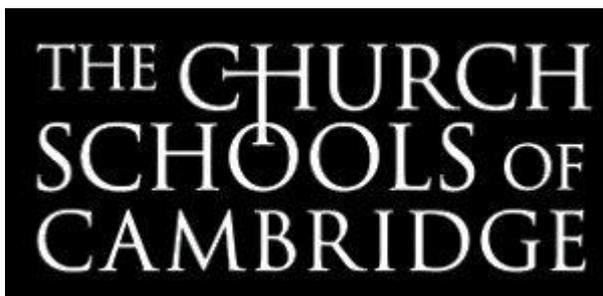




Soul Searching 2: Clergy Roles in Church Schools

Rebecca Nye, 2014



Cover Picture: "Colors of Paradise" Chidi Okoye

Introduction

'Soul Searching' is an on-going series of CSOC projects conducted by Dr Rebecca Nye which explore how primary Church Schools engage with spiritual dimensions of education. Earlier projects have examined:

- i) how cross-curricula work (Art & RE) contributes to pupil spiritual development
- ii) how pupils perceive RE and collective worship in Church schools
- iii) evidence of pupils' general spiritual interests and capacities
- iv) teachers' views about spiritual education, including its place in RE
- v) whole school spiritual profiling

Another project still in progress focusses on identifying spiritually-sensitive approaches to teaching and learning in RE, and the development of a training resource for teachers.

*This report is about **how clergy with Church school links understand and experience their role.***

The original aim of the project was to explore the existing and potential support clergy can offer about spiritual matters to Church schools : their pupils, teachers and governors. However the findings raise many more issues about ministry with schools in general, and the support that clergy themselves need do this work.

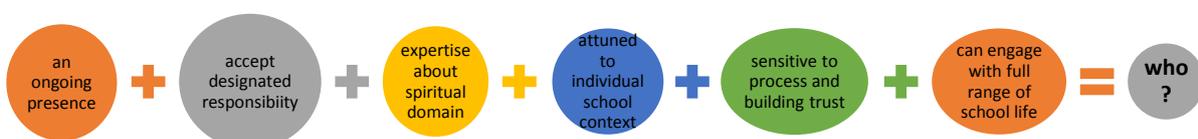
The earlier projects had identified that whilst spirituality can flourish in various ways in Church schools, there can be gaps in key areas. These gaps include

- how best to support spiritual engagement and development in RE,
- how to enable teacher discussion and reflection about the spiritual character of education,
- the general challenge of ensuring that spiritual matters are given sufficient time, energy and sensitivity in the context of so many other competing demands in school life of both pupils and teachers.

Overall there has been a sense of '*This matters. We'd like to do this better and we need to do this more...but we're not sure how to talk about this, nor how to do this*'.

Identifying a Need

This suggested that Church schools need on-going, designated support and guidance to meet the complex requirement to ensure that the experience of education promotes spiritual development of pupils and of society (2002 Education Act). This would require a source of expertise who would nevertheless appreciate their particular context, a long-term local accompanist rather than a one-stop INSET. This role would require both spiritual subject knowledge and sensitivity to process, combining both support and challenge. It suggests a role that engages with the full range of school life, of what being a school means– not just a specific subject area, this policy or that strategy, nor purely pupil focussed. Who could do that?



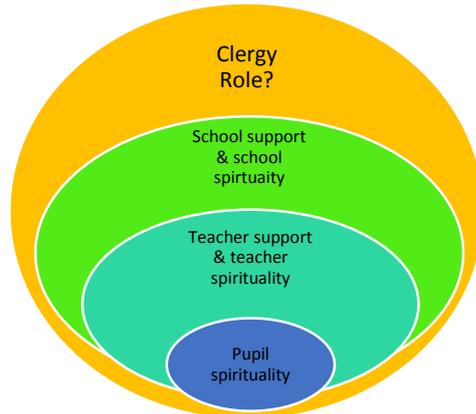
A Clergy Role?

It seemed logical to ask, to what extent do Church school clergy fit this role description?

Is this the kind of support clergy already do, or would like to, offer their schools?

What is the clergy's understanding of their roles and ministry with Church schools?

What support do clergy need to provide this kind of support to schools?



Project Methodology

The project centres on thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with clergy linked to Church schools in central Cambridge. It also draws on wider evidence from published research in other dioceses, national reports concerning Church schools, meetings with the National Society, and discussions with ordinands, ordained headteachers and the director of the Church School Leadership Course.

Some aspects of this project are still ongoing. Discussions are underway with the Diocesan Board of Ministry with view to i) developing specific clergy and reader training, ii) ensuring schools ministry is adequately explored in ministerial development reviews, and iii) a pathway to develop school chaplain roles. Therefore this report focusses on the projects findings and initial recommendations; further outcomes will follow.

I am indebted to all of these contributors, but especially to the local clergy who gave generously of their time and genuinely of themselves in their interviews. Taken together, their data has produced a vivid portrait of realities of clergy ministry in Church schools. It has also provided a valuable additional perspective on the scale of challenge to ensure spirituality in schools is given the attention it needs to thrive.

Direct quotes from these clergy interviews can be found in the left hand margin throughout this report, without directly attributing these to specific contributors.



Overview: Clergy perceptions of their Church School ministry

Listening to clergy talk about their roles in Church schools has been like listening to different kinds of music.

At times there was a predominately sad minor key, expressing the clergy's sense of failure to do more, or to make a more than a superficial contribution, and the difficult realities involved.

Sometimes there was a more contrapuntal 'hard work' style, often with dissonance – a sense of struggling to provide an alternative 'argument' about how education, and life, might be.

At some points, ministry with schools came across as a variations on a theme – a variation clearly related to the ways in which their overall Church ministry is expressed. There was also variation in the sense that the same things were explored in both major (more optimistic) and minor (more pessimistic) ways – such as feeling *restricted* by secular factors in their opportunities to engage in the school, but *appreciative* that there is at least some opportunity for a Christian presence.

There was a lot that sounded like improvisation. For almost all of these clergy, questions about their role, especially what spiritual support for church schools or children's spirituality might be about, required thinking up answers on the spot. They did not have readily available ideas or positions about many aspects of this ministry which they'd rehearsed or copied, ready to pass on to others in a guidance or support role. Rather the interview process itself seemed to open this area up, and begin to develop a view.

Finally, it was important to notice the balance between sound and silence. In talking about how clergy engage with their Church school, it was as interesting to see the issues which really pre-occupied them as it was to notice what was almost never mentioned, or only came up when really probed. For example, it was easier to hear the repeated choruses about doing 'assemblies' and going to governors meetings, but very difficult to pick up vibrations about their own encounter with God, blessing or growth through any aspects of school ministry currently or when they were children themselves.

Significant Themes

But across this variety of 'musical' style, the analysis of these interviews identified a number of significant shared themes.

*We are almost on a **ministry of failure** before we begin*

*All I'm doing is putting a few drops in, in **a tide that is just going in the opposite direction**...there's no chance for it in a sense*

*I get **disappointed** and sad, and I get **frustrated** and cross, but by and large I think this is the deal. In this context, this is what I can do. And actually I'm **really glad that they still let me do it.***

*I value these **opportunities to make contacts** of different kinds with the wider parish – though assembly, meeting staff and parents.*



Themes within the typical Church school clergy role

A large clergy survey in Wakefield diocese (2003) ¹reported that clergy involvement with Church schools typically involves 4 types of role : **Collective Worship** (91% of clergy), **Governor Meetings** (73%), **Teaching RE** (31%) and **Pastoral Support** (less than 20%). Wakefield diocese has a very similar number of Church primary schools to Ely, so on the surface conducting a simple survey in Ely is likely to show the same patterns. But, the underlying themes (listed below) which emerged from the interviews show that the lived experience of carrying out these key tasks involves a much more complicated set of implications and expectations about the role of the clergy in Church school life.

- ***Clergy role in Collective Worship***

 - ...educator, entertainer, worship leader, worship demonstrator*

- ***Clergy role: to be likeable, friendly 'face of the Church'***
- ***Clergy role: religious language representative***
- ***Clergy role: pastoral support for crises***
- ***Clergy role: governors and school management***
- ***Clergy role: to provide view/guidance about children's spirituality***
- ***Clergy role: support for RE, teaching parts of RE***
- ***Clergy role: nurturing pupil spiritual awareness***
- ***Clergy role with staff: spiritual needs, pastoral/friends or Christian information***
- ***Clergy role: upholding sanctuary, safe/sacred spaces in school life***
- ***Clergy role: leadership of wider congregation/Church to engage with school***
- ***Clergy role : provide use of Church building/visits***
- ***Clergy role to see and communicate the big/spiritual picture with schools***

This is a long list. In addition to their many other parish roles, clergy with a Church School ministry are experiencing many calls and demands, both implicit and explicit.

Inevitably this creates role confusion and role conflict, both *within* their work with a school and *between* this work and their other parish priorities. Overall clergy, both in Cambridge and in the Wakefield survey, expressed a strong feeling that they lacked time and skills to do this adequately. Furthermore too often they feel they are devoting energies to aspects of the school role to which they were least suited – not playing to their strengths, nor conducive to their calling.

¹ Wright M and Wright B (2003) A Light Under A Bushel?

The engagement between clergy and schools in the missionary diocese of Wakefield, Modern Believing 44 (4): 45-58

Clergy role: Collective Worship?

We don't really talk about [our assemblies], more than 'what did you do last week'...but not about what it is really FOR...

Leading collective worship is like choosing the short straw, you say.. 'you do the assembly, no, you do it'!

I just find to get that what I consider to be non cringeworthy and engaging, fairly upbeat...something that is going to slightly grab their attention.

It's much harder work than doing a sermon - much harder work.... actually I find that takes me a HUGE amount of time.

I don't have massive huge expectations of one assembly a week, but as long as I don't bore them, and they look engaged with the material, goodness..that's quite low expectations!

I'm unsure if it is teaching, 'something different', or worship? That's an interesting question about how far it is worship....we have a simple prayer at the end and song on the white board...

Whatever they accumulate over seven years of assemblies with me, God actually does know, and what the ripple effect in their lives may be, he knows, but I certainly don't. A drop in a big ocean.

Leading collective worship is a role is fraught with difficulties for clergy. Many these are educational, organizational or political difficulties that perhaps detract attention from spiritual opportunities (and tensions) in this role. Issues raised included

- meeting the wide range of pupil needs and abilities
- the 'problems' of traditional religious practices and language
- unfortunate timetabling (end of the day when pupils are tired)
- lack of technical support (eg with music),
- challenges of co-ordinating with others (clergy team or teaching staff) ,
- challenges of appeasing parent demands
- challenges of achieving a shared vision of what collective worship is for.

Meeting pupil needs in collective worship feels a tall order for clergy: a sense of doing something unnatural both for the children (a school experience not tailored to age and ability) and for the clergy (not trained to work with young children). Most clergy doubted their capacities for this role. Some also doubted children's capacity to worship, and focus particularly on their role 'not to bore them' and 'to keep them occupied'. There was some doubt expressed also about the validity of Christian patterns of worship in the school context – that liturgy and traditional Bible stories 'can't be used on children'.

In response to this role strain, many recognized they adopted the role of a children's entertainer: 'sometimes I think I am there for the end of the day entertainment. I do try and make it light hearted and' its good for them to see adults making a fool of themselves...as they do regularly in my assembly'.

A minority view was that children may have a particular gift for the kind of knowing and being that worship involves: 'children kind of, they engage with it, in ways that we, by and large, find really difficult'.

A lack of co-ordination, planning and shared vision was mentioned often. Clergy regretted never seeing how others led worship in the school, nor having feedback on their own contributions, for example from observing governors. Some sensed their approach might be misunderstood as an attempt to teach (e.g. have clear learning objectives) rather than offer reflection and worship.

Other clergy did perceive the aim of collective worship as a kind of teaching. But they felt in the dark about how to assess the 'value' of their assembly – measuring 'where the children more filled with awe and wonder than they were before' or on the basis of a much longer term influence. The isolation of this role was also felt as teachers

were often absent 'because it's the time when the teachers can do what they need to do', and a regret that this meant pupils' questions and ideas could not be followed up later with teachers.

Clergy role: Likeable face of the Church?

Both in assemblies and wider discussion of their work with schools, clergy mentioned the importance of projecting a 'likeable' image/role as popular. For example, they evaluated their success in terms of being recognised by pupils in the street or shops, or by the fact that pupils liked listening to them. Possibly the emphasis on this need for personal engagement and likeability overshadowed awareness of their role to help pupils engage with God or their own sense of the sacred. Arguably the two are linked. In some cases, being liked by the pupils was more important than trying to be popular with the adults in the school content – sometimes because this was easier, and sometimes because this was regarded as a more important part of their role.

Clergy role: Religious Language Spokesperson?

In the same way as secondary schools might have a native French or German teaching assistant, clergy also sensed part of their distinctive role was to be the one who is able to and allowed to 'speak Christian'. However they perceived this was like keeping a very endangered, dying language away from extinction. So for some this role feels isolated and a difficult responsibility: clergy sense this task seems to fall almost solely to them both within the school and the pupils' culture more generally. There was uncertainty about what could be realistically achieved given the low baseline knowledge.

In some cases this was about providing a kind of vocabulary: 'mentioning God' and basic religious literacy. Some emphasised their role in sharing Bible stories. Some saw their role as translators, from a strange language to their own language, rather than having children to speak or listen to this language in its original form very much.

In contrast, one member of the clergy had discerned their role was to offer pupil's experiences of a particular way of using religious language: to help pupils encounter the surprise and open-endedness of religious language, and actively counter 'parroted' or merely echoed uses of religious language, which they might encounter in both positive and negative forms from others, such as very religious or atheist parents.

My job is to keep...er...to keep the name of God alive, to mention God in that setting

I think that its important to say to children, or anybody, that we deal with the realities of life,(e.g. about death and dying)...so sometimes I'm there to say things other's daren't say...that's my job to talk about it ...but even so, I'm not sure

I try to slip bit of 'God' in the entertainment is what I try to do, just give them some literacy

[I'm hoping to] communicate with children about the things of God, about the things they already know.

Clergy role: nurturing pupil spiritual awareness?

My presupposition is - and I think this is supported over 25 years of doing assemblies - and by the way Jesus talks to us and says we have to be like children...is that children actually exhibit trust, independence, wonder, awe and a whole range of qualities, that are 'spiritual', that are already there.

Children are a lot more open and able to share their feelings when they are younger, and as they get older they become a bit more cynical, and I am always concerned about the balance.

the things of God, ... the things they already know.... generally speaking, that will be educated out of them

Only one interviewee explicitly referred to carrying out their church school roles in line with their view of children's spirituality. Others needed prompting to improvise what that might be 'on the spot', made sometimes inconsistent or very sparse comments about this. By default, this suggests that many aspects of clergy's work with schools happen without reference to a consciously constructed view of childhood and spirituality. Whilst clergy cannot be expected to have well-informed views of teaching and learning, or educational theory, it seems important that they have the use of a considered theological perspective about childhood and about its spiritual characteristics.

Nevertheless, some clergy perceived their role to both safeguard and elicit/contribute to children's spirituality. For example, some had been impressed by examples of pupil's intuitive ways of knowing God or about heaven. There was an awareness, for some clergy, that aspects of pupil spirituality were 'at risk'.

Other comments were suggested needing to adopt a more interventionist role. Such as 'making them connect to the relevance of Bible stories' or doing certain things 'to evoke a response in them'. This included use of time (for prayer), artefacts (a candle, a cross) and rituals. For some there was a residual sense that their role was first to 'teach about' and 'get them talking about' these before they might be of any use in the child's spiritual life.

Clergy role: supporting the provision of good space or sanctuary?

There was an implicit theme about way the school environment can support or impair on spiritual well-being. In different ways clergy saw that they might have a role contributing to that or be affected by this when trying to exercise their roles.

Clergy reflected on the quality of the primary phase to provide a protective, secure base for children, and their real concern and sadness when this more sheltered period ends as they move to secondary school. Clergy are often explicitly involved in marking this transition through a leaver's service, but none mentioned trying to extend their role into the next phase of pupil's lives either through their (community) secondary schools or in other ways.

Some aspects of the school environment were problematic for the roles clergy try to carry out. For example, creating a sense of sacred time and space in collective worship was sometimes difficult with the '*wafting smell of school dinners*' and the

feeling that children were being herded in and out. In some cases, clergy felt 'let in' to the school only at specific time and for specific tasks, which made it difficult to offer a more pastoral and informal presence to staff and pupils. The staffroom environments were sometimes not good places to really 'meet', and more often seemed to be as busy and efficiency driven as the chalkface.

Some clergy had experience of how profoundly the unspoken ethos/environment can create a difference spiritual climate for staff and pupils in different schools. Reference was made to schools which gave/'wasted' more or less school time (value) to collective worship, and schools which had a more target driven, 'success' culture for all pupils to conform to 'the standard, compared with a more inclusive culture where individual difference was embraced more warmly.

Some clergy identified this aspect of their role in their provision alternative spaces/environment to school –such as Church run after-school clubs where different values and objectives to the mainstream school culture operate. Usually, the motivation had been to provide child-care – to help out parents and keep children happily occupied. So comments suggested this had to some extent 'just happened' rather than been deliberately designed to meet children's spiritual needs for a kind of sanctuary

In contrast, a headteacher/ordinand of a Church school in London² has deliberately restructured the physical environment of his school to support a Christian sense of hospitable space for pupils, parents and staff. He has also built on an 'upper room' (which some of the children refer to as heaven) which is set aside as a sanctuary for spiritual reflection and free choice creative activities and play, using the Godly Play approach, which is can be used during the school day. It is credited with making a significant difference not only to spiritual nurture but also to behaviour, concentration and self-esteem across the school.

Clergy Role: Sharing their Church Building?

There were different views about the ways Church visits enable clergy to carry out their Church school roles.

For some, Church spaces are provide a dramatically different space. the steps to the pulpit , and we use that space for the pathways to the nativity - and that was amazing..seeing the space being used - its space and time..

...I do like when the children are transplanted out of their school to the churches..I love that `..there loads of space for them to run about. I love it, to give them that freedom . I tell the helpers – 'there's nothing they can't do', and they climb up the steps to the pulpit..its amazing seeing the space being used – its about space and time.

² <http://www.holytrinitynorthwood.org/website>

When they go to the church they know it is their church, can show their friends its their church , and they are very conscious of it, and gives a sense of them belonging.

Clergy also saw Church visits as a way they could to help foster a sense of belonging to or being a natural part of the Church, although earlier interviews with pupils suggested this was not their view, and many did not really relish visits to their Church school Church.

Some Church visits, particularly services, are viewed negatively by clergy, because neither the pupils nor the usual Church congregation seem to genuinely accommodate one another. Clergy can feel caught between meeting different expectations and needs – that the Church building is an extension of the school, a venue for pupils’ performances etc versus sense that the congregation has graciously invited them in to ‘their’ place.

Clergy role: Supporting RE?

I would wander round the RE classes..totally ignorant of what I should be doing.

None of the clergy interviewed currently help with RE in their Church schools. Some had never observed any RE. Some felt they were too ignorant of both curriculum content and teaching methods to be of use, even in the background. Some felt their view of how children engage best with religious material was at odds with the ‘lesson plan/teaching outcomes’ approaches, and that there could be conflict with the teachers!

When I once did class visit, I was less impressed with the younger ones: they were dealing with the issues with pictures and things, so it was a bit incoherent.

Some felt that offers to help with RE were overlooked, as often RE has low priority compared with key ‘OFSTED’ concerns. Clergy were unsure of how far their role could be to ‘push’ schools to attend to RE more.

I suppose we could be used for the RE more.. we had all these plans which never came off...I felt they just hadn't got the time - concentrating on OFSTED - it is so sad really

Often clergy had had good intentions to regularly engage in discussion about RE but pressures on their own time got in the way.

One interviewee felt their role was to give time to the children, to be with them and listen to them rather than to be their teacher. It had proved difficult to communicate this to the school and usually they were allocated specific teaching assistant tasks to ‘get through’ with the pupils – frustrating the desired role of being rather than doing.

You can tick lots of boxes and you think actually that is pretty good, but it is never sufficient because the area we miss out is teachers. That's the thing I feel we've always missed, and I not sure how to do it.

I feel I've failed in doing anything with teachers. That's the area that I feel, I probably could have done something and I haven't, ever, really, except for chatting and being there.

...And if any teacher wants to talk you are hopefully there at the right moment, and if not you've missed it.

But how do I get to the whole staff..who I have no contact with? Is that my role?

Clergy role: Supporting for teaching staff? In what ways?

Clergy had many ideas they would like to play a support role for teaching staff.

However all felt a strong sense of guilt that few of these things actually happen. The first three mostly happen, but were still prone to self-criticism.

- 'Being there', a pastoral presence – especially for crises affecting staff
- Soothing the fear levels, comforting and encouraging in face of pressure
- Praying for staff
- Providing a Christian basics course for teachers
- Facilitating discussions about 'what it means to be a teacher in a Church school'
- Ensuring collective worship engaged with their need for reflective time and space
- Worship / spiritual time and space for staff, beyond the small 'Christian' set

Many obstacles to making contributions to staff support were mentioned including

- An absence of suitable meeting space
- Uncertainty about being welcomed by 'non Christian' staff
- Teachers always too busy; easier to engage pastorally/informally with TAs
- Working in a clergy team/rota prevents the development of close bonds

There was also evidence of poor division of roles. One clergy person with skills in adult education was only involved in leading pupils in collective worship, which they found 'scary'.

There was surprisingly little said by clergy about supporting the headteachers specifically in their 'spiritual leadership' of a Church school. This would seem an obvious area in which clergy have relevant, parallel experience. There was plenty of confidence in the heads the clergy worked alongside, but the fact that they managed to appoint heads able to exercise spiritual leadership was described as 'lucky' or 'a miracle', rather than something with which clergy could help to them to develop further. It is interesting to be note that the nationally accredited 'Church School Leadership Course' caters only for teachers: there is doubtless scope for fruitful dialogue and reciprocal learning between clergy and headteachers about Christian understanding and practice of leadership.

This leads to the specific question this project sought to explore. To what extent can the role of the clergy be to support and provide guidance about the whole dimension of spiritual education and development for a Church school?

Clergy role: to support the school's overall understanding of spiritual dimensions to education and pupil development?

That would be very big task – it makes the problems of doing assembly pale into insignificance!

Well... we do what we can..and leave God to do the rest

As clergy we battle with ourselves, because we've got so many balls in the air all the time, then we just let things drop [even when they] might be good ideas

No – the teachers don't do God... [teaching] is so compartmentalised for teachers.. but I think some of the teachers are actually practicing church goers which makes a difference, but I wouldn't know which they are....and whether they bring that into their teaching I don't know, though again in a church school, you could do it more easily.

[you need to have a] broader, bigger picture of what human-ness is and I think that's one of the reasons schools struggle with this whole area of spirituality

"The league-table culture and compliance culture that Ofsted has brought in to the system has taken the soul out of schools." (John McIntosh, London Oratory School, Schools with Soul Report 2014)

Ultimately this was the key question these interviews invited clergy to consider.

Did they think this was a viable role for clergy in Church schools?

Their responses included

- Feeling this was definitely for someone else to sort out. There was a view that someone else, or God, needed to provide for this kind of thing.
- Feeling uncertain whether or not they should take the initiative on this. Was it really their role to share their professional expertise (eg understanding spirituality, a theological perspective on education and childhood)?
- Concern that this would add to pressure on them as clergy – another thing to fail at
- Concern that, even in a Church school, it could be inappropriate to invite staff to look at educational values, vocation, education and childhood through a Christian lens
- In agreement this would be a really valuable part of their role to prioritise: but not sure how they would do it – easier to stick to existing input of 'activities'
- A view that private prayer is the solution: clergy can address these issues by privately praying for the school rather than direct engagement or discussion
- Concern that this might introduce conflict between your view of spirituality and educational values and the school's unspoken values. This could jeopardize other roles you have with them. (needs a context of mutual respect and agreement that all opinions matter)
- Agreement that Church culture represented by clergy offers counter-balancing view of life, and 'success' and being 'outstanding', which could help to broaden the mission of a Church school. Unsure how to foster this.
- A strong sense that providing a counter-cultural perspective is an essential role at this time in education, and that those with a Christian/theological perspective can help to provide that. Unsure how to implement this.

The recent report, *Schools with Soul* (2014) suggests “The mantra for the last twenty years of education in England, said too often but not done often enough, has been ‘standards not structures’. It may be time to reintroduce a third ‘s’, the soul of schools, into this mix”. However, the clergy in Church schools in Cambridge seem uncertain about whether this is their role or not, and admit to feeling unsure how to do this even if it is.

Clergy role: Governors and School Management

[governors is] the official bit that I am supposed to be involved in, and I am, but I struggle more with that side...But that's more time consuming than you realise

This was a role which all the clergy found onerous in its current form. It involves them in tasks they feel particularly ill-equipped to perform. It uses up too much of the time which could be allocated to other aspects of their ministry with schools. For example, clergy mentioned having to cut back on leading collective worship in order to get through governor paperwork.

‘the need for governors to monitor and assess the spiritual health of the school was a very interesting, challenging question. It needs different kinds of indicators and evaluation – like church health does too’

In one school, I had been invited by the clergy to facilitate a discussion with the foundation governors about their understanding of the spiritual dimension of Church school life. This clergy person now had a less jaundiced view of their governor role, and could see clear parallels with issues in managing and sustaining the spiritual health of their Church.

Clergy role: Engaging the Church congregation in school life

Members of the congregations whose Churches are linked to schools do play a part in the ministry clergy offer to Church Schools. This is often in important practical ways – such as providing after-school child care, being a governor, being part of an assembly team (e.g. open the book). Physical ways that clergy tried to encourage the congregation to develop share responsibility for the Church school included having a prominent display board about the school in the Church. Some mention was also made of regular congregational prayer support for the school

There was perhaps surprisingly little reference to a view that the Church school was a potential source of new congregation – though perhaps that was assumed? The impression was that only a tiny handful of pupils and parents from Church schools attended the linked Churches. Instead, there was reference to a) some difficulty in engagement between Church and school communities when these seemed to operate rather different visions and values, and b) an (ecclesiological) view that the school was an extension of the Church in its own right: a place of faith and growth which did not need to come ‘in’ to the Church building or be more connected to the congregation to be valid.



Clergy Training For Roles in Church School Ministry?

In the Wakefield Diocese survey (2003) found clear evidence that a lack of training lay behind the difficulties clergy had with the roles in a Church school. Out of 195 clergy, the majority had participated in no school-related IME nor CME whatsoever. The majority of those clergy felt ill-prepared for their work in schools both *practically and theologically*. Even amongst those few who had done some school related CME, most *still* felt unprepared for their engagement with Church schools, indicating that this requires considerable quality and quantity to be effective. The two most frequently requested topics (in the Wakefield survey) for specific training were collective worship (81%) and developing spiritual ethos (66%).

The more recent 'Church Schools of the Future' report (2012) has again made a strong case for clergy to receive in-depth training to prepare them for their roles, as clergy, in Church schools. In the 'ministry' section of the Ely diocesan website, the current year's CME programme for Ely diocese lists nothing to do with school, children or young people. In the 'education' section, there is a 2 hour session available to help governors, but nothing specifically addressing clergy needs.

Training for Church school roles: views of Cambridge clergy

On this matter, clergy were completely in unison:

You don't get any training to do with what you do in schools...I don't think anything I've ever had has been to do with what could I do, how should I do it, how could I improve.

I don't think I got anything in training. I certainly didn't get anything from training.

Training? Nothing, no..we must have done some? There must of been something? But nothing kind of practical, we must have talked about it probably..it hasn't made much of an impression (laughs)

I'd say there's no support (current training opportunities) well maybe if I went and looked for it..but certainly there's nothing that is offered to me.

And comments were made about the negative effects of theological training on skills which could have sustained them in their school roles *'ordinand x was a gifted communicator, and theological college virtually beat him to death - beat his gift out of him..not everyone can communicate, especially with kids. It's a big factor.*

Requests Cambridge clergy made to support their Church school roles

The sadness is that by not getting support, -it is not that you can't do it, but that it slips down the agenda. If no one reminds you what you've got to do, you just do other things, so really I just go in and do assemblies when it is my turn and go to school governors.

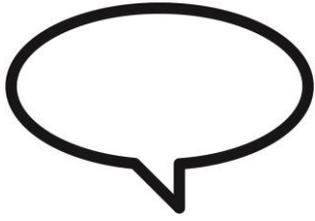
More than just another resource you get emailed and ignore.

To talk things over that's what I would really like...about WHY are we doing it.

If you did this properly this could amount to a whole ministry for one person

- **Pre-packaged advice** –because some issues feel too difficult to work on from scratch
- **Resources they could use with school staff.** For example ‘A sort of package we could take into schools, to use with the staff’
- **Guided help, worked through examples/models to use.** ‘More than just another resource you get emailed and ignore: need to really work it through with us’
- **Time for reflection and dialogue** ‘I would like us to all sit together, the heads, maybe the RE coordinator, the team..you know altogether and maybe a whole hour, or even longer to talk things over that's what I would really like...about WHY are we doing it.
- **Opportunities to compare practice.** ‘I'd also quite like to know what are the other assemblies like - are they all giving them space to think or are the others much more factual?’
- **Someone else to broach spirituality** with staff/schools, to help provide a ‘neutral’ starting point from which to examine differences between staff and clergy values
- **A ‘think big’ session for staff** ‘about the nature of child as a spiritual creature, and how our behaviour towards them affects that’
- Help in **how** to share this with teachers/others (‘another dimension’ of education, and Church ‘alternative’ values)
- **Help for governors**_ ‘to ask the right questions to monitor and assess school’s spiritual health’.
- **Time to have conversations with teaching staff** about ‘what they think it means to be teachers in a Christian school, does it make any difference’
- **Time and more manpower** ‘if you did this properly this could amount to a whole ministry for one person ‘
- **Co-ordination** – harness the positive things already going on, bring together under one vision.

The next stage of this project is to select which of the above the CSOC can best contribute to and develop resources and models for, in consultation with the Ely Board of Ministry and the National Society (Archbishop’s Council:Board of Education).



Every so often I think I get some kind of indication - through a child's face, or child's comments, or interaction with a child or I think there's something..but not something I put on a piece of paper to a bishop, or PPC or a governor's meeting

"What would be helpful is some chance to consider theological and missiological issues around church schools" (clergy Wakefield report)

"What's lacking for clergy is help with understanding their work in schools in relation to their own spirituality and the spirituality of children...."(Jane Brooke, Principal Schools Consultant, Chester Diocese)

Further recommendations: areas for development

Listening carefully to the views of these interviewed clergy has clarified not only what they have said, but also those points on which they said nothing or surprisingly little. These gaps or silences provide another kind of list of needs to support ministry in schools.

There were 3 key surprises in what was mostly absent from these discussions.

1. There was rather little mention of **clergy's experience of a sense of blessing, grace or calling in the course of their work in schools**. The possibility of encountering God or their own growth in the school, through the pupils or teachers was overshadowed by the tasks they had gone 'in to do'. The emphasis seemed to be largely on 'taking God in' rather than also 'meeting God there'.

2. There was sparse use of **Christian theological frames of reference and concepts**. This required explicit prompting or permission to make connection between their perceptions of significant issues facing schools and their work with schools, and theological and spiritual ways of framing those— failure, suffering, weakness, judgement, hope, welcome and hospitality, presence, sanctuary, revelation etc

3. It was curious how clergy very rarely drew from their **own childhood and school experience** to help them understand some of the parameters of their role with children and schools now. When specifically asked about their own experience, most recalled primarily *negative* memories. For example, recalling school assembly *'dredged up memories of all the singing' / 'sitting and singing hymns which we were told we were never singing properly / the Chaplain was a terrible man: authoritarian, moralising – grim. Cold, hard. I don't think I ever heard the Gospel. Ever'.*

This report recommends therefore that clergy are supported in developing:

- **More foregrounded views of child spirituality, including their own.**
- **More foregrounded use of theology**
- **More foregrounded awareness of the connections and contrasts between of their personal spirituality, their Church's spirituality and that of the schools they work with**
- **More foregrounded attention to school environment and other non-verbal expressions of spiritual**
- **Discernment of priorities in their Church school ministry: what can really make a difference and make best use of their gifts and calling, and what can be delegated.**

Conclusion

This is really an *interim* report on the findings of the Clergy interview study which began in March 2014. Its findings provide rich detail about the experiences, perceptions and challenges of Church School clergy.

It has clarified, but also complicated, the question of how to support Church schools in their understanding of and provision for the spiritual dimensions of education.

In theory, some clergy may be best placed to support schools in this way. In practice, this will require the development of support, training and resources to help them to do this in ways that are effective and fulfilling. In such cases, this could be an important way to develop a deeper sense of clergy vocation to Church school ministry, rather than something which too often feels rather overwhelming, draining and 'a failure before we begin'.

However, these findings also suggest that it might be possible, and sometimes more realistic, for others to fill this role. As one clergy person said "*If you did this properly this could amount to a whole ministry for one person*". In the next stage of this project, the possibility of a school chaplain and/or reader-ministry pathway will be explored. It also seems important to ensure that Church school headteachers are close partners consulted in these developments. It is hoped that the CSOC can develop opportunities for clergy/chaplains to reflect and train alongside their headteachers too.

Models such as the Chester diocese IME training model (2013) and the Church School Leadership Course offer useful comparisons. In particular these have demonstrated that this area needs much more than 'quick fix' training which is largely practical and information focussed. Rather, like all substantial areas of ministry, this needs and thrives on extended time and reflection over months. It needs theological and spiritual investment. It has the potential to be transformative.

It is easy for ministry with Church schools to seem like just 'one more thing' in the clergy portfolio, yet it far from being a minority or 'niche' ministry. Nationally, at least one in five working clergy will have responsibilities in a Church school at any one time – therefore perhaps most will have this ministry at some point. In Ely diocese, approx. 14,600 adults and children make up the usual Sunday /once a week attendance (2010 figures). However, approx. 14,500 pupils attend Church Schools in Ely diocese five days a week, supported by well over 1000 teachers and other school staff. Therefore, efforts to support the spiritual well-being and needs in schools, and to understand the spiritual gifts and challenges involved in the education of children, deserve to be a much higher priority – arguably equal to 'parish' ministry. It is hoped that this project, and its future action plans, will help to make that a reality.