

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 5: The evangelisation of culture

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 thematic paper 1 it was noted that leaders in Catholic schools see themselves as faith leaders or leaders of faith communities. In many Catholic schools today a minority of pupils are practising Catholics. Leaders recognise that amid changing familial and social circumstances and the declining influence of the Church their schools are increasingly 'missionary' in character (see thematic paper 2). Moreover the difficulties of recruiting teachers who are practising Catholics knowledgeable of their faith means that schools are increasingly called upon to play an evangelising role among their staff – evangelisation is seen as an important part of the formation of teachers and school leaders (see thematic paper 4).

This paper builds upon the observations above to consider how as leaders of faith communities members of school leadership teams see their role in relation to culture and wider society. How far do they consider the evangelisation of culture and society an aspect of school leadership? How effective are attempts at evangelisation and what challenges to evangelisation are encountered? The paper begins by documenting the ways in which leaders seek to play evangelising roles. It moves on to consider impediments to evangelisation and measures for facilitating leaders to evangelise more effectively.

1. The Aims of Evangelisation

Leaders spoke about their roles as involving evangelisation. They expressed a desire to disseminate Gospel values and provide children with an experience of church that they are unlikely to receive elsewhere:

Catholic education is about the teaching of our Lord. We go right back to the actual work and life and words of our Lord. We're sharing the Gospel, we're sharing the Word and we're ideally living those examples that were set to us.

School leadership is sharing the Gospel message with as many people as you can on whatever level you can. It's sharing and evangelising and it's preparing the children to be little evangelists or big evangelists themselves. To me it's preaching and teaching and walking the talk.

The mission of the school is disseminating Gospel values among the children and making them accessible. I guess I trim down the Gospel values when I am talking to the children. They are aware that there is such a thing as Gospel values, but I bring it down to their level by talking about respect, treating others as you would want to be treated and things like that.

The classrooms have the mission statement. They have alters which are changed for the Liturgical Year. They have the icons and statues in the classrooms. An alter is always present in the hall so that when we're doing assemblies we're doing our evangelisation. There's always an RE display, there's always reflection.

The Catholic school is becoming more and more important in terms of evangelisation. We are the church for the majority of our children.

Beyond this recognition of the school as a site for the evangelisation of young people, on what particular issues would leaders like to bring Catholic values and teaching to bear? In what areas do leaders seek the evangelisation of culture?

One area is education. School leaders feel that Catholic schools have distinctive qualities that

might be shared with other types of schools to their advantage. In particular, Catholic education is viewed as holistic: its aim of developing children morally and spiritually as well as intellectually is viewed as a particular strength and a challenge to narrower educational aims often advanced by government and wider society.

As an institution we have got to conform to DFE standards and we have got to make sure that our literacy and numeracy and geography and history and everything is absolutely up to standard but you also want to make sure that you are creating a kind of whole individual. I want the children here to become morally upstanding people who are contributing members of society. I am not saying that in a school that is not a church school they are not trying to do that, but we have a very definite set of moral values that we are putting forward and trying to nurture our children to follow and that permeates everything that we do.

Our mission statement makes it quite evident. The core principle of our school, about developing the whole person, is absolutely vital – mental and academic development but also being healthy and developing spirituality. Teenagers are usually questioning. You have got to meet them where they are and give them opportunities to think.

I find it challenging when non-Catholic parents do not accept the concept of Catholic education (equality and fairness for all) and thus try to demand that the school supports and promotes an elitist approach to education through the grammar system (specifically coaching year 5 and 6 pupils to 'pass the test').

Parents are driven by attainment and that's a real challenge. They don't see the bigger picture, they see a very narrow one. Of course there should be an emphasis on achievement but only when it's in the best interest of the child. Parents have unrealistic targets for children.

We want to put Christ and the children at the centre of everything that we do. The focus should be on holistic education but government policy at the moment does not allow for that.

How do school leaders maintain the Catholic vision of education, for all and for the whole person, in a context where government attention is increasingly focused on exams and on high achievers? I fundamentally disagree with the "direction of travel" of the DFE as I believe it is contrary to our core values - all of our students are of the same value and need holistic education. I have to implement the DFE agenda whilst protecting opportunities for all! Far from easy!

As in education, school leaders feel that they and their institutions should promote equality and fairness in wider society:

The Church is very concerned with what might be called sins of the flesh but it accepts more grievous but culturally accepted sins like financial ones. What would Jesus say about those?

Our economics teachers are Jews. It's really interesting the discussions we have about economic systems and they're very capitalist in their approach. We need somebody who can talk about why the Catholic Church thinks differently. It can't just be the head of RE who does that. The wider Catholic mission of schools is about outreach work and the common good in our local communities and the wider community.

I want the school to be promoting the use of fair trade foodstuffs.

If I'm not able to give our young people that theological language and a real sound sense of catholicity whether or not they are Catholic, how am I going to fulfil the mission of the Church to get them placed centrally in society for the common good, for social change?

The role of Catholic schools was identified as being to counter modern day tendencies towards relativism and the absence of moral absolutes:

I suppose the challenge for Catholic school leadership is the challenge of secularism and relativism but I feel that we are in a strong position in that respect because we have objective values that are informed by our faith. Some people struggle with the sort of secular influence in the world right now, an all-encompassing subjectivism where it is hard to have a moral absolute. We are in a position of strength because we do have this objective informing the teaching, the leadership, the values that we attempt to live by and uphold as a Catholic school.

On the subject of young people's lifestyles, many leaders expressed a desire to bring Catholic teaching to bear on popular practices and norms:

There is a strong message in the media that you have to be free, you can be sexually active whenever you want to, it's fine to dress in certain ways, it's fine to not care about your impact on others and your environment. Young people are constantly bombarded with these messages and what the Catholic School does really well, although it doesn't have a monopoly on this, other schools do it too, is that it provides an alternative culture to help students understand why it is wrong to buy clothes from Primark, to drop litter in the streets, to be sexually promiscuous. In London it is very easy to access drugs and illegal substances so that's a challenge. The other challenge is the gang culture that exists in some areas, where girls are targeted to do various things within gangs. We have to look out for our girls and educate them to stand strong, not to be drawn into those types of activities.

We used to have discos in the school. There was a time when they were run very successfully and I had no problem with them but then they just seemed to go over the top. They were playing songs and I was listening to the lyrics thinking this really is not suitable for children. And it was an uncontrolled environment completely contrary to everything that we are trying to do in the school.

I think we have to be counter-cultural today for young people. Even in the last two or three years with Facebook, pornography, sexting and god knows what else, I think the pressures on young people are so pervasive and evil that actually you have got to be saying the whole time, 'look this is not real, this is not the only way, there are other values totally alien to these.'

The lifestyle issues raised by leaders often included sex, relationships and marriage:

It was very challenging for me when some parents wanted the school to support charities who are also involved in abortion.

One of my members of staff requested time off for an abortion. I spoke to her but following discussion she was unwilling to change her stance. Another single teacher became pregnant.

I find it difficult when some of my Catholic teachers are openly living with partners before marriage and then marrying in secular venues (stately homes/exclusive hotels) for convenience.

It was suggested that the contraception bus come to the school. There is no way that is going to happen. We cover contraception in R.E. from a particular perspective. People are being silly if they think that the contraception bus is going to park in front of the school gates. It's fundamentally poor thinking.

2. Challenges to Evangelisation

A number of challenges to evangelisation were identified and elaborated upon. With respect to young people in schools, leaders often raised the question of how to balance the evangelisation of non-Catholics with traditional expressions of faith:

It is challenging establishing the school as a model of evangelisation with Christ at its centre when working with children and their families who have little or no faith background and ensuring that we are a welcoming community to those who are not from stereotypical family units. This is particularly challenging when children present for sacramental preparation.

Sacramental preparation with families who do not attend Mass regularly and who are marginal in their participation in the programme of preparation is not easy. If we exclude these children we risk alienating them from the church, if we include them we devalue the importance of the sacrament.

It is hard to resolve the conflict between delivering Catholic education to a high standard and the need to evangelise within a predominately non-Catholic population.

Leaders spoke about the difficulties of balancing a wish to bring Catholic teaching to bear on particular issues with the need to provide professional or pastoral support for students and staff:

How do we show the school community that we support an unmarried female teacher who is pregnant while publicly upholding the importance of marriage?

How do I offer appropriate advice to students relating to their sexual conduct which remains faithful to the teaching of the Church?

A challenge is presented to leaders when staff within schools are not fully supportive of evangelisation. Much work is undertaken to ensure that they understand the importance of evangelisation to Catholic education:

It is difficult when staff who are not Catholic or Christian or religious do not see the value in masses and other faith practices in the school.

Myself and the Deputy really work together on the prayer life of the school. We've noticed in time that a couple of the non Catholic staff do pick up on the spiritual presence that we feel is in our school. We try to look after and support the staff but unless it is in their heart to reach out to people it's really hard.

Leaders often suggested that one of the biggest challenges is parents who do not support the school's evangelising role:

There is a conflict between the teaching and practise of the faith in school and the frequently absent follow-up at home. It is disappointing when a significant number of parents do not engage in First Communion or Confirmation evening meetings.

Family commitment to First Communion sacramental preparation is often lacking. Parents and children attend Sunday Mass irregularly during the sacramental programme.

We work closely with our families and when we have meetings about the sacraments and R.E. mornings, we invite all the parents in and they are all invited to mass. We have to approach the parents and bring them in because we do not have a high percentage of Catholics.

Support from parts of the Church can also be lacking. For example on the recent issue of gay marriage:

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

Suggested in the above is that even where leaders might disagree with Church normative or policy positions they want Catholic teaching to inform popular discourse on particular issues. For more on the support offered by the Church – in particular parish priests – to evangelisation in schools see descriptive paper 3.

Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by leaders concerned for the evangelisation of culture is the often large gap between societal positions and Church teachings. These gaps have grown in recent years, leaders suggested, because of fast-paced changes in society, particularly for young people, accentuated by new technology.

Pregnancy outside of marriage, people living together before marriage and marrying in totally secular environments are all very common place and accepted in our society today. I feel challenged by this because, whilst I don't agree with them, they are widely prevalent social norms.

Unmarried members of my staff are having children and living with partners. Many parents have no faith or knowledge of any religion. Some parents are single mothers with children to different dads. It is very difficult to deal with these situations when all of society accepts and supports them. I feel in a way that I condone their behaviour because I have no choice but to accept the situation. It is hard to encourage parents to witness their faith when I feel I don't have the tools to evangelise and they probably see me as 'Holy Joe!' They also seem to have no need of God in their lives.

Some problems are getting worse. You've got children from one family whose father is now with the mother of another family and then you've got children separately and now there's a new branch of children in common and it's so complex. How do you go about teaching about the family when the reality can be so complicated and still make sure that everybody feels valued? It's quite a complex task now, isn't it? It is very challenging for all of us. We are going to have problems in the future with same sex relationships and what to teach about that.

One of the problems at the moment is how easy it is for young people to get access to the internet and websites that are wholly inappropriate. The problems that that's causing in school are magnified to the nth degree. Children, young people, are arguing on the internet with texts and Facebook and all that sort of thing. And then parents become involved as well. It's added a huge new dimension to what we have to deal with as a school. And vulnerability – there's a national trend of boys asking girls to take indecent images of themselves, and trying to say, 'I'm your special friend, I love you, send images.' And very intelligent girls are being duped into doing this. I think that there will have to be some kind of correction. We believe that we're a good school. We believe that we try to get the right message across to students about how to behave, how to conduct themselves, and about having aspirations but also having an appreciation of other people, so that you're not just going for it at the expense of everybody else.

Leaders also have to contend with popular (mis)perceptions about religion:

With today's society there are lots of pressures, especially in the secular sector, there are a lot of very powerful speakers who really put down any kind of faith completely and young people are very influenced by charismatic speakers or people who publish things in a popular way. To counter that, you have got to acknowledge those ideas and give a

counter argument. We try to have that kind of engagement through R.E. in the school – it's dynamic and a safe environment to debate and question. If there are young people who have lost their way, then you meet them there and give them some alternatives to think about. In this country at the moment, with the way that things are run, it's not cool to have a faith and we have got to say, well actually it is quite cool.

We have a lot of Muslim families which could be a tension but it is not. We have worked together and developed mutual respect for each others' beliefs. Stressing that what we believe is so similar stops this kind of belief that every Muslim is a terrorist. We are re-educating and breeding tolerance and respect for all.

I used to teach year six children in a different school. I would ask them if they'd been to church and very few would answer, so one day I asked, why are you not sharing with me, I know you've been to church. They answered 'yeah but we shouldn't say that, people will laugh at us.' We need to make sure that each child understands themselves first of all and then understands their faith, so that they are not embarrassed by anything in their life including their faith.

Some leaders evinced a concern that evangelisation might condemn or marginalise children or families. One spoke about a need to evangelise “without distancing families.” Another suggested:

I think there's a difference between making people do things through policing and actually winning hearts and minds. At the moment we seem to have a culture in the country, we police and we legislate for everything. It's all about more legislation to make things work. Actually that's not the way to do things better. People must do things because they actually genuinely want to.

Many spoke about Catholic schools as 'counter-cultural':

There is something very distinctive about being in a church school that is counter-cultural. Catholic Church schools have a message and a vision to deliver which is counter-cultural sometimes and I think that's a challenge.

It was questioned, however, whether or not the idea of being 'counter-cultural' is the most useful starting point for understanding the role of Catholic schools in relation to wider society:

I do think we bear a witness to a different reality to what young people get through the media and the celebrity so in that respect we are counter-cultural. But one of the interesting things reported of what Pope Francis is saying is that you don't start the debate by saying all the 'thou shalt not's'. You start the debate with listening and you engage with people where they're at. That's quite profound and a different start to a conversation than if you just define yourself as counter-cultural.

3. Evangelisation and the Future of Catholic Schools

Leaders elaborated upon the personal qualities they require to engage in evangelisation in light of the challenges highlighted above. They include a strong personal faith, commitment to Catholic education and resilience. In addition, support from other parties, including friends, family and colleagues, must be forthcoming:

I think that sometimes as Catholics we perhaps don't always think we're good enough and we are very vulnerable to our own thoughts and we need the support around us. You can feel very vulnerable when you're trying sometimes to stand up for things which are not necessarily agreed on by the wider society. It is important that leaders have support available to them, and a strong faith is very important.

Often when seeking to advance Church teachings you are up against society and that is

hard. That is the biggest challenge. Then you have got to be absolutely straight as a dye even though in your own family there might be things happening that are not strictly by the book, by church law or whatever. You have got to say, even within your family, this is what I am doing and this is why. There are tensions around the lives that your staff are leading, the lives that your pupils are witnessing.

You have to have a thick skin sometimes and energy and tenacity and determination not to give up because it can be quite lonely. Teenagers are impressionable and they do not live in a world where there is a lot of safety these days so you have to build in them an aptitude and an attitude to be resilient and to hang on to those values and morals that will make a difference in the future.

You need a strong faith so that even in times of stress you know that God is always there supporting and strengthening you. You need strong backup both in school and out of school to support you as head, especially in times of stress. You need to realise that you cannot change society on your own and that there are limits to what you can achieve!

Leaders think that the preparation of future teachers and leaders for Catholic schools depends on effective evangelisation:

I am not optimistic, not that we have not got the potential there, not that we have not got younger men and women who are terrific examples. I am not optimistic because I do not believe that society wants us. I think we are moving into a very secularised, aggressively secular society that does not want faith schools. That is why we need strong Catholic bishops, men of courage, and we need men and women who are working in Catholic schools to stand up and be counted.

I think people are afraid to become leaders in Catholic schools or they do not want to commit. Leaders can make a difference for the good but most people are motivated in their career choices by material things. We need to get the message across that there is much more satisfaction in doing something with people.

Recently we had something lovely happen. In June, at the communion, my Year Six teacher just said to me 'how do I become Catholic?' And from that it has snowballed. We've had six staff, two teachers, two teaching assistants and two high level teaching assistants become Catholics. They were confirmed in November. That has really opened my eyes. We shouldn't underestimate the power that we have in our communities. The two teachers are potential assistant heads and heads of the future. So it just shows how little seeds can grow into bigger things – we have two potential leaders.

Part B: Analysis: Schools and Evangelisation

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

The Catholic school is becoming more and more important in terms of evangelisation. We are the church for the majority of our children.

Evangelisation is currently the dominant iconic image in thinking about ecclesiology, or the theology of Church. It is the practical preoccupation of the Church as it faces the issues of the times and a fast changing culture. All sectors of church life are viewed through the lens of the current challenges to faith commitment and the imperative of sharing the Good News in better and more effective ways. So, the recent Synod on the Family, which continues on to a second session next year, has the ultimate aim, in addition to addressing the realities and difficulties of family life, of encouraging and equipping Christian family life for its inherent evangelising role. The same is true in how the challenges of religious life are framed in the upcoming Year of Consecrated Life, how the priestly vocation is seen, how the role of the laity is presented, and how church organisations in all their diversity are understood. Evangelisation is not one ecclesial aim among others but the overarching purpose and mission of the whole church body and each of its parts.

The interview and focus group data amply show how this theme has entered into the thinking of Catholic school leaders.

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 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.

The theology of evangelisation is a fundamental frame within which to situate the mission of the Catholic school, and consequently the faith-leadership role of the school leader.

Some, however, react against the word – as uncomfortably evangelistic or even proselytising. Is the role of the school to ‘evangelise’ its non-Catholic pupils, for example? What would this mean? Is this in conflict with the school’s educational aims?

It is difficult when staff who are not Catholic or Christian or religious do not see the value in masses and other faith practices in the school.

We want to put Christ and the children at the centre of everything that we do. The focus should be on holistic education but government policy at the moment does not allow for that.

It should be noted that evangelisation cannot be reduced to simple evangelism; it is a much wider notion. Certainly, the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and catechesis (evangelism) lie at the heart of evangelisation, but that has to be set within the relationship of the Christian community with the society at large and the Church’s role in service of human needs. The Gospel is a call and a power for social transformation as well as for personal conversion. The Kingdom of God envisages the transformation of society and culture and the establishment of structures and a culture that serve human flourishing. The ultimate goal encompasses the individual person, the family, communities, the numerous fields of human activity such as work, leisure, and (crucially)

education, and the whole of society. In all these fields the aim is nothing other than advancing the Reign of God.¹

1. Evangelisation, Church & Kingdom

The Church's investment in its schools is premised on their potential for advancing the mission of the Church, and this certainly involves the faith formation of Catholic children, but the wider aspects of evangelisation are also helpful in defining the school's role, especially in today's changed circumstances. This evangelising role is not a matter of proselytism, as critics of faith schools might assert. There's no evidence of Catholic schools overtly seeking to convert non-Catholics; if conversion occurs it's because of an attraction the convert has felt.

The mission of the school is disseminating Gospel values among the children and making them accessible. I guess I trim down the Gospel values when I am talking to the children. They are aware that there is such a thing as Gospel values, but I bring it down to their level by talking about respect, treating others as you would want to be treated and things like that.

As *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, reminds us, the Kingdom of God is inserted in history and progresses through history. It is inevitably in tension with those human realities, even within the Church, which are not aligned with its values. The Church, as Herald of the Kingdom², is called to spread this Gospel of the Kingdom and so foster the transformation of human lives and society in the light of Kingdom truths and values. It does this – and today is very explicitly committed to doing it – in cooperation with all people of good will.

The Church understands itself to be at the heart of the message it proclaims. The Church as the Body of Christ continuing in human history is the creation and gift of God. So, in the power of the Spirit, the Church:

- seeks to bring faith in Christ alive among its own members and all who are open to his message;
- invites all who respond to enter and share the sacramental communion of the Church, the Body of Christ, by Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist;
- seeks to be a community of practical love and service of all God's people, of whatever faith or none.

All this is included in the notion of evangelisation. The Church too needs to be evangelised and re-evangelised, to be called to ever-renewed commitment to the Gospel.

This, of course, is the Church as a 'theological ideal'. The reality of the actual church – and of the wider Catholic community – never corresponds very well to the ideal; and it is the 'real church' that school leaders have to deal with day in and day out.

Unmarried members of my staff are having children and living with partners. Many parents have no faith or knowledge of any religion. Some parents are single mothers with children to different dads. It is very difficult to deal with these situations when all of society accepts and supports them. I feel in a way that I condone their behaviour because I have no choice but to accept the situation. It is hard to encourage parents to witness their faith when I feel I don't have the tools to evangelise and they probably see me as 'Holy Joe!' They also seem to have no need of God in their lives.

¹ See Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1974; Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013

² Avery Dulles *Models of Church*, Dublin: Gill & McMillan, 1974

2. Lay Faith Leadership

Leaders in Catholic schools today need to have a broad understanding not only of educational matters or even of religious education, but of how the mission of the Church is to be developed in a fast-changing culture, the renewal of theological and ecclesiological understanding, and the strategic issues of the school's contribution to mission. And they are in the front line in representing the Church to an often sceptical Catholic people and general public.

As Catholic educational leaders they are at the exact interface of Church and society, Church and culture. This makes their faith leadership role uniquely demanding. The data excerpts in part A show how leaders feel this pressure - both internal personal pressures (the 'need for a strong faith ... for strong backup both in school and out of school') and external ones (societal scepticism, reluctance of a new generation of teachers to take on leadership roles). At the same time, the delight of one head with colleagues embracing the Catholic faith shows how seeds of a future for the Catholic school enterprise can also appear unexpectedly.

3. Education

The goal of good education, the education of the whole person, is a dimension of the vision of human life that the Kingdom of God expresses. Education as a fundamental social and cultural enterprise is, in Gospel terms, a 'Kingdom reality'. The participation of the Church in education - institutionally and through its members - is itself a work of evangelisation. Seeking to establish, promote and transform the educational process in the light of the truths and values of the Kingdom is already a work of evangelisation. This is the 'evangelisation of culture'.

The evangelisation of culture might, in fact, be seen as the Catholic school's overarching and fundamental mode of evangelisation – because this encompasses the totality of its educational purposes. Human education, understood and delivered within the vision of the Kingdom of God, is a work of evangelisation. Naturally, the direct evangelisation of faith formation and catechesis, the religious education of pupils and through them, potentially, parents and families, is also an essential part of the school's role.

The views of the school leaders resonate very closely with this vision of education. They are universally committed to excellence – academically as well as pastorally, nurturing pupils' human potential and also their spiritual wellbeing. They feel the school should promote equality and fairness in wider society and alternative values too. They chafe at the pressure, from some parents as well as from government, to deliver what they see as an unbalanced education that neglects spiritual wellbeing, or which capitulates to shallow consumerist values promoted by much of the media.

4. Faith Formation and Catechesis

It is challenging establishing the school as a model of evangelisation with Christ at its centre when working with children and their families who have little or no faith background and ensuring that we are a welcoming community to those who are not from stereotypical family units. This is particularly challenging when children present for sacramental preparation.

Faith formation and catechesis – 'direct' evangelisation – is central to the aims and curriculum of the Catholic school and in this regard there is need for especially clear faith and educational leadership. In the eyes of many, the very worth of the Catholic school is tied up with its capacity to 'pass on the faith', to form young people as believing and practicing Catholics. But as teachers will tell you – 'easier said than done!' Nevertheless, there is no lack of commitment to providing for authentic faith formation.

Our mission statement makes it quite evident. The core principle of our school, about

developing the whole person, is absolutely vital – mental and academic development but also being healthy and developing spirituality. Teenagers are usually questioning. You have got to meet them where they are and give them opportunities to think.

However, the kind of catechesis – and so, the mode of direct evangelisation – that the Catholic school is able to pursue depends, in large part, on pupils' openness to the Gospel. In our contemporary, more secularised society this varies a lot. Some will be believing young people who are, or are being, well initiated into the Church. Others will be 'enquirers' or 'seekers'. Others may have little contact with or interest in the Church. And frequently there will be a significant number from other churches and other faiths. Direct evangelisation needs to be calibrated in respect of this diverse population. The necessary 'tone' is well captured in the comment about 'the difference between making people do things through policing and actually winning hearts and minds...People must do things because they actually genuinely want to'.

In thematic paper 3 on 'Schools, church and the Church', the suggestion is made that Catholic schools represent an 'outreach of Church within and to the world' more than straightforwardly ecclesial or faith communities. This is a matter of simple realism, taking account of the diversity of the Catholic school population and the pluralism of religious attitudes and beliefs therein. Accepting this situation should not be seen as derogating from a robust evangelisation. On the contrary, it is the essential starting point for the *new* evangelisation. As the 2012 Synod of Bishops on Evangelisation declared:

The New Evangelisation requires discerning the signs of the times in the world that impacts the ministry of the Church and in the different particular Churches in their proper territories. Among these signs one needs to recognize certainly a growing awareness of people to the changing circumstances of life today...We are Christians living in a secularized world. Whereas the world is and remains God's creation, secularization falls within the sphere of human culture. As Christians we cannot remain indifferent to the process of secularization. We are in fact in a situation similar to that of the first Christians and as such we should see this both as a challenge and a possibility.³

We cannot adhere to our own faith truly and securely without some understanding and dialogue with those who hold other beliefs or none.⁴ The inter-faith dimension is very important here, as some of the observations acknowledge:

Our economics teachers are Jews. It's really interesting the discussions we have about economic systems and they're very capitalist in their approach...The wider Catholic mission of schools is about outreach work and the common good in our local communities and the wider community.

We have a lot of Muslim families which could be a tension but it is not. We have worked together and developed mutual respect for each others' beliefs. Stressing that what we believe is so similar stops this kind of belief that every Muslim is a terrorist. We are re-educating and breeding tolerance and respect for all.

5. An Initiation Model of Catechesis

The 'outreach model' exemplified here can help to articulate the kind – or kinds – of evangelisation and catechesis that is possible and appropriate in the school setting. As paper 3 again suggests, the religious practice of many pupils (and some teachers) 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'. This leads to the suggestion that the 'school model of catechesis' is best

³ Synod of Bishops 2012, Propositions, nn. 5 & 8

⁴ This is a central theme in Charles Taylor's groundbreaking work *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007

understood as being in the *mode of initiation*; that is to say, for the majority of pupils their participation in the life of faith can be likened to the catechumenal stages of faith.

A catechesis of initiation means proposing a 'way of life' that is distinctive in contrast to routine social expectations; but one which at the same time appeals to the deep expectations of individuals who have been formed by today's cultural climate. This is highlighted in the comment:

I do think we bear a witness to a different reality to what young people get through the media and the celebrity so in that respect we are counter-cultural. But one of the interesting things reported of what Pope Francis is saying is that you don't start the debate by saying all the 'thou shalt not's'. You start the debate with listening and you engage with people where they're at. That's quite profound and a different start to a conversation than if you just define yourself as counter-cultural.

There is a sense in which 'initiation' remains an aspect of faith formation at all stages of our lives. The Eucharist that we celebrate week by week is one of the 'sacraments of initiation' – and this not just at the Mass of First Holy Communion. We are initiated again and again eucharistically into that which begins in us at our Baptism. But those who are in the process of coming to faith – whether as adults or as young people – are on particular kind of journey. We need not expect this first initiation into the Christian life of those young people in our schools who actually undertake this journey to be complete – probably not even by the time they leave school. Even in purely social terms, they are still not fully 'socialised' by that time either. The phase of the human life cycle needed to acquire societal competencies is expanding all the time.

Sacramental preparation with families who do not attend Mass regularly and who are marginal in their participation in the programme of preparation is not easy. If we exclude these children we risk alienating them from the church, if we include them we devalue the importance of the sacrament.

It is hard to resolve the conflict between delivering Catholic education to a high standard and the need to evangelise within a predominately non-Catholic population.

The Church's official catechesis and liturgy for initiation – the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) – is built on the recognition that coming to Christian faith is a journey which may be extended over a lengthy period. The RCIA has recovered elements of the early practice of the Church, with its delineation of pre-catechumenal and catechumenal stages of growing in faith until the final step of sacramental initiation into the 'mysteries' by the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. This understanding of the nurturing of faith through various stages of initiation may help clarify the role that school catechesis plays. The school contributes – and can only contribute – to what is a much more extensive process.

I used to teach year six children in a different school. I would ask them if they'd been to church and very few would answer, so one day I asked, why are you not sharing with me, I know you've been to church. They answered 'yeah but we shouldn't say that, people will laugh at us.' We need to make sure that each child understands themselves first of all and then understands their faith, so that they are not embarrassed by anything in their life including their faith.

If I'm not able to give our young people that theological language and a real sound sense of catholicity whether or not they are Catholic, how am I going to fulfil the mission of the Church to get them placed centrally in society for the common good, for social change?

6. The Catholic School in the Education System

The interview and focus group data shows that Catholic head teachers draw benefit from their colleagues in the wider educational community beyond the Catholic sector. While they champion the distinctive Catholic ethos they know that the values and practices which contribute to this are

by no means exclusive to Catholic schools. They admire the dedication and good practice they see in the other schools in their area and their peers as head teachers. The Catholic ‘thing’ is made up of a certain combination of values and practices, the sense of a live tradition, an authoritative body of moral and social teaching, the influence of ecclesial authority and order, and the sense of communal support that comes from the church as a body.

Whereas Catholic schools in the past might be thought of as the ‘poor relations’ this is decidedly no longer the case. Now they are generally held in high esteem, and places in them are sought from well beyond the Catholic community. This opens up another dimension of their mission – the contribution that the experience of Catholic schools can make to the wider field of education, institutional and political, academically and practically. In pursuing this aspect of their role vigorously they are in fact contributing to the evangelisation of culture.

As an institution we have got to conform to DFE standards and we have got to make sure that our literacy and numeracy and geography and history and everything is absolutely up to standard but you also want to make sure that you are creating a kind of whole individual. I want the children here to become morally upstanding people who are contributing members of society. I am not saying that in a school that is not a church school they are not trying to do that, but we have a very definite set of moral values that we are putting forward and trying to nurture our children to follow and that permeates everything that we do.

The Catholic school has a unique contribution of its own to make to the wider educational community. It has a point of view and a tradition of practice on what makes for truly good education, for the integral good of the person and the universal common good of the society. Even if, as many say, it feels like an uphill battle (“I fundamentally disagree with the ‘direction of travel’ of the DFE as I believe it is contrary to our core values”) it remains a proper objective of Catholic education.

7. Conclusion

This paper has explored the theme of evangelisation, which for the Catholic school means:

1. The Evangelisation of Culture
 - As the core purpose of the school, providing sound human education
 - As partners along with non-faith/non-Catholic schools, contributing experience and expertise to the national educational enterprise
2. Direct Evangelisation – Catechesis and Faith formation
 - Religious education of pupils – and through them, potentially, parents, families

Evangelisation, understood in this broad way, is an integrative notion of the mission of the Church. It views mission as seeking the Kingdom of God by the ways of faith and by contributing actively to the common good of the society in dialogue and collaboration with others in promoting human values and the flourishing of the human person.

Leaders in Catholic schools have to promote evangelisation through good religious education and catechesis in their schools; and they are also called to be leaders in the evangelisation of the culture of education. It will become increasingly urgent in the future to sustain the educational and theological competencies needed for such a crucial role.