

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 3: Schools, church and the Church

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.)

In the previous paper a number of gaps were explored between leaders' ideas and actions in Catholic schools and normative or policy positions dictated by parts of the Church. In their elaborations on three key themes - Who (and what) are Catholic schools for? How do leaders respond to lifestyle issues they encounter? Who should lead Catholic schools? – leaders explained the nature of their schools as manifestations of church and offered a challenge to some Church positions or rules. In doing so they offered ideas, implicitly and explicitly, about what church and the Church should be. The following ideas though not exhaustive were offered most often – that church/the Church should be:

- inclusive of Catholics and non-Catholics (including people of other faiths and none)
- inclusive of people from different backgrounds and socio-economic positions (with a particular responsibility to the poor and vulnerable)
- open towards society and culture
- serving society
- evangelising society and culture
- nurturing relationships with God
- providing pastoral care
- a community based on shared values including love
- less preoccupied with rules
- open to debate and questioning

This paper builds upon the previous one to consider in greater detail school leaders' understandings of what church should be. It begins by focusing on the Church at a local level – the relationship of schools and their leaders with parishes and priests – before moving on to document leaders' thoughts on church and the Church more widely.

1. Schools, Parishes and Priests

Many school leaders are positive about the role priests play in supporting them and contributing to the life of school communities:

I discuss things with the Parish Priest, who is also the vice chair of governors, to help me respond to theological challenges.

Although there have been several changes of parish priest during my time as head teacher and their personalities and traditions have been very variable, I have been fortunate to have benefited from their support in different ways. Naturally this at times has led to further theological challenges which needed to be worked through to reach some form of agreement.

I meet regularly with my parish priest and he is very supportive. I often do this to discuss difficult issues, particularly with respect to staff, where I know that he can provide support to an individual or even just to me. He has also been supportive with difficult issues with parents. An example of this recently was when a large group of parents were complaining that the school was praying for the staff and children who had died in an American school shooting. The school dealt with the incident really sensitively but nevertheless the children were encouraged to pray for the families of the victims. Our parish priest supported us with this issue when he was in school for a liturgy by making a point of praying for the same cause, which quelled parental objections.

The parish priest is very involved in our school even though we are at a distance from the

church. He is a regular visitor. He comes every Thursday and talks to the children about going to Mass. Every time he sees their parents he asks them to bring the children to Mass because obviously pre-eleven they can't get there themselves. He always talks to the children about their relationship with God, so they hear it from him, they hear it from us, they hear it from the class teachers and schools leaders. They're getting that drip-feeding of faith through everything, not just through their RE lessons. What we try to do here is link faith to all curricula areas. When we do Mass we bring in some religion from home to it. We try to make sure that the children receive a full education and have a faith journey.

On the spiritual side, the most welcome support I have had was from the parish priest. At the beginning his support was vital and I always felt very well supported.

Where would I turn if I needed help on the Church's teaching or theological principles? I would go to either my parish priest or the priest in this parish.

I developed quite a close relationship with a parish priest and I am still very close to him. I think that really helped strengthen my understanding and my relationship with Christ. Within the context of new leadership in my school and a change in some personal circumstances, I have really developed a strong sense of faith.

We try to get Gospel messages across through assemblies. I get a lot of my inspiration from my parish priest. He'll talk in his homily and he'll often pull out some beauties and I will recycle those. It's not all of them, because some of them are better than others, but I'm thinking, 'That will go down well. Yes, I'll use that one.' I think that if it's good enough for him, for the priest to deliver to the congregation in church, and it's hitting a note with me, then the kids will like it.

Almost all leaders suggested that they would like a strong and effective working relationship with priests locally:

That relationship with the parish priest is essential, absolutely key. I have worked with priests who've been absolutely fantastic. To me, the key element of the relationship is sacramental preparation and it's absolutely vital that school and parish work together on that if nothing else. And it is very difficult I think if you have a parish priest who has no interest in the school.

I think the children should see the parish priest in and out of the school all the time, he's an intrinsic member of the staff really.

I think that relationship between the school and the parish is incredibly important and unfortunately in my school we haven't got that at all and I feel that I have to compensate for that all the time which is quite difficult. I'd love to be able to achieve it because I think it would make a massive difference to the school.

This is not always the case, however. Leaders spoke about working with parish priests as a "major challenge" sometimes involving significant "differences of opinion" and "clerical criticism" of their actions. Much appears to depend on specific contexts and individuals:

It is always helpful when the parish priest is able to offer support during challenging situations as they have even more experience of them than we do. This support is certainly not consistent.

Many priests are not interested in working with children, particularly little children. I think it's a lottery. You could have a priest who is very supportive, you could have one who doesn't care, who is indifferent, you could have one who could even be hostile or just difficult or have certain preconceptions about how a school should be, so it is really a lottery and it's difficult to tell them or correct them. Some are better than others, some of

them are quiet and unassuming, some of them are bullies.

One of the difficulties with my school – specific to secondary schools – is that you've got ten different parish priests because you've got those catchment areas. All of them have different views on what you should be doing. They very rarely agree with each other and when, for example, we're preparing liturgy and they're coming in, we have to tailor it to the priest who's coming in. They'll tell us, 'that's the completely wrong way to do it' and you'll say to them, 'Father so-and-so said that's fine' and they'll say, 'yeah, but he doesn't really know what he's doing.'

I think the other thing is the turnover of priests and the movement of priests from parish to parish. You are just starting to establish a way of working and a relationship with priests who are getting involved and then if they move on, you have got to wait and see who turns up. Are they interested? Some priests don't want to become involved in governance even though they might have two or three Catholic schools in their parish, they are just quite happy to leave you alone. Others want to get involved very positively and then others maybe want to get involved but in a negative way.

I think it depends on the circumstances, where the school's positioned geographically. If you're right next door to the church - we're quite close - it makes life a lot easier. Whereas if you've got quite a large geographical distance between yourself and the church it's very difficult to get those links. I think as well it depends very much on the priest. You can have a brilliant priest who is really supportive, really knows where the children are at and can just relate to them brilliantly. Equally a couple of years down the line you might get a priest who just can't relate to children, just doesn't feel part of the contemporary world as it were, and therefore that relationship starts to feel a little bit awkward or a little bit difficult and the parents perhaps switch off from the church and so you have the knock on effect of less people attending. So yeah, it's quite a fragile relationship I'd say.

It's very different in each of the three schools I work in and very much driven by the parish priest. Different priests will work in different ways. The children go to Mass every single week at this school. They just go out and take part in the parish Mass. Logistically the church is right next door, whereas at one of my other schools the church is three miles down the road. That's really tricky because then the parish priest comes to the school. Sacramental preparation doesn't happen in this school but it happens in the other two schools. Here we have very close links with the parish because we have a lady who works in the parish who comes in once a week. The newsletter goes into the parish, the parish newsletter comes back into here, the children clean the church, they have displays up in the church that they take ownership for and they have prayer partners, sacramental preparation in the church – lots of links with the parish.

The feeling is widespread among leaders that priests do not always understand their role in relation to schools. Nor are they always comfortable in the school environment. It is recognised that priests are themselves under great strain with often unmanageable workloads.

I think one of the challenges is that like everyone, some priests are very comfortable working with young people and some are not. That's not their natural area and therefore, my experience is some priests are a little bit wary of the school and how it operates and the challenge I think for a head is to make the school a welcoming place for priests. Now obviously it is, but it needs to be perceived that way because I think sometimes priests can feel uncomfortable in an environment, perhaps that's not what they've been familiar with before.

Some parish priests don't understand their role in relation to the school. Some of them come into the school and they're straight through the school office into the playground to talk to the children. They are the ones that feel distinctly comfortable. There are others that come in and they hang around in the school office because the office people may have some close relationship with the parish, so they're comfortable with those people.

Others will walk round into classrooms and hijack the national curriculum agenda, and say, 'right I'm here, maths is on hold.' That type of thing. Are they given a clear set of guidelines? Is there something that says 'this is the role of the parish priest in schools'? Is there anything that tells them what their role should be?

My parish priest has actually asked for guidelines just recently because the poor man has two schools to deal with in one parish, which is quite a lot of work. He has sought advice on how you manage the situation and still do all the things he's supposed to do in the parish and outside of it. And he came back to me and threw his hands up in horror, and said: 'The Bishop is not helping me at all. I went to him for guidance and he went to the Archbishop and asked 'what am I supposed to do?'' So I know he's finding it all a struggle.

Our parish priest comes to governing body meetings, leads the prayer at the start and says nothing else. That's it. There's no further contribution, even if the head teacher's report is going through the Section 48 matters, there's no commentary at all. So I wonder whether he doesn't know that he is at liberty to make some commentary and challenges.

My experience often is that priests are quite frightened of teenagers. Maybe they love the local parish school and identify with it, and the children often respond extremely well, but at secondary level there's a huge nervousness amongst priests and it takes a particular set of skills and confidence in that particular priest to be able to relate to young people. We have an outreach program. We go to seven parishes in the course of the year and there's a whole diversity of responses. But, over the twenty years that I've been head of the school, I could only say that there were two priests who were keen and active governors, for example. On the ground, we've been better with chaplains. But in my experience, it's a minority of priests who are comfortable with the reality of day-to-day young people.

They're absolutely run off their feet as you know. So much pastoral work to do and the obligations to lead masses and things and running round three parishes. So they're not in the school as much as they used to be. The children see them occasionally. At my last celebration in the school, I think it was possibly Harvest Festival, a priest came and I thanked the parents and the children for everything and then asked Father if he'd like to give us a blessing at the end and he said no, he wouldn't, he wouldn't like to say anything, he was in a hurry. I thought that was really sad, I was shocked when the parish priest said no. So we've gone from this lovely friendly grandad-type priest who would do anything for us and who was so devout and holy as well to a priest that was in a hurry and had to go and be somewhere else and didn't have time to give us a blessing.

Some leaders think that priests' confidence to engage with young people has been affected by recent abuse scandals while others do not.

The difficulties of working with priests in schools have been accentuated in many instances by an increasing number of priests arriving in England and Wales from overseas:

Our parish priest died sadly. The parish has been split into two and it's led by a Lebanese priest who doesn't quite understand the western life. It's very different and quite a challenge. I find myself supporting him rather than him supporting us.

Dealing with your parish priest takes particular skills. It's very dependent on your parish priest. We were very blessed to have a parish priest that supported us. He didn't always know the answers. He didn't always know the right thing to do but he came in with a smile and he spoke to the children and the children loved him. Unfortunately he's ill and we now have a new parish priest. We are a missionary country now, aren't we? We have lots of priests from different countries and in our parish we have an African priest. He's only been in the country a year and he has no idea at all about the English education system. No idea about governance. He's not one of the governors. He doesn't want to be involved in the school and that is very, very hard for our children. He's very hard to understand. He

preaches a doctrine of hell, fire and damnation almost, to young children. I then have to go and speak to him about what is appropriate to say to the children in the middle of mass and what's not appropriate to say to the children. Week after week after week. Now, does that encourage our young people to want to be leaders? I'm laughing about it but it is a real problem for the children in our school, many of whom don't practice. They come to the school mass and hear a message that will completely turn off their parents and them. We are trying to deepen their faith and give them a prayer life. It's completely counter-productive obviously.

It is a major challenge communicating with a priest of a different cultural background on matters such as demons, hell fire, scripture as illuminating the story of God and his people rather literal history.

This brings us on to the question of what is taught in schools. School leaders are overwhelmingly convinced that religious instruction and wider faith experiences must be made meaningful to children – lessons and other activities must be designed with pupils' ages, abilities and differing levels of religious literacy in mind. Some but not all priests realise or are appreciative of this:

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.

It isn't always about prayer, it is about what you do with the children and it is about knowing what their needs are and where they are at in their life journey and in their faith journey. It is trying to not impose or interfere but to support.

I think it's the difference between what we believe is making the Catholic faith relevant to our young people and what the priest would interpret as dumbing down, that's the phrase he's used with me in some of the discussions we've had. In my experience, the priest hasn't understood the scale of the task in making our faith relevant to young people. In our school, the vast majority of children are not regular mass attendees. To make faith relevant and meaningful for them when they don't have the vocabulary that probably most of us were brought up and steeped in is really quite a challenge. How do we interpret and pass on social teaching? I think we need to be really careful with young people, otherwise it will just sound as if we are talking a different language and we'll push them away. Our job is about communicating with young people and I think sometimes we've come up against a brick wall with that. Some of the worship that we do, we're told 'it can't be like that, it has to be like this.' And you're asking children who don't understand this vocabulary to take part in something that will mean nothing to them. So even though the relationship with the priest in my school has been amicable and in some ways a warm relationship I find it quite difficult.

Our priest, who's in his eighties, is fantastic in that he's steeped in his own faith but in terms of the way he talks to the children and the parents, it is completely having the opposite effect to what he's hoping to have. He genuinely believes that by talking to parents and children in that way he's leading them into a faith life and it's the complete opposite.

Our local priest has written a book for families going through all the type of things that he feels they should talk about with children. We're actually working through that as a staff. I quite like it, because it hasn't got that kind of high-falutin language that makes it impossible. We once had an RE training day a couple of years ago and one of the speakers was over everyone's head and did utmost damage and it was completely irrelevant to all of us. I think the choice of language is very important. It worries me when we go on training courses and they give us that kind of theological language; if you start

getting familiar with it you don't realise that other people have not got a clue what you're talking about.

Leaders identified a pressing need, not always recognised by priests, to make liturgy meaningful:

I lead a school with a very low percentage (under 20%) of Catholic pupils and parents. Developing liturgical programmes and trying to get the Catholic message across is proving challenging.

Making liturgy as meaningful as possible to those (both parents and pupils) who do not come from a faith background was hard. I wanted to ensure that the balance remained right and that the Catholicity wasn't lost. It helped to liaised with the priest.

A supportive Parish priest who is able to make Mass engaging and reach out to people is vital.

Some priests are interested in people and some are not, that is the big difference. When they are interested in people it comes across, when they are interested in churchyness and liturgy that comes across as well. There is an infant and junior school close to me and the children have to walk to the church every week and be subjected to an hour of liturgy torture.

It's a huge challenge for us as heads working with priests to make sure that for our pupils Catholicism is a living faith, where being a Catholic is not just about jumping through hoops – mass said in a particular way, for example.

All of the students here have their baptism certificates and have their priest reference forms. So technically, year seven to eleven is 100% Catholic. If you then came into an R.E. lesson and heard a discussion, you would see that there is a wealth of variations in how people live their faith and understand it, that kind of knowledge base. That is why the role of the parish is so important – to build those links and have liturgies that are accessible and enjoyable. Working with our priests to deliver that is very important. One of the bishops said Mass here a few weeks ago and I just loved the clarity of his message. He was talking to about 250 seventeen and eighteen year olds and he basically said: 'There are lots of decisions that you are going to be making. Really important decisions in the next few years. I really hope that your faith plays an important part in those decisions.' It is so appropriate and such a beautifully clear message. I think that is what we have got to get better at: working in tandem with our clergy so that our faith and our churches are attractive and welcoming and accepting.

At secondary level, where schools are usually not rooted in one parish, leaders are more likely to seek out actively priests who they feel are capable of contributing to their school and supporting them. One head teacher of a girls' secondary school explained:

I think there are several issues. One is to do with the time commitment of the priest in the secondary school. We've got 1,400 children. I need six priests every time I do the sacrament of reconciliation on three separate days. The actual massive commitment of time is a real issue, so part of the work of the school's full-time chaplain is connecting with priests that we agree will match the ethos of the school and that's really important. You have that choice in a secondary school of who you have in and who you don't. I really think it's important that a member of the Church sits on your governing body and gives theological advice in terms of the context of making policies. It doesn't have to be a priest, it could be a woman, but where do you find someone in the structures of the Church with that kind of expertise, if it's not a priest. So there are issues there. And the third one is the spiritual development of the head teacher and the role that a priest or a person within the Catholic Church should have in terms of that kind of support. I think it doesn't have to be in terms of going on a retreat, but that kind of drop in with the person who comes in and develops over time a relationship where you feel free as a headteacher to say 'well this

happened, what do you think?' Or 'I feel like this, what do you think?' And then there's the spiritual development of the staff. Our parish is changing hands at the moment. The Jesuits are leaving. So I'm now going to find somebody to replace the parish priest who's going out. The Church hasn't changed in terms of women. The new parish priest will want to go to the boys' school because he'll see that as a breeding ground for new priests. That's the reality of it isn't it. So one keeps moving on and trying to find another priest or a woman, doesn't have to be religious, who will then come into the leadership part of the school and the governing body.

To overcome the shortage of priests able and willing to participate fully in schools some leaders proposed that lay chaplains take on more and more functions usually reserved for clergy:

I think that priests are very far removed from schools. Just as there's a crisis for Catholic education, I think there's a crisis for Catholic priests and the vocation to the priesthood. A lot of the priests are very aged, ours certainly is. He would love to be able to communicate and engage with the children but to be quite honest he doesn't know how to and he doesn't know how to reach out to parents. The idea of lay chaplains in schools is a good one. In academies I can see how that can work – you could appoint a lay chaplain. It's harder in small schools. You are so small and so isolated and the day job is so broad that sometimes the relationship with the church is just so far removed. I think that's a great shame.

Other leaders suggested that schools should work more with people in parishes other than priests:

I think it's really important that we are very determined and that we work with the priest and build bridges even if it is difficult. Maybe we've got to look beyond just the parish priest and see how we can bring members of the parish community in, because that's Church too isn't it. If we can get volunteers to come in....We're working with a team of catechists for the programmes of preparation for the sacraments and that's another kind of link isn't it. I always say to parents when they come that if it wasn't for the parish this school wouldn't be here. The two go together. If there's no parish we're not here. It's a really important relationship that as heads I believe we have a real duty to nurture and maintain even though it's hard.

School leaders almost unanimously concur that priests should be trained more effectively for their role in schools. Alongside this training there should be a coordinated approach to the provision of priests to schools:

I've always felt that if a parish priest has to work with the school, if that's part of their job description, then they need to be specially trained and if they don't like it they can't be there. I think it's totally wrong that you put someone with a school who doesn't want the training and has very fixed ideas. In our school we've had both: we've had one priest who works with you all the way and is incredibly supportive and one who is antagonistic and is doing much damage. If they're going to be working with the school and they're going to be part of the governing body, they have to be trained and they need to know what's expected of them.

I know that the diocese has training for parish priests and their role within the school, but it's actually getting them to go on that course, that training. I think some parish priests are not interested in the school. If they think the school's doing well, they're not interested. They have other areas that they're involved in in the parish.

It would be interesting to find out how much of the parish priest's training addresses issues concerning schools and the way that we as school leaders address issues. I wonder if they ever sit around and ask, 'what are we doing for our schools?' Are we a high enough priority to them for them to become more involved?

There is always a recipe for angst or disappointment when you have a lack of clarity of

expectations. We have schools with certain expectations of priests and most priests don't know about the expectations probably and then the priest will have certain expectations which they don't communicate to us so you have a conflict of expectations. There might be some overlap but there is insufficient clarity about those expectations. In employment, in jobs, in careers I would say that if you are going to manage people you make sure that at least they have got clear expectations so that everybody knows what they are working towards. It is something that we do not have with all of the priests.

The bishops should have a team that goes out to find half a dozen priests or people who like children and have an interest in the schools and then allocates them to the schools. They could move around and hopefully we would have a decent relationship with them.

Where you have got good practice and you have got good support you can see the difference. We are very fortunate, we have got a sister who helps out and she is like an extra member of staff, she just lives and breathes the school, does everything. With the priests it is more variable, it depends on their personality and because we have had maybe seven or eight parish priests in the last six years it is very difficult to build up the parish links. But if being a part of the school came as part of their training or part of their expectation, if part of their vocation was working with schools, it would make things a lot easier.

2. Schools and the Church More Widely

Leaders try to position their schools within the wider Church. They want to be a part of it. This is considered important for the experience and development of faith among students, staff and leaders themselves.

As schools we linked together to do work with CAFOD and did the Run for Women. It's about opening opportunities for linking into the wider Church. At secondary level the World Youth Days, the Celebrate Movement, other things that are going on – it's about having different things linking with the Church.

The schools and the Church must come together to help students, to open their eyes and give them opportunities. How do we do that?

I attend as many conferences, retreats and weekends, locally and nationally, as possible. Our diocesan staff and head teachers all agree that the primary focus of our yearly Heads and Deputies conference is a retreat style opportunity for reflection about our faith and how we can deepen a sense of this for the children and staff in our care. This makes these occasions a tremendous blessing and privilege and the fact that our Bishop and some clergy can attend too adds a great deal of opportunity for deeper prayer and community. We try to bring as much of this experience into our school too through the use of theatre groups, liturgical dance, music and visitors from other faith backgrounds. This enriches our knowledge and understanding. We are lucky to have the beautiful resource that is Buckfast Abbey where we can hold conferences such as last year's Clear Voices which attracted internationally renowned speakers and an overwhelming array of outstanding liturgies. It also has an amazing bookshop which provides any resources you require with skill and ease. Our priests help us through Deanery days and training for catechists, readers, Eucharistic ministers etc, and diocesan staff are willing to support development of the adult faith life in our schools.

A sense of frustration exists with the Church, however. One head teacher noted:

You are dealing with an increasing number of people who have not yet been baptised and who are un-churched. It would be easy to see some of the things that they did as being not particularly respectable, but they don't mean to be disrespectful. As a faith community the school is facing times that are changing at an expedient rate and the Church can't

keep up. The slow pace of the Church and its thinking and its changing was helpful at a time when there weren't massive changes but if you look at the last 200 years, and then you look at the last 30 years or 50 years in particular, society has changed at a rate that the Church has not. The Church is agile and that maybe has been its saving grace and may yet be its saving grace but it does not change quickly. I sometimes feel like I am battling on my own.

What are the particular sources of frustration for leaders? Certainly they would like the Church to support Catholic schools and leaders more in wider contexts such as policy-making at a national level:

The Church has to have a little bit more clout about it. It has to stand up and say, 'well ok, the National College has got this, this has got that, but we would like a faith element.' Because I think lots of young people now are coming into teaching without Catholic certificates.

More commonly, leaders feel that their voices are not always listened to by the Church:

I sometimes feel that I have a vocation in spite of rather than in congruence with the practicalities of church at a local level. Sometimes the clergy listen but often we are ignored and sometimes there is negative criticism from the sidelines and very rarely does someone want to engage us in any authentic open way.

Without pointing a finger at any particular bishop, there have been some decisions that have been made that have been, let's say bewildering. You wonder how somebody has made that decision because they seem to be so out of touch with what is actually happening in the school. There have been occasions when that has led to certain moral frustration for myself and other heads and certainly a sense that our view isn't being listened to.

Above all, perhaps, leaders would like the Church to recognise that schools are church for a huge number of people, especially young people – and to respond to this by engaging with leaders at local, diocesan and national levels:

In my school I don't feel that we are part of the Church necessarily. We get parish priests in, we encourage them and the ones that come are brilliant but it's not part of a joined up thinking.

The Church in the town is going to change and there are consultations now about how it is going to change. Part of the answer has got to be the Catholic school, I would say. They're talking about knocking down some churches. There's a school next door, a special school: in an ideal world I would love that site to be the church. I'd like for the school, for us, to be the focus of Catholic life in the town.

Evangelisation now is, rather than say non-Catholics or non-Christians, it is actually trying to re evangelise people who have become disillusioned with the Church or maybe drifted away from the Church and sometimes one of their ways of staying engaged is to actually to send their children or grandchildren to a Catholic school. I think that is where there is a huge opportunity being missed. I think that if the clergy and schools worked more closely together, you have got access to all of the, if you like, young church, and yet all of the clergy are targeted towards parishes almost waiting for people to turn up. There is so much work that could be done in schools engaging with the youngsters and the families, which might in turn mean that they re-engage with parish life. You do get some very good support from certain priests and clergy but you also have other people who are either maybe afraid to engage with schools or with young people or just don't see it as part of their mission. Sometimes it is as if there are separate missions – church schools and parish life. Trying to keep those together is a challenge. I think the schools are very open but maybe the clergy need to see it as an opportunity.

If you see the school as a kind of partner in the mission of the church, then I think the diocese should allocate resources to that, and to my mind it makes practical sense when you have got a diocese under financial pressure and you have parishes dwindling, well, then you should be allocating resources like clergy, chaplains whatever to the schools so that we are re-engaging with parents, re-evangelising ex-Catholics or whoever as well as other children. That is a way of reinvigorating parish life and bringing people back to the parish. And I think sometimes what happens is that it is seen the other way and sometimes that creates friction, because if you have vibrant liturgy within the school and the children participate and then children go to a parish on a Sunday and it's a drag and they are not involved or they are not invited to take part, it just exaggerates the difference. The only way to counter that is for closer relationships.

There is probably a culture amongst some clergy that the school is either the enemy or certainly a competitor for resources. It doesn't have to be like that. Some of the clergy feel that the schools are responsible for the deficit within the diocese. The perception of some of the clergy is that the schools are soaking up all of this money and making life difficult in parishes. I think there is a need to review the whole diocese in terms of how we allocate resources and how we move forward as a full church with schools and parishes working in partnership.

I think there's a theological issue. So many of the clergy still think in terms of the triangle of the home, the parish and the school, and for the vast majority of our young people it's a complete nonsense. There is no religion in the home and the parish is irrelevant. Whether they're baptised or not. And we are dealing with a deeply, deeply fractured society aren't we? Including within the church. It seems to me that the theology on which we are founded and which we grew up with ourselves as people is from another era. There are signs, universal signs, of a sea change maybe, and my goodness, we need that reality on the ground. We need theology to catch up with the actual reality of what we do in everyday life.

I met with the priest who runs the Diocese Education Service a few weeks ago and he said something that I think is very true, he said that the new evangelisation is taking place in schools. I think that strategically the Church is actually very aware of the power that we have, but I think the dissonance comes at a parish level where within our communities there will be people who may have gone to your school themselves and their parents may have gone to your school. The Church itself is changing, the schools, as a manifestation of church life and church mission, are changing, and if peoples' memory of the Catholic education they had is very different to what their children are experiencing they can be quite bitter about it. On occasion the priests don't help, because they're not always on our side.

For a lot of our families, parish is irrelevant, but they see the Catholic school as church. They want Catholic education for their children because they don't feel welcomed into a parish but they do want Catholic values and the Catholic message for their children – essentially that God loves you whoever you are and whatever you are. I think that a dialogue needs to take place between the parish priests and the schools about working with children and families in schools. That dialogue needs to go beyond individual priests. I think the schools are at the heart of rather than peripheral to where the Church should be.

A number of these comments gesture towards the concern highlighted above for the better training of priests for work in schools.

Some school leaders took issue with particular Church rules or approaches to issues (additional to the concerns documented in paper 2). For example:

The gaps between Church teaching and how people live their lives in lots of cases now is

huge. I'm not sure that we don't need a Vatican III to look again at some aspects.

I wanted to support our school chaplain when he decided to leave the priesthood. As a school, following advice from the diocese, we were not 'allowed' to support him in the ways he needed and asked to be supported. I felt we let him down as a community and were not enabled to act in the way we wanted to.

A topic which a number of leaders dwelt upon was women and the priesthood:

The whole business of ladies not being able to be Priests. The church has so many strengths and there are so many good things about it, but there are core areas that I just feel it has got to move on from if it is going to thrive and if it is going to draw young people into it. It is not about being trendy or jumping on the band wagon, it is about being true to what is right and what I genuinely believe that Christ would have wanted. At the end of the day he was a simple man who ran around in sandals and lived with the poor didn't he? And I am sure his apostles were married, so why cannot priests be married? Women in his day did not become priests because that was the culture of the day, but women now can do anything so why should they not be a priest? It is just wrong I think.

We have a full time chaplain who we pay a right and proper salary to, probably as much as one of my heads of English. She prepares all the masses, all the priest has to do is come in and say the mass. She prepares all of the sacrament of reconciliation. She is absolutely fantastic at liturgy, but she can't deliver and it's absolutely ridiculous when we're finding it so difficult now to get the priests to come in. So there has to be a future for women in terms of the sacramental part.

I really notice the absence of a member of the clergy on the governing body. The parish priests come in and do Ash Wednesday for us with the sacrament of reconciliation and we can have two more whole school masses in the year. After that there's one for each year, but that's it. They can't come in, they're not well, they're very over stretched. I support them as much as I can in terms of just understanding their role and its loneliness and they understand and acknowledge the isolation of my role too. But as a woman I still feel that we're below higher order mammals really.

Leaders overwhelmingly feel that church should not be about rules or the prohibition of things. One stated this candidly as follows:

To me, the Church is a bit like a club. I've been a sportsperson, I'm very used to clubs. And they all have their little committees, and their rules, and how you should do things, and very often these clubs are select because of the rules that are imposed on the people who go to them. And all that helps to do is to make them more exclusive. I use the word 'bonkers' because the Gospel message is not exclusive, it's totally the opposite, it's inclusive. The Church tries to be inclusive but actually it's only inclusive up to a point. Because if you're not in the club, then you're not.

As in many of the extracts in paper 2, the following statements reveal leaders speaking about their schools as manifestations of church. Explaining what their schools are about, they put forward ideas on what church should be:

In secondary schools if you talk about sex and drugs, kids will come with a view. If you talk about injustice and poverty and what the Church stands for then actually you will inspire them. If you say 'you can't do this and you can't do that' they say, 'yeah but I'm doing it anyway'. If you tell them that the Church is about challenging injustice and poverty – that that's the mission of the Church – then you see their eyes light up. I think there's a real opportunity here to gauge a wider proportion of young people.

One of the things we need is to be better informed of Catholic social teaching. I think the principles of Catholic social teaching should direct the mission of the school and I don't

know how high a priority they are when we set our school development plan or when we engage in our strategic vision. And that teaching needs to be made simpler for teachers and head teachers so that it can be spread through the curriculum and the school. There needs to be action research as well. For example, in terms of girls' education, when was the latest action research or anything published about girls and their spirituality? Where is the life and creativity within the Church? I think the mission has to be creative and we have to be involved in some creative activity rather than just passing on tradition.

There is a bit of me that says I've stayed a Catholic despite the Church, and I have a lot of sympathy with people who articulate that a little bit more aggressively. I pick and choose which parish I go to. The Church is giving us formation and I choose that formation as somebody who has said 'I fundamentally believe Catholicism is my faith and whatever you do to me, you're not going to destroy that.' There's a whole generation of young people who do not go to church, but they live out their Catholicism in other ways – in service, in the way they treat other people, in prayer life, in a dynamic which none of us would challenge as Catholic. I would like to think that some of the remarks of Pope Francis will filter downwards in the Church, for example 'who am I to judge?' The danger at the moment is that people are being judged and turning away from the Church. We should give people opportunities to explore ways of coming back to their faith. Maybe those opportunities will grow but they're not going to come from the current clergy I think.

I teach Year 6 and sometimes what those children come out with is absolutely stunning and it leaves you almost speechless. Maybe as teachers we can be a little bit patronizing towards children and then these children will just reveal who they are, the real child, and you are just blown away by their relationship with God and with the world that they live in. So it is about trying to nurture and help the children along those lines. We don't want the school to become just purely a place of academic study, where we are pushing to pass exams. It is about the children learning to deal with their problems, learning to cope with the lives that they live, with the world that they live in, learning to understand it and to grow and develop their relationship with God.

There is a faith and an ethos that does filter all the way down and it is how we behave and how we treat everybody who comes into our school no matter who they are, they are all equal. I know you would have that in a non-Catholic school as well, you would have that spiritual, moral, cultural development but for us there is that extra point that everything is Christ-centred.

What we aim to do in a Catholic school is to make a Catholic community that is focusing on Christ. In many of the things that we do we think how would Christ have done that, what would have happened if he was standing here amongst us now? I think that sometimes changes our view of what is happening and makes us think twice about how we do something. We are a welcoming community because that is how he would be, he welcomed all and so we take in the vulnerable, the poor, the disadvantaged, the advantaged, there is no difference between everyone here.

I think that one of the things that characterises Catholic schools is the quality of the relationships. I've learned that if you get the relationships right, you can do just about anything with a pupil. You can get them to do just about anything you want. So we're modelling to the children. They see us laughing with each other, and enjoying each other's company, and I think that's so important. They see how we behave towards each other, and that has a big effect. We use the word 'love' a great deal. Love for the pupils is expressed freely and easily, and we tell the pupils we love them. They're told in assembly and in more casual ways, in a small group. The word 'love' is used in that way without there being any unpleasant connotations to it.

Many of my pupils are black African now from Nigeria and Ghana. They believe in a very harsh God and their writing is full of asking for forgiveness all the time and the angle of death is very real to them. They are coming from that spirituality. We have to emphasise a

loving God and an all-encompassing God and be very careful about that. We're not trying to evangelise people with no knowledge of God, we are trying to evangelise people with what we would consider not a very good view.

One thing about the Catholic faith is that we don't ram things down people's throats. We say 'this is what we believe and this is why we believe it and you can either accept that or not.' Everybody has their own faith journey and everybody will go places in their own way. People have to be allowed to question and they have to be allowed to journey and they have to be allowed to develop their relationship with God in their own way. We teach the children that there is a God who loves them deeply and who is always there for them. Your religious life is about the relation that you develop and how do you develop that. Through conversation, through prayer, through going to Mass, whatever that may be. It is about deepening that relationship and these are the ways that you can do it. People will either accept it or they won't and you have to allow people that choice. When we teach things from the Bible we say to the children, 'look, I don't know, I haven't got all the answers.'

I think there's a naivety in assuming that the delivery of R.E. makes us a Catholic school. It's nothing to do with it. If you walk around this school, you know that God is present here, I'd argue. You know that there is a spirituality about the place and about the children. And the ruling to teach ten per cent R.E.? Apparently that came from the Bishop's Conference. But it's insane and it's causing a lot of difficulty.

In the above extracts leaders suggest that church should be creative, inclusive, non-judgemental, accessible and welcoming to all. It should be about engaging and inspiring young people and tackling real-world problems. Church communities should be founded on good relationships between people and on love. The final extract reveals a leader challenging a Church rule affecting schools while simultaneously rearticulating what church and schools-as-manifestations-of-church should be.

Other specific statements of what the Church should be included the following. It should be interactive and participatory, with prayer, liturgy and worship developed by participants:

We have a fantastic lay chaplain who's really brought that practical part of the mission to life. We have lots of children who are driving the agenda. It's better now but last year that caused real conflict with the priests because they were unhappy with the way in which the children were preparing the liturgy. Now, for me that's the important part of the process. The fact that they put it together, they're organising it, and they really enjoy it and it's good, it's very good liturgy that they put together.

On a Thursday I hand the worship over to the children. We have worship before we go into hymn practice and I'll just say who's going to lead the prayers and often when we get to class it's spontaneous, it's not the form of traditional prayer that they say lower down. They show each other what they've prayed about. It might be a personal prayer, something that the church shared or a celebration prayer where they're thanking God for what they have. It is a joy seeing that journey from when they're four and how they pray to how they pray when they're twelve and it is something special, something unique.

We've had all sorts of different activities, to try and develop the life of the children – the prayer life and the Catholic life of the school. Half of the youngsters would profess to being Catholic. If ten per cent of them go to Mass on a Sunday I'd be staggered. However, the balance for me is always those children who go to Mosque and pray or to Pentecostal churches where some of our children will spend all of Sunday in Church. And you can draw on that experience, to support the prayer life of the school. So our gospel choir is good, and it has children from that Pentecostal background more so than, maybe, a Catholic Church background. In terms of the sharing of leadership of liturgy, the children themselves now lead more and are prepared to share more of their individual life experience, and perhaps, family or cultural background than happened in the past.

It should be accessible to people from diverse backgrounds and faiths:

I've had my share of tussles with Governors, some of whom may have thought that we're not Catholic enough. So I've asked them to define what that means, you know? What kind of things do they raise? I suppose: Are we traditional enough? Are we more concerned with being ecumenical? We've had away days as governing teams, looking at what that might mean. And I still come back to, well, what do you actually want it to look like for an eleven year old from an utterly impoverished background? Where's Jesus in all of this for them and what it's about?

Our mission statement has changed because it was too wordy and now we have reduced it to 'Living and learning in God's love and family.' It is simple. We may reduce it even more, because for the younger ones it is still too much. A mission statement should be what you are here for and that is what we are here for.

It should be a space for dialogue and debate:

One of the things I think the children really enjoy about the GCSE R.E. and the A Level Philosophy in Ethics is that they can argue and debate any topic. Indeed, the syllabus requires it and so when they're talking about the role of women in the Church, or the Church's attitude to sexuality and so on, very good debates, occasionally a child will say, 'why isn't this debate going on within the church itself?' It's a very good question because there's an absence of debate on these issues. So there's a tension. Children are up for the debate and the discussion and have their views but we still need these debates within the church as a whole. I think that might be part of the problem for priests on occasions when they come into school because the thought that someone's going to question something you're giving them as maybe not an absolute truth is difficult.

It should be ecumenical. The head teacher of a joint Catholic-Church of England school said:

There are sixteen joint church schools in the country. It is important to recognise that there are differences between the churches but my goodness there is an awful lot that we share and also there are some practices, and some ways of approaching things, that I think enrich the school community. My staff go to different denomination churches around the area and they bring to school a diversity of worship, celebration, creativity and thought that we can all share. In the school we have our values and our mission, we pray everyday, we have reflection everyday, we have the assemblies with a gospel context. It is possible to respect the diversity and buy into a shared vision or mission.

It should embrace other faiths:

You have to cater for children coming from different cultures. We do a lot of multicultural work to teach children about different faiths. I think that is important, although we predominantly teach our Catholic faith. You need to teach children about the faiths of everyone around them. If children know about faith then racism and ignorance can be tackled. What we are really trying to do is prepare children to go out in a multicultural society so that as Catholics they can be proud of their faith.

It should recognise people's unique faith journeys:

When I first came into teaching I felt that if you were a Catholic teacher you had to be a strict Catholic, so you went to church every week, you knew all your prayers, you knew the rosary, but now it is definitely not that. Yes it is still about going to church every week but it is more about living the faith and living it in your school and in your relationships. I cannot tell other people what they should be doing if I am not doing it and I think that in the bible Jesus says that those of you that have not sinned cast the first stone, you know. Catholic education should get rid of all that high and mightiness of trying to be strict Catholics and we should look more at what it means to be a Catholic and have these good

relationships with our staff and our children and our parents. I think that is really important. Obviously I have an expectation of my Catholic teachers to be there at Mass when there is a special Mass and I will preach it and I will be a role model, but I will not ever make people feel uncomfortable about their faith. I see leaders like that, who think that they are a bit more important because they go every week and they practise, but I would question after watching these people and watching and listening and talking to priests and nuns whether they are actually practising or whether they are just pretending.

I think we present a human face to parents. When we are talking with parents and we have cultural evenings and things like that they see that we are open. We are not just following dogma, we are trying to actually live the life really. We do tell them that we like children to come to mass and take part in – and that parents are welcome – but we don't force it on them. Some families are really challenged and stressed and we try to be that oasis of calm when they come here.

Several school leaders expressed their hope that the Church would change under Pope Francis:

My sign of hope is our new Pope who I think, considering his advanced years, seems to be talking a language that we can interpret for young people in a way that we haven't been able to before. That's give me a huge amount of hope really.

I'm very pleased that Pope Francis is a very different leader. Sometimes you need to pare things back and look simply at things. Well, his example is the servant king. Don't get in the limousine, get on the bus and what he's showing there? Simple. Do we need all these robes? You just need two shirts and a staff. Just get on with it.

Part B: Analysis

(Written by James Sweeney on behalf of the VfEL research team.)

1. What to Expect of the Catholic School

The Catholic school, and more particularly the parish primary school and the local Catholic secondary, have been central to the work of the Church in this country. The network of schools was established under the direction of the bishops and parish clergy and religious orders, and was sustained by the generosity and enthusiastic backing of the Catholics in the parishes. Originally established to provide for the educational needs of a mostly impoverished Catholic community and to sustain it in a hostile environment, and to transmit Catholic faith to future generations, Catholic schooling has now matured to become a valuable and desired educational resource which is of interest to much more than just the Catholic community. At the same time, the Church's continuing investment in its schools is premised on their potential for advancing the mission of the Church.

Because schools, as a primary means for preparing citizens to meet ever-new and emerging needs and challenges, are central to the functioning of society they are always under pressure. They have to respond to the demands and requirements not only of pupils, but of parents, of government, of employers - and in this case the Church. In a world that is constantly changing - and a Church that finds itself challenged by social and cultural change - schools have to be adaptable and creative. They're always asked to deliver more, to improve standards, to produce better results; there's no 'steady state' they can reach.

The pressure of change and responding to it is a defining feature of school life and school leadership today, and this applies equally to the Catholic school; and specifically, in the terms of this paper, to the school as a Church-related institution. The Catholic community is not a stable but a changing constituency; pupils of one generation are markedly different from previous ones; perceptions of faith, Christianity, the Church are volatile; religious observance and practice are fragile; and the Church institution (even!) is apt to make changes in its pastoral requirements and direction of travel.

These patterns of change and all that they imply is an overarching theme in what emerges in our research on the functioning of leadership in the Catholic school. There are changes both in what *the Church expects of the school*, and in what *the school expects of the Church* – what it expects from families, parishes, dioceses, at national level, and as a universal communion.

As one respondent put it: 'It's always a recipe for angst or disappointment when you have a lack of clarity of expectations'.

2. The School as Church

I'd like for the school, for us, to be the focus of Catholic life in the town.

Head teachers are naturally committed to a 'high doctrine' of the Catholic school as an institution. But even taking that into account, it was impressive how often the notion came up of the school as embodying the *reality of Church*. This was more than a pious sacralising of the school as a 'Christian community' - much more down to earth than that.

It arose when observing that in many (perhaps most) cases the only real contact between the Church and pupils/families is via the school. They do not frequent the parish, and whatever outreach there is from the parish it does not reach them. Apart from occasional contact for baptisms, marriages, funerals, and maybe at Christmas, 'regular Church' is off the radar for many and doesn't figure in their everyday lives and practice.

So now it's the school and the teachers who are the primary pastoral agents who engage with them, going far beyond narrow educational provision with a broad duty of care, especially for those in special need or in crisis. This carries over to the witness of the Church. The school may be the only place where pupils will hear the Gospel proclaimed, where they will experience the power of prayer and sacramental celebration, where they will be in touch with the communion of the Church.

For a lot of our families, parish is irrelevant, but they see the Catholic school as church ... the schools are at the heart of rather than peripheral to where the Church should be.

This displacement and relocation of the ecclesial *within the educational* is far from what has traditionally been envisaged. Up to now the school has been thought of as existing *within the ecclesial* – even if the priority ever since the 19th century to the present day has been to build schools first and churches later.

Significant ecclesiological and sociological issues arise from this transformation of context.

2.1. The religious and the secular

Faith schools occupy a unique sociological location, sitting at the religious-secular boundary as both secular institution and Church community. They answer to both the secular educational authority and the Church authority, and at certain junctures this can give rise to competing loyalties in terms of ethos, values and curriculum. The secular-religious tension registers in personal life too. Both teachers and pupils live - in many various ways - with both the demands of these times and the call to faith-full living. Given the force of contemporary secularization, the experience of living at this interface has become dramatic, even traumatic. Schools live close-up to, and in their own way re-enact, the religious-secular tensions characteristic of modern society.

One way to construe this new situation is that the Catholic school now is the Church dispersed within society – no longer a 'sub-section' of a Church *in but not of* the world, but an 'outreach' of Church *within and to* the world. This is rather different from the traditional understanding of the meaning and role of the Church school.

This, of course, is a matter of some controversy. Who are Catholic schools for? What are they for? Is their purpose evangelization? And in what sense? These questions will be taken up in another discussion paper.

2.2. Where is 'Church'?

Ecclesiological-theological questions here concern, firstly, how and where the Church can be identified; and secondly, the practices (especially sacramental) by which Church is 'enacted'.

The school is a prominent institution within the makeup of society, and the Catholic school is a prominent feature within the institutional church. Of course it's not 'divinely ordained' but a contingent means by which the life and mission of the Church is carried on; but it embodies something of the Church as a public institution.

But as already said the Catholic school also fulfils a basic societal function (socialization, citizenship, training for personal autonomy, employment skills, etc). It is within this human-socio-cultural complex and in close coordination with it that the school proposes and inculcates Christian faith and ecclesial living. It does so by the practices of catechesis, prayer, the celebration of the sacraments and works of love and service. By these means the Christian 'event' happens – but in the midst of the educational world that is the school.

This 'enactment' of Church can be compared - with all due allowance for the differences - to its enactment in other social circumstances – in family living, the workplace, politics, the leisure sphere, civil society. In all these contexts the Church exists and acts through the faith-full lives of its members. The Church, in other words, is also 'enacted' through life-practices far beyond the

visible boundaries of its institutional life.

The suggestion here is that viewing the Catholic school as an ‘outreach of Church within and to the secular world’ (a world that believers too inhabit and embody) is a helpful way of construing the reality of the Catholic school as we find it today.

These two features outlined above, of (a) changing mutual expectations of Church and school and (b) the Catholic school as a place where a ‘dispersed’ enactment of Church occurs, can be glimpsed in our evidence gathered from school leaders.

3. The School as a Catholic environment

School heads are alert to the importance of the institutional culture and overall environment for maintaining their schools’ Catholic character. But, what kind of environment is the Catholic school? What does it, and what should it, aspire to be? There is a variety of ways such questions are answered in practice – from a school that is uniformly and exclusively Catholic in its ethos and practices to one that espouses a broad and deep Catholic sympathy that is open to and seeks to integrate diverse cultural influences.

In our interviews, the latter approach was predominant. We discern a broad consensus around an understanding of the school as distinctively Catholic and adhering to the mission of the Church, while yet in a stance of openness and engagement with the diverse influences that shape the lives of its pupils and their social and family backgrounds. The following sections 3.1 to 3.4 give a sketch.

3.1. Catholic ethos

The figure of Jesus Christ and his Way is the great guiding Icon:

What we aim to do in a Catholic school is to make a Catholic community that is focusing on Christ. In many of the things that we do we think how would Christ have done that, what would have happened if he was standing here amongst us now? I think that sometimes changes our view of what is happening and makes us think twice about how we do something. We are a welcoming community because that is how he would be, he welcomed all and so we take in the vulnerable, the poor, the disadvantaged, the advantaged, there is no difference between everyone here.

Evangelical values need to be explicit, not just as words, but effective in naming reality:

I think that one of the things that characterises Catholic schools is the quality of the relationships. I’ve learned that if you get the relationships right, you can do just about anything with a pupil. You can get them to do just about anything you want. So we’re modeling to the children ... We use the word ‘love’ a great deal. Love for the pupils is expressed freely and easily, and we tell the pupils we love them. They’re told in assembly and in more casual ways, in a small group. The word ‘love’ is used in that way without there being any unpleasant connotations to it.

It can’t be just top down. The pupils bring the vision alive:

I teach Year 6 and sometimes what those children come out with is absolutely stunning and it leaves you almost speechless. Maybe as teachers we can be a little bit patronizing towards children and then these children will just reveal who they are, the real child, and you are just blown away by their relationship with God and with the world that they live in. So it is about trying to nurture and help the children along those lines. We don’t want the school to become just purely a place of academic study, where we are pushing to pass exams. It is about the children learning to deal with their problems, learning to cope with the lives that they live, with the world that they live in, learning to understand it and to

grow and develop their relationship with God.

3.2. Open to others

Values and practices such as a special concern for the disadvantaged, reluctance to use exclusions, willingness to 'go the other mile' are emblematic of the school. But, as the head of a joint Catholic-Church of England school acknowledged:

My goodness there is an awful lot that we share and also there are some practices, and some ways of approaching things, that I think enrich the school community. My staff go to different denomination churches around the area and they bring to school a diversity of worship, celebration, creativity and thought that we can all share.

The multi-faith character of our society has to be integrated:

We do a lot of multicultural work to teach children about different faiths. I think that is important, although we predominantly teach our Catholic faith. You need to teach children about the faiths of everyone around them. If children know about faith then racism and ignorance can be tackled. What we are really trying to do is prepare children to go out in a multicultural society so that as Catholics they can be proud of their faith.

This can bring surprising benefits:

We've had all sorts of different activities, to try and develop the life of the children – the prayer life and the Catholic life of the school. Half of the youngsters would profess to being Catholic. If ten per cent of them go to Mass on a Sunday I'd be staggered. However, the balance for me is always those children who go to Mosque and pray or to Pentecostal churches where some of our children will spend all of Sunday in church. And you can draw on that experience, to support the prayer life of the school. So our gospel choir is good, and it has children from that Pentecostal background more so than, maybe, a Catholic Church background. In terms of the sharing of leadership of liturgy, the children themselves now lead more and are prepared to share more of their individual life experience, and perhaps, family or cultural background than happened in the past.

3.3. Catholic teaching

The Catholic school exists to teach what the Church teaches. Pope Francis' insistence on presenting this with the right sense of priority certainly resonates with school teachers - he is 'talking a language that we can interpret for young people in a way that we haven't been able to before'.

Many of my pupils are black African now from Nigeria and Ghana. They believe in a very harsh God and their writing is full of asking for forgiveness all the time and the angle of death is very real to them. They are coming from that spirituality. We have to emphasise a loving God and an all-encompassing God and be very careful about that. We're not trying to evangelize people with no knowledge of God, we are trying to evangelize people with what we would consider not a very good view.

Respecting the path of the individual in their faith and belief is essential:

One thing about the Catholic faith is that we don't ram things down people's throats. We say 'this is what we believe and this is why we believe it and you can either accept that or not.' Everybody has their own faith journey and everybody will go places in their own way. People have to be allowed to question and they have to be allowed to journey and they have to be allowed to develop their relationship with God in their own way. We teach the children that there is a God who loves them deeply and who is always there for them. Your religious life is about the relation that you develop and how do you develop that. Through conversation, through prayer, through going to Mass, whatever that may be. It is

about deepening that relationship and these are the ways that you can do it. People will either accept it or they won't and you have to allow people that choice. When we teach things from the Bible we say to the children, 'look, I don't know, I haven't got all the answers.'

Pupils' freedom has to be respected; Catholic teaching cannot be 'imposed'.

In secondary schools if you talk about sex and drugs, kids will come with a view. If you talk about injustice and poverty and what the Church stands for then actually you will inspire them. If you say 'you can't do this and you can't do that' they say, 'yeah but I'm doing it anyway'. If you tell them that the Church is about challenging injustice and poverty – that that's the mission of the Church – then you see their eyes light up. I think there's a real opportunity here to gauge a wider proportion of young people.

Engaging pupils in enquiry and debate is necessary.

One of the things I think the children really enjoy about the GCSE R.E. and the A Level Philosophy in Ethics is that they can argue and debate any topic. Indeed, the syllabus requires it and so when they're talking about the role of women in the Church, or the Church's attitude to sexuality and so on, very good debates, occasionally a child will say, 'why isn't this debate going on within the church itself?' It's a very good question because there's an absence of debate on these issues. So there's a tension. Children are up for the debate and the discussion and have their views but we still need these debates within the church as a whole. I think that might be part of the problem for priests on occasions when they come into school because the thought that someone's going to question something you're giving them as maybe not an absolute truth is difficult.

This approach to the teaching of the faith, however, is disturbing for some people:

I've had my share of tussles with Governors, some of whom may have thought that we're not Catholic enough. So I've asked them to define what that means, you know? What kind of things do they raise? I suppose: Are we traditional enough? Are we more concerned with being ecumenical? We've had away days as governing teams, looking at what that might mean. And I still come back to, well, what do you actually want it to look like for an eleven year old from an utterly impoverished background? Where's Jesus in all of this for them and what it's about?

School heads can feel the pressure of expectations:

I think there's a naivety in assuming that the delivery of R.E. makes us a Catholic school. It's nothing to do with it. If you walk around this school, you know that God is present here, I'd argue. You know that there is a spirituality about the place and about the children. And the ruling to teach ten per cent R.E.? Apparently that came from the Bishop's Conference. But it's insane and it's causing a lot of difficulty.

3.4. Nurturing faith and spirituality

Prayer, worship and sacramental practice are the heartbeat of the Catholic school. Heads express overwhelming conviction that religious instruction and wider faith experiences have to be made meaningful to pupils.

On a Thursday I hand the worship over to the children. We have worship before we go into hymn practice and I'll just say who's going to lead the prayers and often when we get to class it's spontaneous, it's not the form of traditional prayer that they say lower down. They show each other what they've prayed about. It might be a personal prayer, something that the church shared or a celebration prayer where they're thanking God for what they have. It is a joy seeing that journey from when they're four and how they pray to how they pray when they're twelve and it is something special, something unique.

But the challenge is enormous. It's essential 'not to impose or interfere but to support'.

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 ... One thing I've done in my school is tie an awful lot of our initiatives to Catholic social justice teaching, which everyone can understand.

But finding that balance is difficult.

Making liturgy as meaningful as possible to those who do not come from a faith background was hard. I wanted to ensure that the balance remained right and that the Catholicity wasn't lost. It helped to liaise with the priest.

I think it's the difference between what we believe is making the Catholic faith relevant to our young people and what the priest would interpret as dumbing down, that's the phrase he's used with me ... In my experience, the priest hasn't understood the scale of the task in making our faith relevant to young people. In our school, the vast majority of children are not regular mass attendees. To make faith relevant and meaningful for them when they don't have the vocabulary that probably most of us were brought up and steeped in is really quite a challenge ... I think we need to be really careful with young people, otherwise it will just sound as if we are talking a different language and we'll push them away. Our job is about communicating with young people and I think sometimes we've come up against a brick wall with that.

In this, the role of the priest is crucial.

Some priests are interested in people and some are not, that is the big difference. When they are interested in people it comes across, when they are interested in churchyness and liturgy that comes across as well. There is an infant and junior school close to me and the children have to walk to the church every week and be subjected to an hour of liturgy torture.

One of the bishops said Mass here a few weeks ago and I just loved the clarity of his message. He was talking to about 250 seventeen and eighteen year olds and he basically said: 'There are lots of decisions that you are going to be making, really important decisions in the next few years. I really hope that your faith plays an important part in those decisions.' It is so appropriate and such a beautifully clear message. I think that is what we have got to get better at: working in tandem with our clergy so that our faith and our churches are attractive and welcoming and accepting.

3.5. School environment - Catholic environment

The evidence is that under the guidance of their senior leadership Catholic schools today provide a particular kind and quality of Catholic environment. This paper suggests that its character is not a straightforward experience of Catholicism pure and simple, but a more complex outreach of Church *within and to* the world. This is dictated largely by how Catholic pupils and families now present themselves, and also because of the significant presence in many of the schools of those who are not Catholic.

This is (mostly) the *actual* model of the Catholic school, and it has consequences in terms of ethos, values, curriculum and activities. There are points of significant tension, and these affect school and parish at the local level, and more broadly the Catholic school system and the wider Church.

The 'outreach model' embodies particular understandings and ways of approaching the basic practices of the Catholic faith - catechesis, prayer, sacraments, service of others. For pupils at Catholic schools (and perhaps many of their teachers as well) engaging in these practices is:

episodic rather than regular; experienced in the moment rather than deeply rooted in their lives; and in a greater or lesser measure of dissonance with, rather than integrative with, the social and cultural influences in their day to day lives. The practice of service of others is what is most accessible.

It is in and through these practices – especially the sacraments – that Church communion is enacted. It may be suggested that, for the majority of pupils in Catholic schools, participation is in the *mode of initiation*. They are still in what would traditionally be known as the catechumenal stage of faith. In this perspective, Catholic schools can be seen as extended catechumenal settings.

This theme will be taken up again in thematic paper 5 on Evangelisation.

4. The School, the Parish and the Priest

I always say to parents ... that if it wasn't for the parish this school wouldn't be here. The two go together. If there's no parish we're not here.

In its ecclesial reality the Catholic school shares the wider communion of the whole Church, and in the first place the parish. Many of the heads testify to good and close relationships with their parishes and priests. When that's the case, the school's mission is strengthened immeasurably. Indeed it's essential.

As already observed, however, the nature of the school-parish relationship has changed. The school has become more distinct and somewhat more autonomous from the parish. Where once there was a 'close fit' now there's significant disaggregation.

I think there's a theological issue. So many of the clergy still think in terms of the triangle of the home, the parish and the school, and for the vast majority of our young people it's a complete nonsense. There is no religion in the home and the parish is irrelevant - whether they're baptised or not. And we are dealing with a deeply, deeply fractured society aren't we? Including within the church. It seems to me that the theology on which we are founded and which we grew up with ourselves as people is from another era. There are signs, universal signs, of a sea change ... We need theology to catch up with the actual reality of what we do in everyday life.

Even 'signed-up' Catholics will 'hang loose'.

All of the students here have their baptism certificates and have their priest reference forms. So technically, year seven to eleven is 100% Catholic. If you then came into an R.E. lesson and heard a discussion, you would see that there is a wealth of variations in how people live their faith and understand it, that kind of knowledge base. That is why the role of the parish is so important – to build those links and have liturgies that are accessible and enjoyable. Working with our priests to deliver that is very important.

The changed relationship of parish and school is reflected in changed expectations between them – but not usually well articulated or negotiated. For priests the parish is their primary focus; and Catholic priests (unlike their Church of England counterparts) do not have so strong a sense of outreach to the wider civic community. Perceptions of what the Catholic school is about are at the heart of the issue. The school heads see it rather differently from many priests.

I think we present a human face to parents. When we are talking with parents and we have cultural evenings and things like that they see that we are open. We are not just following dogma, we are trying to actually live the life really. We do tell them that we like children to come to mass and take part in – and that parents are welcome – but we don't force it on them. Some families are really challenged and stressed and we try to be that oasis of calm when they come here.

A dialogue needs to take place between the parish priests and the schools about working with children and families in schools. That dialogue needs to go beyond individual priests. I think the schools are at the heart of rather than peripheral to where the Church should be.

Differences of opinion create tensions and dealing with priests takes particular skills.

In my school I don't feel that we are part of the Church necessarily ... it's not part of a joined up thinking.

Sometimes it is as if there are separate missions – church schools and parish life.

4.1. Priests' role in the school

Relations vary greatly. The interviews show many instances of the positive role that priests play. They are supportive; act as personal counsellor for the head; are well placed to mediate on difficult matters, such as with parents; are a source of inspiration in their preaching and pastoral activities.

And yet, the prevalence of troubled relationships is signalled by the stated awareness that there's much to be worked on!

It's really important ... that we work with the priest and build bridges even if it is difficult. Maybe we've got to look beyond just the parish priest and see how we can bring members of the parish community in.

Heads are aware that priests are often not comfortable in the school environment, and that they need to ensure it's a welcoming place for them.

A range of issues is mentioned. There's often clerical criticism of schools making for quite a fragile relationship; priests can be very far removed from the schools; some are interested and good at working with children – others not; 'some are quiet and unassuming but others can be bullies'; foreign priests may not understand the local culture and issues, and then preach 'hell fire'; some clergy feel the schools are soaking up money and making life difficult for the parishes. In addition, different priests often don't agree with each other, and the school has to accommodate their different views and ways.

The perception is that priests don't have a clear understanding of the role they might play. Some are school governors, but again may be unsure of their contribution. The opportunity is there for them to act as school chaplains – reflecting and supporting the ethos of the school, relating to the pupils, caring for the spiritual development of the head and the staff.

Priests are quite likely to have to work alongside a lay chaplain who exercises a fully professional role – which heightens comparisons.

We have a full time chaplain who we pay a right and proper salary to, probably as much as one of my heads of English. She prepares all the Masses, all the priest has to do is come in and say the mass. She prepares all of the sacrament of reconciliation. She is absolutely fantastic at liturgy, but she can't deliver and it's absolutely ridiculous when we're finding it so difficult now to get the priests to come in. So there has to be a future for women in terms of the sacramental part.

The lay chaplain has the task of coordinating visiting priests. This can be fraught.

One of the difficulties ... is that you've got ten different parish priests because you've got those catchment areas. All of them have different views on what you should be doing. They very rarely agree with each other and when, for example, we're preparing liturgy ...

we have to tailor it to the priest who's coming in. They'll tell us, 'that's the completely wrong way to do it' and you'll say to them, 'Father so-and-so said that's fine' and they'll say, 'yeah, but he doesn't really know what he's doing.'

There's a sense of opportunities being missed.

If the clergy and schools worked more closely together, they've got access to all of the young church, and yet all of the clergy are targeted towards parishes almost waiting for people to turn up.

If you have vibrant liturgy within the school and the children participate and then children go to a parish on a Sunday and it's a drag and they are not involved or they are not invited to take part, it just exaggerates the difference.

One lesson is that training for the priest's school role is essential. But, as one head said: 'it's totally wrong to put someone with a school who doesn't want the training and has very fixed ideas'.

On the other hand, priests often feel at sea and let down by their bishops, who don't provide guidance or help. It's also true that some priests 'are quite frightened of teenagers'.

4.2. A gulf between Church and school?

Talk of a gulf is no doubt too strong. And it would be naïve to blame priests, as if the issue were a simple failure of their pastoral care. They anyway are under multiple pressures and lack effective working support. But some failure of fit is obvious.

A sense of frustration exists with the Church. As a faith community the school is facing times that are changing at an exponential rate and the Church can't keep up.

School heads are aware of their role as faith leaders and typically have an impressive commitment to the mission of the Church. Better coordination between them in this ecclesial role and that of priests (and bishops) would help - to work towards a genuine working partnership. To achieve such a partnership would need proper specification. At present, when it happens it is powerful, but it's haphazard, reliant on the personalities of head and priest (bishop).

This issue applies across the whole Church - the forms of collaboration between the clergy and laity - and it is something that heads and others live with at this time in the Church:

A moral frustration for myself and other heads and certainly a sense that our view isn't being listened to

My vocation is in spite of rather than in congruence with the practicalities of church at a local level. It's rarely someone engages us in any authentic open way.

I've stayed a Catholic despite the Church ... There's a whole generation of young people who do not go to church, but they live out their Catholicism in other ways - in service, in the way they treat other people, in prayer life, in a dynamic which none of us would challenge as Catholic. I would like to think that some of the remarks of Pope Francis will filter downwards in the Church, for example 'who am I to judge?' The danger at the moment is that people are being judged and turning away from the Church. We should give people opportunities to explore ways of coming back to their faith. Maybe those opportunities will grow but they're not going to come from the current clergy I think.

The last remark is harsh. A more understanding comment acknowledged the difficulties priests labour under.

Just as there's a crisis for Catholic education, I think there's a crisis for Catholic priests

and the vocation to the priesthood

It would help to have the clergy's perception of Catholic schools and their role in them. This is something that badly needs to be investigated in the same way as this investigation has been carried out. It's beyond the scope of this research but would be a useful follow-up.

5. Summary and Concluding Reflections

As stated earlier, the Church's continuing investment in its schools is premised on their potential for advancing the mission of the Church. The implications of this will be drawn out in the paper on Evangelisation.

This paper has reflected on the changing profile of the school within the Church community. This gives rise to a number of theses or propositions for further reflection:

1. There are significant changes in what *the Church expects of the school*, and in what *the school expects of the Church* – what it expects from families, parishes, dioceses, at national level, and as a universal communion. This arises from the reconfiguration of the Catholic Church community as a whole, the effects of social and cultural change, and the maturing of the Catholic school system as now led predominantly by lay persons who are assuming the role of 'faith leaders'.
2. The more accurate way of construing the actual reality of the Catholic school as we find it today is to view it as an '*outreach of Church within and to the secular world*', rather than a 'sub-section' of a Church *in but not of* the world. This has implications for defining the kind of role the school plays in evangelization.
3. It is in and through the various practices of faith which the school develops - catechesis, prayer, sacraments, service of others - that Church communion is 'enacted'. Insofar as pupils (and perhaps many teachers) engage in these practices today, it is in the rather tentative *mode of initiation* - in a catechumenal stage of faith. Catholic schools can be seen as extended catechumenal settings. This implies its own particular approach to religious and faith education and how to introduce pupils to Christian practice.
4. The relationship of the Catholic school to the parish(es) and the priest(s) is a basic institutional relationship which enters into the definition of the Catholic school; but how it is to be structured and what it requires in practice needs to be re-considered in the light of socio-cultural, religious and educational change in recent decades.

The data from the interviews and focus groups presents a picture that has immensely rich theological import. There is a striking picture here of a real love of the Church - a lived ecclesiology – etched in images of pastoral care, human and spiritual nurture, outreach to those most in need, a keen awareness of vulnerability among pupils and families, and a strong dedication to the Gospel and the mission of the Church. All this is evidence of a definite and clear 'espoused' and 'operant' theology embedded securely in the life of the Catholic school. Such impulses of a 'grass roots theology' are clarified and strengthened by being in vital contact with current Church teaching and the perennial message of the Christian tradition (the 'normative theological' sources) as well as the work of enquiry and exploration of 'formal theology'.