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Schools and academies

Leadership and faith schools: issues and challenges

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National Centre for Social Research for the Centre for Understanding Behaviour Change (CUBeC), December 2012

Resource

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How to cite this publication

Scott, S. and McNeish, D. (2012) Leadership and faith schools: issues and challenges, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

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Introduction

This paper is intended to provide a brief overview of the issues and challenges for faith school leadership. It is structured in three broad sections:

- a description of the history of faith schools in England and their current place in the provision of education
- a summary of the main types of school leadership and the relevance of these for leaders of faith schools
- a discussion of the main issues and challenges specific to the leadership of faith schools, including some examples of how leaders are responding to these in practice

This paper draws on relevant literature identified through searches of bibliographic databases, including the British Education Index, Australian Education Index, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Science, and Social Policy Digest. It also uses evidence from an extensive search of 'grey literature'¹, informed by a Nexis search of education sources including the TES (Times Educational Supplement).

It also draws on a range of other materials identified through an exploration of the websites of a number of relevant organisations and research centres, including the Association of Muslim Schools, Catholic Education Service, Church of England, Department for Education, General Teaching Council for England, General Teaching Council for Scotland, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Institute of Education, Jewish Leadership Council, Liverpool Hope University, NAHT (The Association for All School Leaders), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), National Centre for Christian Education, Ofsted, the National Institute for Christian Education Research and the Accord databank (Accord, 2012).

It is worth noting that relatively little research has been carried out in this field, and most existing studies are largely qualitative and based on relatively small samples of informants. Furthermore, most studies have focused on Roman Catholic and Anglican schools, with research on other faith schools (eg Muslim and Jewish schools) being very sparse indeed. This document should therefore be read as an issues paper, intended to prompt thinking and discussion.

1 Informally published written material e.g. reports and working papers

About faith schools in England

A brief history

The earliest known schools in England were established in the late 6th century and were attached to cathedrals and monasteries. Their role was to educate boys for monastic life and the priesthood. From the 16th century onwards, religious organisations were at the forefront of providing education in England, and until as late as the 19th century all university fellows and many schoolmasters were expected to be in holy orders. Following the Act of Uniformity in 1662, religious dissenters set up academies to cater for students who did not wish to subscribe to the articles of the Church of England. Some of these 'dissenting academies' still survive, the oldest being Bristol Baptist College (see Gardner et al, 2005).

In 1808, Joseph Lancaster, along with fellow Quakers, formed the Royal Lancasterian Society (which then became the British and Foreign School Society) to provide schools for the poor. Lancaster argued that education should be Christian but not sectarian, and of the 7,000 children educated by the Lancasterians between 1798 and 1811, none became Quakers (Whitbread, 1811). In 1811, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales was founded, with the aim of establishing a school in every parish in England and Wales. The first Methodist schools were founded in the 1830s and the Catholic Poor School Committee was set up in the 1840s (see Grace, 2002).

It was not until 1870 that Board schools were founded by the state, thus creating the dual system of state and church schools which were later integrated under the new Local Education Authority system in 1902. The 1944 Education Act allowed faith schools to become maintained schools, either as voluntary-controlled or voluntary-aided schools with a religious character (see Berkeley, 2008).

The first free Jewish school was established in 1732. There are now Jewish schools in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and north-east and north-west London. However, the type of schools and maintained funding differs between mainstream and strictly orthodox schools. In the maintained sector (which makes up only 28 per cent of Jewish schools), 70 per cent of the schools can be described as mainstream and 30 per cent as strictly orthodox (Miller, 2001).

Independent Muslim faith schools emerged in the 1950s and 1960s and their number has grown rapidly since 1990. The first two Muslim schools (one in north London and the other in Birmingham) became state maintained in 1998. Since 2001, Muslim schools have been actively welcomed into the maintained sector, with the government giving the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) financial support to facilitate their integration into the sector (Hewer, 2001; Flint, 2007).

The first state-maintained Hindu school opened in September 2008 in Harrow, west London. The first state-funded Sikh school, in Hillingdon, London, opened in 1999.

Faith schools in the wider school system

There are five main types of state-maintained schools in England:

- community schools
- foundation and trust schools
- voluntary-aided schools
- voluntary-controlled schools
- academies

The first four all receive funding from local authorities (academies are separately funded). They must all have fully qualified teaching staff, follow the national curriculum and be regularly inspected by Ofsted.

Community schools

A community school is run by the local authority. The local authority employs the staff, owns the land and buildings, and decides which admissions criteria to use to allocate places if the school has more applicants than places.

Foundation and trust schools

Foundation schools are run by their own governing body, which employs the staff and sets the admissions criteria. Land and buildings are usually owned by the governing body or a charitable foundation. The foundation appoints the majority of governors if it is a voluntary-aided school and a minority if it is a voluntary-controlled school. The foundation holds the land and assets of the school and must be consulted before any changes are made to these. The trustees also have to make sure the objects of the trust (ie to provide faith education) are upheld. For the majority of faith schools, the foundation is the diocese.

A trust school is a type of foundation school which forms a charitable trust with an outside partner, for example a business or educational charity.

Voluntary-aided schools

Voluntary-aided schools are mainly religious or 'faith' schools. As with foundation schools, the governing body employs the staff and sets the admissions criteria. School buildings and land are normally owned by a charitable foundation, often a religious organisation. The governing body contributes to building and maintenance costs.

Voluntary-aided schools may fill all the teaching places with staff of their faith, and may also apply a faith test for appointing support staff if there is a genuine occupational requirement. In voluntary-aided schools, religious education is taught in accordance with the school's trust deeds.

Voluntary-controlled schools

Voluntary-controlled schools are similar to voluntary-aided schools, with the key difference that they are run by the local authority. As with community schools, the local authority employs the school's staff and sets the admissions criteria. The land and buildings are normally owned by a charity, often a religious organisation, which also appoints some of the members of the governing body.

Voluntary-controlled and foundation schools can reserve up to a fifth of their teaching posts as religious posts. Both follow the locally agreed syllabus unless parents request that they provide denominational religious education.

Academies

Academies are independently managed schools set up by business, faith or voluntary groups in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and the local authority. Together they fund the land and buildings, with the government covering the running costs.

A small number of academies are new free schools. Some were previously maintained schools that have chosen to 'convert', while others have been set up to replace underperforming schools. The latter have a sponsor responsible for improving the performance of their school. Sponsors come from a wide range of backgrounds, including successful schools, businesses, universities, charities and faith bodies. All three types of academy may be faith schools.

Schools which already select some or all of their pupils can continue to do so if they become academies. All new faith free schools and new faith academies that have not replaced a predecessor faith school (for instance, where a faith organisation has taken over as sponsor of a forced converter school) can only have a maximum of 50 per cent faith-based places when oversubscribed.

Faith groups will still be able to establish new faith schools through the voluntary-aided route, where they can prioritise 100 per cent of places by faith when oversubscribed.

How many faith schools are there?

In 2012, 35 per cent of maintained schools in England had a religious character (6,814 maintained faith schools out of a total of around 20,000 maintained schools), educating just under a quarter of all pupils. Almost 70 per cent of maintained faith schools were Church of England and 30 per cent were Roman Catholic.

The first Hindu, Muslim and Sikh state schools have all opened since 1998, and the first non-Christian faith academy (a Sikh school in Hillingdon) opened in 2011.

In 2012, all Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim schools were voluntary aided (except one which is a Catholic foundation school), while Church of England and Methodist schools were a mix of voluntary controlled and voluntary aided.

Table 1 numbers of maintained faith schools by school type in England at February 2012

Faith schools	Voluntary aided	Voluntary controlled	Foundation	Academies	Total
Primary	3,556	2,382	35	223	6,196
Secondary	341	32	7	248	628
Total	3,897	2,414	42	471	6,824

Source: Edubase 01/11/12

Table 2 maintained and independent faith schools by religious character at November 2012

Religious character	Voluntary aided		Voluntary controlled		Foundation		Academy converters		Sponsored academies		Free schools		Total maintained	Independent schools
	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec		
Church of England	1,896	66	2,327	31	34	6	125	69	7	34	1	1	4,597	268
Roman Catholic	1,586	252	0	0	0	0	74	66	2	4	0	1	1,985	116
Methodist	2	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	13
Other Christian	4	1	9	1	0	0	0	18	0	36	4	2	75	301
United Reformed Church	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Greek Orthodox	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Seventh Day Adventist	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5
Christian mixed	31	9	20	0	1	1	0	3	0	5	0		70	4
Jewish	27	6	0	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	3	0	43	49
Muslim	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	14	139
Sikh	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	5	1
Quaker	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
Hindu	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	4	2
Multifaith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Buddhist	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	3,556	341	2,382	32	35	7	204	162	9	79	10	7	6,824	911

Approaches to school leadership

Bush and Glover (2003) differentiate between school leadership and school management. They suggest that:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values. Management is the implementation of school policies and the efficient and effective maintenance of the school's current activities.

Bush and Glover, 2003:10

The link between leadership and the overall success of a school has been recognised for some time. Indeed it is nearly a quarter of a century since Beare, Caldwell and Millikan stated that:

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority.

Beare et al, 1989:99

Since then there have been numerous studies looking into the impact of effective school leadership, and evidence from a range of sources has highlighted the significant role leaders play in increasing school effectiveness (eg Matthews 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Matthews and McLaughlin, 2010).

Day et al (2009) found that effective school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a school influence on pupils' learning. In particular, the headteacher's leadership can be critical in influencing improvement in the school's organisation and the teaching and learning environment. Similarly, Robinson et al's (2009) meta-analysis of data and evidence found that it was through their ability to influence the instruction in the school that leaders made the greatest impact. A wide range of other studies have found evidence that leaders have an important indirect impact on student outcomes (eg Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2012; Creemers and Reezigt, 1996; Walters et al, 2003; Robinson et al, 2009; Robinson et al, 2011).

Jensen et al (2012) found that leaders played a key role in setting the conditions to promote reform and improvements in teaching and learning through performance management, removing distractions from staff and focusing on the key organisational priorities. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012: 8) go so far as to state that: 'To date, we have not found a single documented case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership'.

There is also a growing evidence base on the day-to-day practice of effective school leadership. For instance, in 2009 Ofsted published a series of three reports exploring the nature of outstanding schools and school leadership in primary, secondary and special settings (Matthews, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Collectively, these studies identified a number of consistent leadership themes, which included the need for a clear purpose, vision and values; the importance of displaying high expectations and aspirations; and the need to lead by example. Similarly, in an extensive three-year review of leadership in schools, Day et al (2009) identified 10 strong claims for successful school leadership.

10 strong claims for successful school leadership

1. Headteachers are the main source of leadership in their schools.
2. There are eight key dimensions of successful leadership, which comprise:
 - defining their values and vision to raise expectations
 - setting direction and building trust
 - reshaping the conditions for teaching and learning
 - restructuring parts of the organisation and redesigning leadership
 - roles and responsibilities
 - enriching the curriculum
 - enhancing teacher quality
 - enhancing the quality of teaching and learning
 - building collaboration internally
 - building strong relationships outside the school community
3. Headteachers' values are key components in their success.
4. Successful heads use the same basic leadership practices, but there is no single model for achieving success.
5. Differences in context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership actions.
6. Heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination and accumulation of strategies and actions.
7. There are three broad phases of leadership success.
8. Heads grow and secure success by layering leadership strategies and actions.
9. Successful heads distribute leadership progressively.
10. The successful distribution of leadership depends on the establishment of trust.

(Day et al, 2009)

Several of Day et al's 'strong claims' offer clear pointers on the nature of day-to-day leadership practice required to promote the overall effectiveness of the school. At the same time, however, they also highlight the need for every leader to put their leadership practice into operation in ways that are sensitive to their school's specific set of circumstances. Dimmock and Walker (2000:14) warn that policies and practices should not be simply transferred between schools without 'due consideration of cultural and contextual appropriateness', while Luckcock (2007) points out that a particular challenge for faith school leaders is to connect models of leadership which derive from their faith with state-led constructions of professional leadership.

Bush and Glover (2003) identify a number of factors as particularly important to understanding the cultural and contextual nature of schools. From a faith perspective, key considerations are likely to centre on the school culture, including the values, beliefs, customs and rituals of the school. Governance and parental expectations are also likely to be important criteria in considering the specific context of a faith school. Each of these factors can be expected to have a particular impact on several key areas of leadership practice.

The first of these is the area of moral leadership, which is likely to be particularly significant for leaders in faith contexts. Moral leadership assumes that the primary focus for leadership is on the values and ethics of leaders themselves (Bush and Glover, 2003). From this viewpoint, a key source of authority for leaders is the set of beliefs and values which guides their practice (Sergiovanni, 1992).

There is some evidence that for leaders of faith schools this dimension of moral leadership is often underpinned by strong religious beliefs. For example, Gurr et al (2005) found that Gospel values were

strongly evident in the leadership approaches in the Catholic schools in their study. A report of the Archbishops' Council following a major review of church school education in 2001 emphasised the importance of personal Christian commitment and integrity (Archbishops' Council, 2001). It recommended three leadership styles: the servant-leader – encouraging the educational and spiritual growth of pupils; the transformational leader – setting the overall tone of the school; and the invitational leader – welcoming all to the school. However, moral leadership is not just relevant to faith school leaders. Flintham (2003) interviewed 25 headteachers from a cross section of schools in England to consider the concept of moral and spiritual leadership. All the headteachers were able to articulate an individual, personal value system underpinning their approach to leadership. Defining moral and spiritual leadership was important in terms of the head acting as guardian of the vision of the school and being a consistent exponent of its value system. Flintham also found that these headteachers used a range of strategies to keep functioning effectively in this role, including belief in the underlying rightness of their value system and support networks. For faith school leaders, faith networks may be particularly important in sustaining them in their moral leadership.

The religious or spiritual values of the school and its leader may also shape the leader's approach to a second key area, which can be characterised as transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is concerned with constructing a strong connection between leader and followers, which in turn raises the motivation and ability of the follower to achieve more than would otherwise have been anticipated (Northouse, 2007). For instance, Reed et al (2002) studied three schools to investigate how headteachers transformed failing community schools which had become church schools. These schools were seen as being inclusive of all pupils and the heads were seen by pupils, staff and parents as being concerned for their pupils' best interests. Reed et al found that the contribution of these headteachers' explicit Christian commitment was a constant reference point for pupils and staff. Major changes occurred because the heads were able to envisage the whole school, its responsibility and its contribution to the community. These heads saw worship as the pivotal support by which the transformation of the school was levered.

Several studies have shown the significance of values to successful leaders of non-faith as well as faith schools. West-Burnham (2009) reported on a survey of 313 headteachers from schools graded as outstanding by Ofsted on what factors they rated as important in influencing their careers. For 31 per cent, their personal faith or philosophy and vocation was the single most important factor. Gold's (2003) study of 10 'outstanding' school principals in England also revealed the importance of values-led leadership. These values included inclusivity, equal opportunities and equity or justice, high expectations, engagement of other organisations, co-operation, teamwork, commitment and understanding. Similar findings are reported by Campbell et al (2003) and Gurr et al (2005).

There is some tentative evidence that their faith school context may influence some leaders to take a different approach to the distribution of leadership across their organisation. For instance, Coll's (2009) study, based on interviews with 20 Catholic probationary teachers who had chosen a career in the Catholic sector, suggests that participative leadership (commonly referred to as 'distributed leadership') was seen as a particularly important part of these faith schools' ethos. Three-quarters of those Coll interviewed were positive about the ways their schools were led, and expressed this in terms of 'ethos', 'atmosphere' and 'spirit'. Although guided by the headteacher, this ethos was not seen as their sole responsibility: rather, leadership of this dimension was also devolved to senior managers, members of departments and the chaplain. This seemed to occur in schools where teachers were most positive about the faith and religious dimension of their working environment. In this study, Coll suggested that devolved leadership patterns had a positive impact on the teacher's own faith.

Issues and challenges for leadership in faith schools

Many of the issues and challenges faced by leaders of faith schools are similar to those for leaders of any other maintained school. However, there are some issues which, while relevant to all schools, raise some specific issues for faith schools. Several themes recur in the literature:

- The need to maintain **distinctiveness** as a faith school. This includes retaining the school's religious character, sometimes challenging secular values and balancing the two priorities of educational attainment and moral and spiritual development.
- The need to manage the changing context of **admissions**, and increasingly provide for pupils of other faiths and of none alongside those of their own faith.
- The need to **build the capacity of the school**, including the recruitment, retention and development of school leaders, staff and governors. This has to be achieved in the context of balancing the importance of having staff who actively practise the faith of the school with the need to maximise staff quality.
- The need to maintain and develop a range of **partnerships**, within the faith community and beyond.
- The need to fulfil the expectations of the wider community and contribute to social cohesion, sometimes taking a **community leadership role**.

Distinctiveness

Why is distinctiveness important?

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that distinctiveness is important for faith schools for a number of reasons:

- The distinctive ethos of faith schools is viewed as supporting both academic success and positive behaviour. This has led to faith schools being encouraged and promoted by successive governments.
- The belief that faith schools should offer a different, more spiritual and values-based approach to education. To some, this means that faith schools are viewed as playing a role in providing a challenge and alternative to secular values.
- Faith schools have a role in passing on the faith to the next generation and strengthening the particular faith community.
- The distinctiveness of faith schools can also be viewed as their 'USP' – or unique selling point – in a competitive market: they have an appeal for some parents, and not only parents of the particular faith.

Distinctiveness and attainment

A comprehensive review of the research evidence published in 2009 concluded that, while the effect is small, the available evidence does support the claim that students at maintained church schools do better academically, and that the differences cannot be entirely accounted for by the prior attainment and socio-economic status of their intakes. In other words, there is a small 'school effect' of faith schools on attainment (Green, 2009). These differences vary between different kinds of faith school – for example, the 'school effect' appears to be stronger for Catholic than Church of England primary school pupils. Among Church of England schools, Arthur and Godfrey (2005) found that pupils in voluntary-aided schools made more academic progress on average than pupils in voluntary-controlled schools. They suggest that these voluntary-aided schools tended to be more distinctive in their Church of England ethos and this may be linked with higher attainment. It was on the basis of this view that Dearing (2001) recommended that, wherever possible, Church of England schools should have voluntary-aided status.

What the research does not tell us is what the distinctive characteristics are that cause this modest 'school effect'. Morris (2005) considers possible reasons for the higher levels of attainment by pupils attending Catholic schools in England. He concludes that as the majority of state-supported Catholic schools serve, primarily, communities with a particular religious history and identity, they are likely to have higher levels of congruity with parental values and attitudes than schools serving more pluralistic and diverse communities. Social cohesion between home and school is likely to produce a high degree of social harmony and of educational purpose in the school community, leading to high levels of academic effectiveness and productivity. He suggests that this, alongside the traditional confessional model of Catholic school, can provide a particularly supportive environment for high academic attainment, especially by socially disadvantaged pupils.

What is distinctiveness?

'Distinctiveness' is frequently cited as an important characteristic of faith schools. For example, when the Church of England set out its proposals for the development of its schools in 2001 it placed considerable emphasis on the need for church schools to be distinctively and recognisably Christian institutions (Dearing, 2001). 'Distinctiveness' itself is a slippery notion and competing notions exist. However, in revisiting these proposals in 2012 the Church School of the Future Review Group suggested the following definition:

Distinctiveness is about more than organisational arrangements and designation as a school of religious character. It must include a wholehearted commitment to putting faith and spiritual development at the heart of the curriculum and ensuring that a Christian ethos permeates the whole educational experience.

Archbishops' Council, 2012:14

However, having reviewed the qualitative research, Green (2009) concluded that headteachers of Church of England schools found the concept of distinctiveness difficult to grapple with. Comparative studies of faith schools suggest that headteachers perceive Christian distinctiveness in a variety of ways according to their own context and personal attitude towards religion. At the most fundamental level there is little, if any, consensus on what constitutes a school with a Christian ethos. Indeed, in one study of headteachers (Street, 2007) none were able to differentiate between distinctive Christian values and those held in common with local authority schools.

The limited research that has been undertaken with faith school leaders suggests that there may be considerable differences of opinion between leaders of schools representing different faiths on how distinctively religious their schools are or should be. In research carried out by Johnson (2002), the six Catholic school headteachers involved in the study described how they saw their schools as explicitly Catholic partnerships of staff, children, parents and the local Catholic parishes. Participation in public rituals by all members of this partnership demonstrated commitment to the school's vision. Spirituality and morality were seen in Catholic terms and the schools were seen as part of the Roman Catholic Church. The heads had themselves been educated at Catholic schools, and five of them had attended Catholic teacher training colleges. By contrast, the seven Church of England headteachers interviewed described varying degrees of commitment to Anglicanism, and some expressed the view that their school should not be an 'Anglican ghetto'. Although the act of collective worship (via the school assembly) was seen as a significant part of spiritual development, there was uncertainty as to how 'religious' it should be. For example, two south London headteachers felt that in a multicultural community 'the name of Jesus could be excluding'.

However, the differences between Catholic and Anglican schools in terms of their religious character may be diminishing. A survey of Catholic school governors by Storr (2009) found no consensus on the meaning of Catholic ethos, and governors' responses lacked an emphasis on the school as a community of faith and prayer. Only two of the seven schools surveyed had a formal monitoring committee for ethos and were described as 'largely indistinguishable from other schools in the majority of their activities but with a distinct religious element added on'. Storr concluded that 'the "spiritual capital" that had defined the ethos of Catholic schools in the past was weakening and not being renewed. The schools were therefore beginning to lose their distinctive character'.

One tangible way in which faith schools can demonstrate their distinctiveness is through the school curriculum. However, the extent to which faith schools do this is unclear. Grace (2002) found that

headteachers of Catholic schools found it difficult to challenge the 'secular, market-dominated curriculum; a performance-based pedagogic regime, and a system of evaluation and accountability dominated by visible and measurable outcomes'.

In a series of workshop sessions held by the National College of School Leadership (2005), school leaders looked at what makes faith schools distinctive. Among the conclusions they came to were that faith schools:

- are a way of integrating an authentic expression of faith in a context within which children are growing
- have a distinctive understanding of individuals – distinctiveness but not exclusion
- need the confidence to develop a distinctive curriculum for individuals
- need to develop spirituality – to find it and develop it, and to take that 'special bit' and run it throughout the curriculum
- get their hands dirty with the difficult and marginalised – mission redefines the purpose of education

Admissions

Who should faith schools serve?

The pattern of admissions to faith schools is changing. A survey (Pennell et al, 2007) of the 106 voluntary-aided secondary schools and academies in London classified as having a religious character found that:

- In Church of England schools, around 7 out of 10 pupils were reported to be Christian and fewer than 1 in 10 were Muslim, with a similar proportion of no faith.
- In Roman Catholic Schools, over 9 out of 10 pupils were reported to be Christian, with very small percentages of other faiths or of no religion.
- In the three Jewish schools surveyed, all pupils were reported to be Jewish.

However, demographic changes and the continued decline in both Anglican and Catholic church membership have led to many faith schools admitting increasing numbers of pupils of other faiths and of no faith. Alongside this, the present government wishes to ensure that all new academies follow an inclusive admissions policy and new free schools will be required to admit 50 per cent of their pupils without reference to faith. The new Admissions Code came into force in February 2012 and states that:

As with other maintained schools, faith schools are required to offer every child who applies, whether of the faith, another faith or no faith, a place at the school if there are places available. Schools designated by the Secretary of State as having a religious character (commonly known as faith schools) may use faith-based oversubscription criteria and allocate places by reference to faith where the school is oversubscribed.

Department of Education Admissions Code (2012):14

At the same time, the views of some faith communities and school leaders on who their schools are intended to serve may be gradually changing. Although Church of England schools have always seen themselves as fulfilling a dual role of serving the Anglican and the wider community, until relatively recently they have been able to assume that the vast majority of their intake shared a Christian cultural heritage. This assumption no longer holds in the context of declining church attendance and multicultural and multifaith admissions. Respecting diversity and adopting inclusive practices have become important. Guidance on admissions to Church of England schools issued by the Archbishops' Council (2011) requires schools to be inclusive and to be living Christian communities strongly related to the local community. It advises that schools should be able to show how their admissions policy demonstrates the school's commitment to both distinctiveness and inclusivity, to church families and the wider community.

The admissions challenges for those faith schools which have traditionally had an exclusive focus on educating children of their own faith community are a little different. Catholic schools have traditionally

had as their central mission the education of Catholic children. Therefore, the limited evidence available suggests that there may be more ambivalence about a change of direction in Catholic schools. In Storr's 2009 study, two-thirds of Catholic school governors said they would not admit non-Catholics in preference to Catholics where the school was oversubscribed by Catholics. However, research carried out by Walbank (2012) with Catholic primary school headteachers in the north-west suggests that some Catholic schools are clearly shifting away from the historic model of providing education solely for the Catholic community, and increasingly admitting non-Catholics. Figures produced by the Catholic Education Service in 2012² show that nationwide the level of Catholic pupils in Catholic schools stands at 70 per cent – that is lower than the Labour government had proposed. In Catholic sixth forms, the figure falls to 44 per cent.

The Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) (2008 and 2011) considering the internal and external strategic issues facing Jewish schools has called for the schools to reflect the religious diversity of the community and simultaneously to offer every Jewish child who wishes to attend a Jewish school the opportunity to do so. Both primary and secondary numbers in Jewish schools have risen in the last few years, and in secondary schools spare places have emerged and an increasing number of non-Jewish pupils have been enrolled. Two Jewish schools were among the first 16 to be approved by the Department for Education for free school status. However, broadening admissions is not necessarily welcomed by everyone. As the JLC notes: 'The continuing push towards more open admissions is seen by many as threatening the very "raison d'être" of Jewish schools'.

Admissions and equality

Issues of inclusivity do not only relate to matters of religion, and faith schools in general have received criticism over their approaches to selective admission. Research undertaken by the Institute for Public Policy Research (2007) showed that where faith schools were their own admission authorities they were 10 times more likely to be highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area than community schools where the local authority was the admission authority.

Allen and West (2011) used data from the National Pupil Databases and the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England to explore the reasons why secondary faith schools have student intakes of a higher social background and ability than their secular counterparts. Their analysis showed that schools in the religious sector have fewer pupils eligible for free school meals, more top-ability students, fewer Asian students and greater numbers of Black African and Caribbean students. When analysed in relation to schools' neighbourhood characteristics, the general pattern is for the composition of faith schools to be more affluent than the neighbourhood the school is located in. Their analysis also found that children from higher-income religious families were more likely to attend faith schools than children from poorer religious families. It should be noted that the data used in this study relates to school admissions before the tightening up of the Admissions Code in 2003, 2007 and 2009 to restrict some potentially selective practices.

More recently, *The Guardian* (March 2012) analysed DfE data on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in each of England's 19,534 state, non-selective primary and secondary schools.³ The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in each Church of England, Catholic or non-religious school was compared with the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in their local authority, and among all the comparable schools in the same postcode area. The analysis shows that the majority of Catholic primary and secondary schools do not mirror the proportion of poor pupils living in their community. Some 73 per cent of Catholic primaries and 72 per cent of Catholic secondaries have a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than the average for the local authority. Similarly, for Church of England schools around 74 per cent of primaries and 65.5 per cent of secondaries have a smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than the average for the local authority. In contrast, non-religious schools tend to reflect their neighbourhoods.

The number of state-funded Muslim and Jewish schools was too small to form a meaningful group although the analysis noted that the 11 state-funded Muslim schools in England are collectively more reflective of their community, with 67 per cent of primaries and 60 per cent of secondaries having more than the local authority average of free school meal pupils. The 36 Jewish state schools on average have fewer pupils on free school meals than the average for their local area.

² <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/ces-census>

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/mar/05/church-schools-shun-poorest-pupils>

In the light of evidence on admissions, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has since 2007 opposed the expansion of faith schools and called instead for a system of comprehensive schools based on equality:

In determining the oversubscription criteria of admissions policies the entitlement of every child to a good local school must be paramount. The NUT is opposed to admissions policies which either privilege or discriminate against children on the basis of the beliefs, motivations or practices of their parents. It is vital that all schools have admissions practices which are inclusive and which respect the diversity of the community they are situated in.

NUT, 2007:9

In response, the Catholic Education Service (CES) has pointed out that the catchment areas for Catholic schools are often geographically wider than the area in which the schools are situated. Indeed, CES has quoted figures from DfE showing that 18.6 per cent of pupils at Catholic primary schools live in the 10 per cent most deprived areas of England, compared with only 14.3 per cent of primary school pupils nationally.⁴

In 2011, the Church of England responded to criticism by publishing new guidance on admissions, saying:

Points systems used to differentiate between families with equal commitment should be as simple as possible, and only used if absolutely necessary, and ideally should be phased out over the next few years... Points systems can discriminate against families unable for a variety of reasons to participate in Church activities.

Church of England Archbishops' council Education Division/The National Society (2011): Appendix 1, paragraph B 8

The new guidance suggests that the only criterion that should be taken into account when allocating places is attendance at worship, and supports church schools that are more inclusive of pupils from other faiths.

More broadly, and in response to these concerns, bodies representing different faith communities (including the Jewish Board of Deputies, Church of England Board of Education and Catholic Education Service) have worked together to actively lobby on the benefits of faith-based schooling and around issues of common concern (see Jewish Leadership Council, 2011).

Building the capacity of the school

Recruiting, retaining and developing staff

The recruitment and retention of good-quality staff is a key challenge for any school leader, and the recruitment of leaders themselves is an important issue for schools and their governing bodies.

The scale of this challenge reflects in part the ageing profile of senior leaders in schools. Data from the Schools Workforce Census, for instance, shows that in 2011 the average age of headteachers was 50, while approaching one-third of all headteachers were aged 55 or over. This ageing profile is compounded by the fact that nearly half of all headteachers elect to take early retirement (Earley et al, 2012).

At the same time, there is some evidence to indicate that many schools experience difficulties in attracting sufficient quality and quantity of applicants when vacancies arise. Faith schools appear to face particular difficulties in this respect. For instance, EDS's 2010–11 survey of school vacancies found that re-advertisement rates for headteacher vacancies were markedly higher in Church of England and Catholic schools than their maintained counterparts (42 per cent and 51 per cent respectively, compared to 38 per cent for all primary schools and 24 per cent for all secondary schools for the same period).

Evidence from a number of sources offers some insight into the potential factors behind this. For instance, the National College's 2012 annual survey (National College, 2012) found that while 73 per cent of deputy and assistant heads aspired to headship at some point in their career, 28 per cent did not harbour this ambition. Key non-personal factors in this included a desire to stay in the classroom, a negative view of

⁴ See http://fullfact.org/blog/faith_schools_shun_poorest_pupils_deprivation-3386

the responsibilities and workload associated with headship and a broad satisfaction with their current role. Smithers and Robinson (2007) have also identified a number of factors which make headship less attractive, including workload, too many government initiatives, excessive accountability, vulnerability to dismissal through poor Ofsted reports, and insufficient pay differentials.

Faith schools have some additional challenges and dilemmas for recruiting staff generally – and school leaders in particular. One of these involves the need to make judgements about how important it is to have staff and leaders who actively practise the faith of the school, alongside the need to maximise staff quality. The priority given to appointing staff of the same faith as the school varies according to the type of faith school and the views of the head and governors. On the one hand, there is a view that maintaining a ‘critical mass’ of school leaders and teachers who share their faith is part of what it means to be a faith school, and a key element of the school’s distinctiveness (Twelves, 2001). On the other hand, restricting the pool of potential teachers and leaders makes it more difficult to make appointments and risks compromising the quality of the staff as a whole.

The recruitment of senior staff (heads, deputies and assistant heads) appears to be particularly challenging for faith schools. A survey of schools carried out in 2009-10 (Howson and Sprigade, 2010) found that faith schools (Church of England and Roman Catholic only – other types of faith school were not represented in the survey) were more likely to have to re-advertise headship vacancies. Faith schools, especially Roman Catholic schools, were least likely to make an appointment: of the 53 voluntary-controlled Roman Catholic schools that responded to the survey, 25 had failed to appoint a new head, compared with 107 of the 366 community schools. The survey found similar difficulties for faith schools in making deputy head appointments, with faith schools (and Roman Catholic schools in particular) reporting receiving fewer applications for vacancies than community or non-faith foundation and voluntary schools. Roman Catholic schools tended to cite a lack of applicants as a reason for not filling posts, whereas Church of England schools cited a lack of quality rather than numbers (see also Howson, 2012).

It is noteworthy that these difficulties are not unique to the English educational context. Similar difficulties in recruiting school leaders have been identified in the United States. Helm (2000) reported on the growing problem of recruiting Catholic principals in both elementary and secondary schools in the United States, identifying the shortage of Catholic candidates and competition from non-faith schools as contributory factors. In their research in Australia, Dorman and d’Arbon (2002) identified a number of factors deterring potential candidates from applying for senior posts in Catholic schools. They highlighted the challenge of leading a faith-based school community in which their personal lives, faith commitment and religious practices are placed under scrutiny by pupils, parents, the Church education system and by Church authorities. They also suggested that the traditions and dogma of the Catholic Church are not necessarily consistent with contemporary Australian culture.

Many faith schools take a pragmatic approach to staff appointment, particularly below the level of deputy head. For example, Colson’s (2004) study involving interviews with heads of four Church of England secondary schools in London found that the proportion of staff identifying themselves as Christian was sometimes as low as 20 per cent. While the heads of these schools regarded staff as important to the delivery and maintenance of school values, it was hard to attract Christian teachers, so these heads tended to focus on recruiting staff who were willing to share the underlying Christian values of the school rather than being actively practising Christians.

In Roman Catholic schools, too, there is no expectation that most staff will be practising Catholics, although the Bishops’ *Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools* (CES, 2003) highlights the importance of Catholic staff to the quality and distinctiveness of Catholic schools. This memorandum sets out the Catholic bishops’ expectations in the appointment of teachers – that school leaders should be baptised and practising Catholics, and that a high priority should always be given to finding ‘Catholic teachers who combine personal conviction and practice of the faith with the required professional qualifications and experience’.

There are indications that, even for headships, some Roman Catholic governors are prepared to appoint non-Catholics. For instance, in Storr’s (2009) survey of 100 governors of Roman Catholic schools nearly half said they were prepared to appoint a non-Catholic to the posts of headteacher, deputy headteacher and head or co-ordinator of religious education, despite the official position that they should be filled by practising Catholics. A notable proportion said they were prepared to appoint a non-Catholic even if Catholic candidates were available.

Valins et al (2002) noted that Jewish day schools experienced similar problems in attracting and retaining Jewish members of staff, especially teachers of Jewish studies and modern Hebrew. The Board of Deputies of British Jews referred specifically to orthodox Jewish schools and the practice of drawing teachers from their particular communities, which can provide a limited pool of expertise. To meet the need for a relevant religious education, they have begun an accredited training programme for teachers from these communities as well as other faith backgrounds. Valins also identified the problems of attracting younger and less experienced teachers into Jewish schools as inevitably leading to later problems in recruiting headteachers, senior managers and departmental heads. A number of Jewish schools have non-Jewish headteachers.

Hewer's (2001) study of the development of Muslim schools in Birmingham noted that the Islamic understanding of the role of the teacher as the embodiment of the good Islamic life can be at variance with some understandings of the role of the teacher in modern education. This in turn may have implications for staff recruitment, development and retention.

Succession planning

A key element of the National College's succession planning programme is encouraging headteachers and governing bodies to develop 'grow your own' strategies. Bush (2011) identified eight main factors that undermine succession planning, including: capacity – especially lack of time; funding and budgets; the reputation or 'brand' of the local authority; perceptions of headship – especially heavy workloads; the (until recently) mandatory nature of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH); and resistance to new models of leadership in some local authorities; concerns about the quality of leadership and the specific requirements of faith schools.

For faith schools, succession planning may be particularly important given the additional difficulties of attracting applicants for senior posts. As Howson and Sprigade (2010) point out, these difficulties are not new but they take on a new urgency in this 'age of austerity' when any waste of resources is to be regretted. They suggest that, as successful candidates come from within a group that should be known to the dioceses, the answer must lie in their hands, and flag up the need to ensure that similar recruitment problems do not beset new academies and free schools. Fincham (2010) likewise concluded that it was incumbent on headteachers and senior leaders in Catholic schools to identify future leaders and encourage them in their professional development.

The National College in 2010 produced a guide on succession planning in faith schools (National College, 2010a). This suggests that the headteacher's responsibility for leading a faith community as well as providing professional leadership may appear daunting to some candidates. Successful recruitment strategies take account of this, emphasising post-appointment support programmes for incoming heads and encouraging suitable applicants to apply from other career backgrounds. Specific strategies for helping school leaders to make the step to headship include offering opportunities to act up into the headteacher role, to take short-term placements and secondments or to join headteacher shadowing programmes. The National College has also developed a succession planning strategy for schools with a religious character, in partnership with the Catholic Education Service, the Church of England's National Society, local dioceses and local authorities, with the aim of increasing the supply of high-quality school leaders.

Canavan (2001) suggests that it is important to identify and nurture potential leaders from early on in their careers – the aim should be to develop 'a culture of leadership'. Leadership profiles of teachers and co-ordinators should be developed and linked to leadership development plans. However, a survey by Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) found little evidence of actively identifying leadership talent early in a teacher's career. They identified personal and professional confidence as a barrier to leadership succession, with middle leaders agreeing that there needed to be a balance between active preparation for the next role and patronage by a decision-maker, usually the head (see also National College, 2012b). The heads surveyed identified a number of effective mechanisms for in-house leadership development: a degree of empowerment, support, controlled risk-taking, accountability through project work, work shadowing and networking. Although headteachers were aware of the factors thought to help with motivation and retention, they were unclear as to the role of their leadership style and professional culture in encouraging leadership retention in their schools.

Professional and leadership development

Related to the issue of succession planning is the role of continuing professional development for both current and potential faith school leaders. Several commentators have suggested that it is important to develop leaders to face the specific challenges of a faith school and to nurture and support people in their spiritual leadership role (National College, 2005; Fine, 2008; Coll, 2009; Fincham, 2010).

Grace (2009) argues that the professional and in-service needs of faith school leaders tend to be sidelined in a secular world view of school leadership education. He also argues that the specific needs of faith school leaders should not simply be left to the faith communities themselves – both because faith communities do not have enough capacity and because academic and professional objectivity is better served if this is done by those outside a particular faith community. Similarly, Sullivan (2006) suggests that faith schools need separate provision for school leadership development, arguing that in faith schools there is a need for greater emphasis on personal formation, on orientating the curriculum, on community-building, on coping with personal failings and vulnerabilities – and on the role of prayer and worship in all these things.

A national survey of provision for leadership and management development carried out by the National College, Catholic Education Service and Church of England Education Division (see National College, 2010a) identified a number of key priorities for supporting and developing leaders in schools with a religious character. These include a need for:

- a more strategic approach to leadership and management development throughout a teacher's career, including early leadership development and succession planning for headship
- understanding and making effective, through training and development programmes, the distinctiveness of faith-based schools, including middle-level leadership and specific knowledge and skills for headteachers
- faith-based activities to nourish teachers and leaders personally as well as professionally
- the creation of effective models to strengthen community leadership
- support for school and network-based training and development, through coaching and mentoring, consultancy and better e-learning, and stronger links with higher education, particularly the network of Church Colleges and Universities
- more effective marketing of National College programmes and activities in the context of Anglican and Catholic schools and the communities they serve
- more inter-diocesan and regional opportunities

Governors

Research on the role of governors in schools generally suggests that the quality of the governing body is an important influence on school improvement (Balarin et al, 2008; Dean et al, 2007; Ranson et al, 2005). The chair of the governing body also plays a particularly important role in both supporting and, where necessary, offering challenge to the headteacher (James, 2011; Ranson, 2011). Where the governing body has low levels of capacity and competence, this has been shown to have a negative impact on outcomes. Recruiting and developing an effective governing body, therefore, can be a challenge for many schools.

The literature suggests that there may be additional challenges for some faith schools. The requirement to have governors of the faith can impact on the ability to recruit them. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), for instance, has highlighted the problem of recruiting governors from the Muslim community, even for state schools with a significant or high Muslim population (MCB, 2007). Recruiting volunteers for lay leadership positions has also been identified as a problem for Anglican and Catholic schools (Harris and Rochester, 2001).

Governors of all schools need the capabilities to deal with the diverse range of issues and challenges emerging from an ever-changing educational context. In faith schools they also need to understand and share the additional leadership challenges. The relationship between the headteacher and the governing body can be particularly important, and has been identified as one of the keys to faith schools' success

(Twelves, 2001). A survey of Catholic headteachers by Fincham (2010) reported that most found governors to be supportive – they were often referred to as ‘critical friends’. Some felt that governors were too concerned with target-setting and results.

The extent to which governing bodies embrace a spiritual leadership role varies. Walbank (2012), for example, found that only one of the Catholic primary headteachers surveyed regarded the governing body as driving the Catholicity of the school, and Storr (2009) concluded that formation and education courses for the governors of Catholic schools need to be developed urgently. In Storr’s study, nearly half of the governor respondents felt they had not been prepared for their role by the diocese in five key areas of responsibility: staff appointments, admissions, the conduct of the curriculum, the control of buildings, and religious education and worship.⁵ Fincham (2010) highlights the value of a collaborative approach between the diocese and local authority in the training of governors and Parish et al (2012) recommend that local authorities invest in support for governors so that they can add real value to schools and provide a conduit between the authority and academies.

Partnerships

As the structure of state-funded education in England has changed in recent years, so too has the range of actual and potential partnerships and collaborations in which schools may be involved. New partners have entered the educational arena and the role of local authorities has been reduced.

Some of the existing and potential partnerships of faith schools include:

- partnerships between **parishes** and their local schools and the individual relationships between school leaders and faith leaders or clergy
- partnerships between the **diocese** and schools
- partnerships with **national faith-based bodies**
- **ecumenical collaborations**: these are already well established between the Church of England, Methodists and Roman Catholics, but could include multifaith schools
- partnerships between maintained faith schools and **independent schools** with Anglican, Catholic or Jewish foundations
- **free schools** sponsored by parents or faith groups which could become affiliated to the diocesan family
- the growth of **federations**

There are clearly opportunities for faith schools to work with a diverse range of partners, and respondents to the survey conducted to inform the Church School of the Future Review (Archbishops’ Council, 2012:20) were enthusiastic about the potential role the Church might play in new partnerships:

We should be willing partners in setting up academy groups. We must be open to looking at academy groups that are not exclusively Church of England, e.g. ecumenical groups or even mixed with community schools.

Archbishops’ council Church School of the Future Review (2012):20

However, the challenge recognised by respondents is to retain distinctiveness at the same time:

Everybody is desperate to jump on the academy bandwagon and we should not be the last man standing. That does not mean that we are going to lose in any way our Christian distinctiveness. We have all passionately chosen to be heads of Church schools, because that is what is important.

Archbishops’ council Church School of the Future Review (2012):20

⁵ Walbank’s 2012 study was based on interviews with headteachers and governors in 9 Catholic primary schools, supplemented by questionnaires in 19 Catholic primary schools, all in the diocese of Lancaster. Storr’s 2009 study involved 100 governors of Catholic maintained primary and secondary schools in 4 English Catholic dioceses.

Local authorities are likely to continue to be significant partners, albeit playing a reduced role in the supply of services and support. In a report for DfE, Parish et al (2012) explored how local authorities are evolving and adapting their role to meet the needs of a more autonomous education system. All nine participating authorities acknowledged the tensions inherent in keeping their role as a maintaining authority and developing a new type of role as facilitator or enabler in a more diverse and devolved education system.

At the same time, the changing remit of local authorities will mean that schools will turn increasingly to other agencies. In the case of Church schools this is likely to result in new demands being made on diocesan boards. Case studies drawn together by the National College (2010b) illustrate the range of effective joint working between local authorities and dioceses, though the report notes that this good practice may not yet be sufficiently widespread, nor shared and publicised throughout the system.

Relationships with diocese and parish

There have been a couple of studies of the relationships between schools and their diocese. The four heads of Church of England primary schools in London surveyed by Colson (2004) regarded the role of the London Diocesan Board for Schools as a major source of influence in defining the values of their school. They generally found the relationship between the school and the parish to be beneficial and local clergy supportive. However, overlaps in responsibilities could create tensions. The Archbishops' Council (2012) stated that partnerships between parishes and their local schools could be strengthened and that the importance of the relationship between the incumbent and the church school should be recognised and incorporated into the training of the clergy and the appointment of heads and clergy.

In interviews with eight Catholic headteachers, Fincham (2010) found they were satisfied with the support they received from diocesan officers although there were concerns about their effectiveness in problematic areas such as sex education and children of other faiths. However, in Storr's 2009 survey of 100 Catholic school governors and diocesan directors of education, most governors saw their bishop as 'shadowy and remote'. Although some diocesan directors had established a pivotal role, generally the diocese only assumed a high profile when a headteacher was appointed. At other times governing bodies were dependent on a priest to provide a link between diocese and school. It was felt that many clergy did not wish to be involved with school governance.

Some of the new demands that may be made on the diocese were highlighted by some survey respondents to the Church School of the Future Review:

New business models are needed to beef up our school improvement capacity in all aspects, as are new ways of relating business-wise to other dioceses.

We need to become proactive, strategic education organisations, to develop as commissioning bodies and to provide brokerage for school to school support.

Archbishops' council Church School of the Future Review (2012):13

The Archbishops' Council (2012) noted that where partnerships have worked well, there is a clear alignment of values and a well-developed mutual understanding of what needs to be done. Where partnerships have worked less well, the diocese has been moved to a subordinate position in terms of governance, trusteeship or both, and the partner organisation has effectively taken over the school and installed its own ethos and branding.

Case studies of 13 schools in the Roman Catholic diocese of Hexham and Newcastle carried out with the National College highlighted the potential of dioceses to be active in finding new models of leadership (National College, 2011). These include schools sharing headteachers, using executive headships and sharing boards of governors and heads, while remaining separate schools. These case studies highlighted the role of the diocese in being willing to cross boundaries to make new arrangements successful, acting swiftly and purposefully to save schools' settings and the sense of community. The diocese was prepared to take risks to make its programme a success.

The growth of federations and a new 'middle tier'

Federations represent another relatively new model of partnership working. Chapman et al (2009, 2011) highlight a variety of different forms of federation, including:

- **cross-phase** (consisting of two or more schools of different phases, such as a primary and secondary school)
- **performance federations**, usually consisting of two schools, one low and one high performing
- **size federations**, consisting of two or more very small or small schools, or a small school and a medium-sized school
- **mainstreaming federations**, consisting of one or more special schools combined with one or more mainstream schools
- **academy federations**, with two or more academies run by the same sponsor in a federation or chain
- **faith federations**, combining two or more schools of the same denomination (this type can overlap with one of the other types, but in many cases does not)

Chapman et al explored the development of these types of federations in 2008-9, with a follow up study in 2010-11. Over this period the number of performance federations increased considerably, from 16 per cent to 56.8 per cent of their sample. The proportion of those which were academy federations also rose, and the percentage of federations which were size federations decreased. Faith federations also fell, accounting for 15 per cent of the sample in the first study and 3.7 per cent in the follow-up study.

Federations can have a number of benefits for schools, including financial savings from economies of scale, shared effective leadership and professional development. Chapman et al also identified improved outcomes for students (including attainment) from some federations. For faith schools, federations can be one response to the challenge of recruiting leaders as well as offering the opportunity for schools to support others of the same faith.

Academy-sponsored chains are a growing, if still small, part of the leadership landscape (see Hill et al, 2012). In broad terms, chains and federations can be seen to be forming part of a new 'middle tier' and taking over the role of the local authority. New autonomies for schools and a reduced role for many local authorities are intended to stimulate a new school improvement market, and chains, consultants, companies and indeed local authorities themselves will find themselves in competition to sell services to schools. Access to a wider pool of advice, including from other schools, may be welcome, but reconciling collaborative learning with a market which buys and sells advice and support may not always be easy (Hill, 2010).

Role in the community

A particular challenge for leaders of faith schools relates to the role they are expected to play in the community – both the faith community and beyond. Faith schools have attracted a considerable amount of attention in terms of their effects on social cohesion. Views tend to be polarised: some commentators have criticised faith schools for being socially divisive; others have applauded them for taking a leadership role in bringing diverse communities together.

The role of schools generally, and faith schools in particular, was considered as part of the Cattle Commission of Inquiry, set up to examine the origins of the 2001 riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. The observations from this inquiry, together with the Labour government's response to the 7/7 bombings, led to the development of a strong community cohesion agenda. A duty was placed on all schools to promote community cohesion and ensure that 'all pupils understand and appreciate others from different backgrounds with a sense of shared values, fulfilling their potential and feeling part of a community, at a local, national and international level' (DCSF, 2007). However, reporting on integration in Oldham a decade after the Cattle report, Burgess and Harris (2011) suggested that the prevalence of faith schools in the area may be one reason why integration levels have remained relatively static.

Under the Coalition government, the Education Act 2011 removed Ofsted's explicit duty to report on community cohesion (created by the Education and Inspections Act 2006). Instead, Ofsted must consider 'the

spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school' (Education Act 2011, Part 21:25). Ofsted is also required to consider how well the school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, and has published separate guidance on inspecting faith schools (Ofsted, 2012). The Coalition government has also refocused the Prevent Counter-terrorism Strategy, which recognises the vital role schools can play in challenging extremism (Home Office, 2011).

In the UK a lobby has formed to oppose the expansion of faith schooling. Its members include Accord, the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association. One of the main challenges of this lobby is that faith schools undermine social cohesion. Short (2003), for example, argues that the most serious practical criticism of faith schools is that they are likely to lead to a fragmentation of society. Some opinion polls have also shown a lack of public support for the expansion of faith schools and government funding for them (ICM, 2010), although Clements (2010) argues that the evidence is more mixed and that public opinion towards faith schools varies according to socio-economic status, religious characteristics and attitudes. Clements found that Catholics, those attending religious services regularly, those with high levels of religious feelings, and those with socially conservative beliefs are more supportive of opportunities for religious bodies to be involved in delivering education.

Not surprisingly, these criticisms can have a negative impact on morale among faith school leaders and Green (2009) found that headteachers in faith schools were often sensitive to such views. As a consequence, some schools have opted to promote social cohesion and downplay the importance of distinctive Christian teaching and Church doctrines.

On the other hand, faith schools have their supporters, who argue that they can play a socially cohesive role. Faith school leaders themselves often view their purpose as one of service to the local community (eg Colson, 2004). Analysis of Ofsted reports from 2005–09 by the Catholic Education Service (2010) found that the management and leadership of Catholic schools was more likely to be 'outstanding' in their contribution to community cohesion (41 per cent of Catholic secondary schools compared with 24 per cent of all schools). Morris et al (2011) considered the reasons for this. He points to some evidence that Catholic headteachers are more concerned with building and sustaining an explicit formative culture and emphasise working with parents and the local community. The larger catchment area of Catholic schools may also lead to a greater diversity in the social norms and experiences pupils bring to the school.

With regard to Islamic schools, Lawson (2005) comments that these are 'a vigorous and idealistic response by the Muslim communities to address the social issues of our time and that such schools are frequently more highly aware of the challenges we all face and more committed to finding solutions than perhaps many in the state sector'. Lawson notes that Islamic schools are also likely to be relatively poorly resourced as a result of a lack of support and a misunderstanding of their role and potential within the wider society.

The Runnymede Trust undertook a consultation on the contribution of faith schools to equality and social cohesion, involving 1,000 people drawn from schools, faith groups, parents, young people and policy-makers (Berkeley, 2008). The report concluded with recommendations intended to clarify the role of faith schools in the education system and help them improve their capacity to promote social cohesion. These were:

- **End selection on the basis of faith:** faith schools should be for the benefit of all, and with state funding there should be an obligation for faith schools to be relevant and open to all children.
- **Children should have a greater say in how they are educated:** children's rights are as important as parents' rights. Faith schools emphasise parental choice but also need to champion the rights of children to make choices for themselves.
- **Religious education should be part of the core national curriculum:** all children should learn about the role of faith in society, critical thinking about religion, ethics and the diversity of faith traditions.
- **Faith schools should also serve the most disadvantaged:** selection procedures, while based on faith, can favour the most privileged. Allowing faith to be a criterion for school selection appears to contradict the mission of many faith organisations to provide education for the most disadvantaged.
- **Faith schools must value all young people:** faith is an important marker of identity for many, but faith schools also need to value other important identities including gender, ethnicity, ability and sexual orientation.

Concluding comments

The evidence review which supported this paper identified relatively little research concerned with leadership in faith schools, and the studies which have been undertaken tend to have been focused on Catholic or Church of England schools.

Faith schools do not form a homogenous sector, but it is clear that schools representing different religious traditions do share a number of common leadership issues in addition to those they share with all schools. We have discussed here the five challenges for faith school leaders that most frequently recurred in the literature:

- maintaining distinctiveness
- their admissions policy in relation to children of other faiths, and none
- balancing the provision of high-quality education and faith commitment
- partnerships within and beyond the faith community
- contributing to social cohesion and meeting community expectations

This paper summarises published research and analysis of these issues while recognising that discussion 'on the ground' moves on apace. However, given the rapidly changing educational landscape, and the new roles for faith schools within it, further research across a wider range of schools could make a valuable contribution to the knowledge base on which faith school leaders and policy-makers are able to draw.

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