the teachings of the Church; the picture is far more diverse and complex

Neither should the rehearsal of the issues related to the life-style choices of Catholics (including Catholic leaders and aspiring leaders) be totally surprising, given that the adults and children in a Catholic school or academy grow up and live in a society that has shifted its attitudes and mores a long way from the teachings of the Catholic Church, which fifty years ago were more closely aligned with the views of the rest of society.

The pressures of increasing secularisation of society and society's increasingly laissez-faire attitudes has an additional effect on the theological and ethical challenges facing Catholic leaders. Professor John Sullivan observed:

*One kind of tension or conflict about faith schools, more specifically, church schools, and even more narrowly, Catholic schools, that may become more marked in the future than it has been in the past, is disagreement within the faith community as to the purposes and priorities of 'their' schools and to the expectations of leaders of those schools. Referring to my own Catholic community, the move from religious or clerical leadership of church schools, now almost complete in many parts of the world, the professionalisation of governing bodies, (whose work requires active citizenship and responsibility rather than 'rubber-stamping' what the Head decides and simply being a supporters' club), the emergence of more confident forms of lay spirituality, the growing numbers of people who are theologically literate, a more independent religious press, more open communication between and less subservient relations between people and their clergy - all these features may well lead to more vigorous debate about the characteristics of Catholic schools, and therefore about their leadership, than was seen in earlier generations ...*¹⁹

Perhaps the key question emerging from this section is:

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Professor John Sullivan, *Addressing Difference as well as Commonality in Leadership Preparation for Faith Schools*, 2005

- What do leaders identify as their needs and how they may be provided for in relation to managing life-style issues? And how does this apply to the duties and needs of the governors/directors of Catholic schools and academies?

3. Who Should Lead Catholic Schools?

Most of the skills and resources that leaders identified as being necessary for “effective and characteristically Catholic” leadership in education form part of the person specifications used for senior leaders’ posts. However, leaders believe that the criteria for appointment to senior leadership posts may limit the potential fields, because as well as having to meet secular requirements senior leaders in Catholic schools have to be practising Catholics.

Some headteachers have sought legal advice over the national policy of Bishops’ *Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools* to require that headteachers and deputy headteachers are practising Catholics, in accordance with the provisions made possible by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 regarding a genuine occupational requirement in a school of a religious character. Other leaders report having side-stepped the requirement for the post of deputy headteacher by using a different job title.

Perhaps the key question emerging from this section is:

- How can the governing bodies/boards of directors of Catholic schools and academies, senior leaders and Diocesan Education Services work in partnership at a local level to develop effective strategies and policies for succession planning and the leadership training, formation and development of Catholic leaders?
