

Education and the Church: into the next 200 years

A report of the National Society / Board of Education

Introduction

The celebration of the National Society's Bicentenary is an opportunity to recognise and affirm the Church of England's witness and service to children, families and communities through its schools. The commitment to partnership with the state found its unique English (and Welsh) form in the 1944 Education Act which, while guaranteeing state funding for church schools, allowed the churches to retain considerable independence and control.

It is also an opportunity to review the achievements following the Dearing Report *The Way Ahead; Church of England schools in the new millennium*. Published in 2001, the report laid out an ambitious programme for national, diocesan and school level action and led to a major expansion of Church school provision.

The changes brought in by the present Coalition government present significant challenges to the church's continued involvement in the public education system. The changed rationale and growth of academies requires action now to ensure the survival of our provision. That provision will be affected by how and to whom the commitment to being 'distinctive and inclusive' is understood, as embodied in revised Advice on admissions to church schools. The exclusion of Religious Education from the English Baccalaureate brings into focus the overall health of the subject and the potential for the Church of England to make a major contribution on behalf of all schools.

This report is offered to Synod not only as part of the Bicentenary celebrations but also as a call to action to maintain the proud history of the Church of England's contribution to education in this country.

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200 years of the National Society

1. The founding of the National Society in 1811 set in train a new and extraordinary phase in the history of the engagement of the Church of England with education. At a time of great change in our national life Joshua Watson of Hackney persuaded the Archbishop of Canterbury and other leading clergy and laymen of the need for mass education of the poor, as essential both for the church's mission and the life of the nation.
2. They were living through the industrial revolution, with the movement of whole communities into the centres of production – a population shift unseen before, creating massively expanding cities and entirely new communities. For the families that moved to service the new industries the rewards turned out to be few. Poverty and exploitation, disease and death were their lot, and that of their children. For the governing classes there was the awful warning of the French Revolution of 1789, which had to be prevented on British soil.
3. The founders knew that the way out of poverty and ignorance was education, not only to train people in basic skills but also to build character. At that time there was strong resistance to the idea that this should be provided by the state, or paid for from taxation. So as with hospitals and healthcare and other forms of social care this had to be provided through voluntary effort.
4. The first meeting of the Society took place on 16 October when the name and purpose of the Society were agreed, and the practical commitments that would drive the Society for the next 50 years adopted. The full name taken by the group was the *National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church*. They believed that 'the national

religion should be the foundation of national education' and committed themselves to a church school in every parish.

5. Money was raised through public subscription to carry out their aim. Grants were given towards the cost of building a school on condition that the schools demonstrated Church of England foundation and teaching, and by 1861 there were around 12,000 schools 'in union' with the NS. This was a phenomenal achievement. It was the invention of mass education. Though fear of social unrest was a major driver, and denominational rivalry spurred it on (for the Free Churches were building their own schools as well), at the heart was a concern that the poor were given resources to better themselves. (The full story is fascinating and a new history of the Society will be published later this year.)
6. Building schools on this scale led to a demand for teachers, training for those teachers, a replicable pedagogy, lesson materials and examination apparatus that had to be more or less invented from scratch. And the National Society, along with the Church through its dioceses, developed all these, including a higher education system based on its teacher training colleges, with higher education available for the first time to women. The National Society founded 4 colleges, with the major expansion of teacher training taking place in the dioceses.
7. From the start the founders were clear that education was about character, and that character would be formed by exposure to and participation in the teaching and worship of the Established Church. Religious instruction and attendance at worship were the cornerstones of the education offered to the poor.
8. These convictions set the pattern not only for church schools but for the state funded system that followed. As the century progressed voluntary provision could not meet the demand and the 1870 Education Act laid the foundations of a state system. Religious instruction and worship were written into the Board Schools and successive education legislation has never dislodged the expectation that all pupils would take part unless their parents withdraw them.
9. A succession of Education Acts bore witness to the shifting balance between voluntary schools and state schools until the 1944 Act incorporated church schools within the state system, creating voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools receiving funding from public taxation and subject to all subsequent legislation. Church schools remained an accepted part of the national system but the initiative in all areas of educational practice and curriculum development passed to the local education authorities. The Church's capacity to affect professional practice narrowed to a concern with Religious Education, with the National Society continuing to publish resource materials for schools.

The Dearing report

10. In 1999 the General Synod debated a full report on Church schools and passed a strongly supportive motion affirming 'that Church schools stand at the heart of the mission to the nation'. Following from the debate the Church Schools Review Group, under the chairmanship of Lord Dearing was formed, funded by the National Society and central Church funds. The remit of the Group was 'to review the achievements of Church of England schools and to make proposals for their future development'.
11. *The Way Ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium* was published in 2001 following nearly 2 years work and an interim report offering further opportunity for comment. The main theme of the Report, following the Synod motion, was the central importance of church schools to the mission of the Church not only to children and young people but to the long term well-being of the Church of England.
12. Most significant of all the recommendations was the call for the increase of secondary places by the equivalent of 100 new schools over the following seven to eight years with a particular focus on

deprived areas. To achieve this major expansion and to improve access to primary schools a fundraising campaign was proposed, with the objective of raising £25m over 7 years.

- 13.** For schools to achieve the Church's mission the schools must be distinctively Christian, in close partnership with worshipping communities, with consequent implications for clergy training. The Report also stressed the crucial importance of Christian teachers and school leaders, with a number of recommendations about their training and support. The Report urged greater recognition of teaching as a Christian vocation and for the Church colleges of Higher Education to secure and enhance their Christian distinctiveness so that there were places where teacher training could take place in that context.
- 14.** The Report devotes a short section to Religious Education, urging dioceses to set targets for improving standards of teaching and learning in RE for their schools, including the expectation that every pupil in a Church secondary school should take at least short course GCSE and preferably the full course. More space was devoted to the issue of admissions to Church schools, recognising the hugely varied practice across Church schools as a whole and advocating a balance on all schools of 'open' places allocated to the local community and 'foundation' places reserved for children of church families.
- 15.** The group supported an ecumenical approach to new schools and looked to the development of stronger links between maintained and independent Anglican schools. A clear message came from the Report: that the role of Church schools was to be less concentrated on the 'domestic' provision and more on the 'general', which is to say that the schools should be seen as a service to the whole community and not solely as a service to the Church.
- 16.** A full assessment of the impact of *The Way Ahead* demands more space and research than is possible here, so the following summary should be seen as only a starting point. Nevertheless it can be said that Report had a very significant effect on the Church school context both nationally and locally. It provided a restatement of the Church of England's engagement in public education around which the work of Diocesan Boards of Education and the National Society and the Archbishops' Council could cohere. It demonstrated a confidence in the continuing contribution of Church schools which inspired local effort to achieve the aspirations it set for new schools of a distinctively Christian character.
- 17.** In the 10 years since the Report there has been the most significant expansion of places since the beginning of the National Society. Early on there were a number of additional Church schools formed from failing county / community schools. There were about 70+ so-called 'Dearing schools', supported with grants from the fundraising campaign to develop Christian ethos. With the advent of academies in their first incarnation a new vehicle for developing new schools became available. Intended as a radical solution to persistent under-performance, the involvement of individual or corporate sponsors was intended to bring new energy and innovative approaches to improve educational opportunities. As most of the schools identified were in areas of social deprivation they fitted well with the commitment of the Church and the possibilities of Church of England sponsorship was explored across the dioceses. The resulting 42 Wave 1 academies make the Church of England the largest provider of academies, and an estimated 54,000 more students are now receiving secondary education in a Church of England establishment than in 2001.
- 18.** A small number of new schools or academies were ecumenical, mostly in partnership with Roman Catholic dioceses. This has been most notable in Liverpool where the needs of both churches and the city coincided. A number of new primary schools have been opened with Methodist involvement. An attempt (which ultimately failed) to develop a multi-faith academy with Muslim involvement was a testimony to the creative thinking taking place at Diocesan Boards of Education. (The current breakdown of Church of England secondary provision is available on the Education section of the Church of England website.)
- 19.** Following a feasibility study a full Fundraising Campaign was initiated using a professional company. A measure of success was achieved, especially in identifying one sponsor in particular who worked

with three dioceses in developing Church of England academies. It is not easy to estimate how much money was actually raised as the bulk went directly to the individual academy projects rather than through the National Society or Archbishops' Council. It has been estimated that £48m went into Church of England schools during this phase from private and public funds. The costs of the fundraising campaign were almost entirely born by the National Society, and it was wound down in 2009.

20. Training for Church school leaders was significantly developed, largely in partnership with the National College for School Leaders. A number of grants from the College funded significant work on succession planning and developing Black and Minority Ethnic leadership in church schools. Many of the Church HE institutions have developed creditbearing courses focussing on Church School Leadership. This is now a recognised pathway for continuing professional development and dioceses are closely involved in the creation and delivery of such courses.
21. The commitment to Religious Education across Church schools has been maintained into the new academies, though there have been difficulties in some case in recruiting suitably qualified teachers. The number of pupils taking GCSE RE have risen year on year, though Church schools and others with a religious foundation make up the bulk of the numbers sitting the full course.
22. Admissions arrangements continue to be contentious, with renewed attacks on the principle of foundation places from those hostile to Church schools. All the new academies are committed to serving the immediate neighbourhood, and only a very small number have any foundation places. Revised advice produced by the National Society / Board of Education in 2011 reiterates the Dearing emphasis on all Church schools offering both open and foundation places.
23. The Dearing recommendations that have had the least effect are those related to clergy training. A day conference was held shortly after the publication bringing together DDEs, DDOs, CME officers, and college and course staff to explore together the implications of the Report. This was not followed up, however. A national review of pre- and postordination training took place with virtually no reference to schools or children and youth more broadly. Provision in courses or colleges remains ad hoc and minimal. DBEs have worked hard to make an impact on local provision but their success depends too much on the willingness of individual course or college staff to make space.
24. Inevitably there are some aspects in which *The Way Ahead* is captive to the time out of which it arose, especially in its approach to Local Authorities. However, its role in prompting the great expansion of secondary schools will alone ensure it a place in the next history of church schools.

Church schools today

25. In 2011 there are 4,745 Church of England schools, 225 secondary and the rest primary, with a total of one million children being educated within them. They have if anything grown in popularity since 2001 with endorsement from subsequent government spokesmen on their valued place within the system. At the same time hostility towards faith based schools has increased with high profile challenges made to admissions on the basis of faith, appointments of staff and control over religious education. Claims are made that the very existence of faith based schools widens social divisions and hampers community cohesion.
26. The change of government in 2010 led to a new Academies Act being brought through Parliament with the express purpose of extending the academy programme to, eventually, all schools, including primary and special schools. The pursuit of this intention, with conviction and speed, signals the most fundamental shift in the publicly funded school system since 1944. The rationale has changed from a desire to improve poor provision to a means of enabling schools to escape from local authority control.

27. All academies are 'independent' schools paid for from the public purse. As such they are outside most of the core education legislation and are therefore only accountable to themselves for their curriculum, school organisation, admissions policies, teachers' pay and conditions.
28. For a Church of England school to convert to academy status a number of conditions had to be satisfied: the land and title issues dealt with appropriately; the relation to the wider diocesan family of schools maintained and the school continuing to be committed to the distinctive character of the foundation. Together with Roman Catholic and Methodist colleagues the National Society and the Department for Education drafted appropriate documentation and issued advice to both Diocesan Boards and schools.
29. The danger was that church schools that became academies could in the not too distant future let the church foundation drift until it had no meaning. That has been to some extent averted by the church school specific documentation. As system change becomes a reality (though taking place at different rates in different parts of the country) the Church of England infrastructure may look very attractive to schools cast onto their own resources, or prey to commercial providers, building on the schemes of affiliation already in existence in some dioceses.
30. The key challenges being addressed by the National Society and the Board are, in the immediate term, supporting individual dioceses as more of their schools become academies. In the longer term as resourcing and supporting all church schools falls to DBEs, how can they be enabled to gear up to provide the resources formerly the province of the Local Authority, including school improvement?
31. In the short term a grant from the Church Schools Fund has secured the services of 25 days of consultant expertise to work with the Head of School Strategy to support DDEs as they manage church school conversions. It is hoped that the Jerusalem Trust will fund the work from September 2011 as it develops into reshaping the system.
32. The **Church School of the Future** development programme is working closely with DDEs and the DfE to build a sustainable structure to resource church schools in the new environment. Early discussions suggest are exploring regional or sub-regional groupings, building on the experience of the NW dioceses (through DBE Services) and the Eastern region (Church Schools East). A parallel programme is assessing how to develop the resources for DBEs to take a leading role in managing poor performance in church schools.
33. There are serial challenges to the national well-being of **Religious Education** in non-faith based schools. Pressure continues to be brought to bear on the Secretary of State to include RE in the English Baccalaureate. While the exclusion has had an immediate and depressing effect on option patterns nationally, our evidence suggests that church schools are maintaining a commitment to GCSE RE. The key to convincing Ministers that RE should be included lies in offering a solution that would not jeopardise their objective of increasing the take-up of History and Geography.
34. There are implications for the future of RE nationally in the current revision of the National Curriculum. RE is not currently part of the National Curriculum, so is not included, but the fear among the RE and faith communities is that it will lose status and among teachers if no attention is paid to it.
35. In addition Local Authorities will have clear difficulty in funding SACREs and Agreed Syllabus conferences in the future. There is a good case for looking again how consistency and quality of Agreed Syllabuses can be assured and resourced.
36. Standards in RE are not healthy. In particular the teaching and learning about Christianity is generally not well done. The Church of England should not be overly complacent about the quality of teaching about Christianity in its own schools. Syllabuses generally do not give enough help to teachers now entering the profession who lack even a default understanding of Christianity. While DBEs still provide in-service support for teachers the mountain is very large and progress is slow.

37. The National Society is in discussions about the possibility of a substantial project funded by a private donor to create a new resource for Church of England schools for the teaching of Christianity. Any resource designed to be used in the wide variety of Church of England schools would transfer well into community schools, and could significantly affect how Christianity was understood across the country.

A future for church schools?

38. The National Society and Board of Education, recognising the extent and depth of the changes facing the church school system today, believe that there is a need for an external review of the current situation to articulate and authenticate the direction of travel.

39. There has been widespread support for their responses to recent changes and the policy initiatives that they have necessitated. But very short notice has been given for many of these as the government agenda has been driven through Parliament. This is not the best way to build for the future.

40. The National Society Council has agreed in general terms to a short term Review of current issues for the Church schools system. This will undertake a sharply focussed consideration of the issues bringing together the views of those most solely concerned with resourcing and supporting Church schools. Under the leadership of a suitably connected and qualified person it will take evidence and present a written Report, with recommendations, to guide the work of the Board / National Society for the next period.

41. In view of the pace of change it is essential that the Report is completed by Christmas 2011, if not before. That would then provide the basis for the regular reporting to Synod and other bodies.

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