

## *Anglican Schooling*

### **A St George's House Consultation**

9 - 10 March 2015

#### **Background**

St George's House, Windsor hosts some 60 residential consultations each year embracing a wide range of social, ethical and theological strands. This was the first on the area of Anglican schooling and was chaired by Bishop David Thomson.

#### **Key Purposes:**

1. To enable participants to deepen their understanding of the role of each organisation and to identify common issues and practical priorities to enhance :- a) The flourishing of Church schools and b) Their distinctive contribution to the mission of the Church of England.
2. To explore scope for increased joined-up thinking between organisations and to identify ways to develop the most effective use of resources to support the identified priorities.
3. To advance sustained theological reflection on Anglican schooling in order to :- a) Promote the flourishing of the Church school movement b) Enrich the Church's understanding of its mission in the community and the central part its schools play in that mission.

#### **Summary Report**

##### **The purpose of the consultation**

The Church of England has a unique privilege and heavy responsibility because of its role as the State Church and given its significant presence in education through its schools and universities. Inspired by a Christian vision of what it means to be a human being in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century England, it seeks to contribute to the flourishing of all whom it serves, irrespective of their own faith. The purpose of the Windsor consultation was to bring together a group of people all of whom were committed to this mission, but who had different ideas as to how this might be expressed in practice. This event was designed to facilitate the sharing of their passions and priorities and to employ a process from which it was hoped a shared vision and way forward would emerge.

##### **The consultation process**

Chaired and facilitated by + David Thomson, 22 invited participants worked throughout the consultation in small groups, feeding into plenary sessions. Participants included those who resource thinking about Anglican education, diocesan education officers, headteachers and leaders from Anglican schools (state and independent sectors) including teaching schools, theologians, leaders from Anglican HEIs, and representatives from related trust funds.

An initial invitation to share passions and priorities related to Anglican schooling revealed a shared sense of urgency to transform a disparate network into a purposeful movement.

This was further informed by input from Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, about the emerging vision and planning for a national 'Institute', which, it was agreed, could play a significant part in any future movement. The lack both of existing, relevant theological thinking and of an academic literature in relation to Anglican schooling were identified as fundamental issues needing to be addressed. Participants welcomed the establishment of the new theology group to underpin the 'Institute', chaired by Professor David Ford. They also recognised the diversity of contributions which are already being made, but noted that, in this respect, the Church HEIs are an untapped resource.

Participants recognised the challenge of offering a distinctive Christian education in a plural society. They suggested that, in such a context, the existence of church schools poses challenging questions for the Church about their role and about the provision of the necessary resources for their work to be developed, secured and sustained into the future. Whether this is an addition to, or fits within, the Archbishop of Canterbury's three key priorities of prayer, reconciliation and evangelism, was a question raised.

There was an agreed perception that this is a key moment in Anglican schooling's historical narrative, indeed for religion in the public square. Participants were therefore encouraged to think afresh about reframing and reconceptualising identified possibilities and aspirations.

**The consultation participants subsequently prioritised and worked on four major themes:**

### **1. Communicating the vision**

In relation to the development of a vision for an Anglican schooling movement, with an intellectual and theological foundation, participants recognised the need for key messages to be identified, clarified and articulated in forms which could be transmitted to diverse audiences. Messages relating to learning, wisdom, beliefs, virtues, character and the curriculum, centring on the formation of both pupils and staff, were all discussed.

Detailed work is essential to identify the audiences to which the vision will be communicated, and the form which that will take. The new national 'Institute' is likely to be the main communications platform, relating directly to a teachers' / leaders' network in schools. From there, as exemplars become available to reify the messages, a grassroots movement using social media, blogs etc. would hopefully grow as teachers become enthused and embrace the vision. The Education Division will need to work closely with the Ministry Division of the Church of England to establish and ensure communication with clergy. Communicating beyond church schools and churches was not discussed, but is recognised as crucial for the future of the movement.

### **2. Developing people**

Developing people is directly linked to developing a vocation to be involved in Anglican schools, whether laity or clergy. This could range from the local situation to the national. It will include pupils, teachers, leaders, headteachers, systems leaders, teacher trainers or mentors in a teaching school, governors, chairs of

governors, church members, parish clergy, chaplains, diocesan education staff, other diocesan staff, archdeacons and bishops.

A 'spiral curriculum' was described with modules relating to purpose, mission, beliefs, pedagogy etc which could be centrally developed and locally delivered. The national 'Institute' would have a central role in this.

Participants believed that developing people starts with **recruitment**, working with young people in schools and churches, and adult church members, transmitting the concept of a professional vocation and vision and enthusiasm for involvement in Anglican schooling. For teachers in training, whether at Anglican teaching schools, SCITTS or in HEIs, for newly qualified teachers in Anglican schools and for governors, there needs to be opportunity for **formation**, both through particular modules within courses and through special opportunities and events.

Opportunities through CPD for **nurturing growth** must follow, and also be available to existing teachers, middle and senior leaders. Similar opportunities for continuing replenishment and nurture should be available for systems leaders, chaplains and governors.

Envisioning clergy with the concept of church schools as an integral part of the Church's mission will require involvement in initial training for clergy, together with ongoing developmental training. Once clergy catch this vision for mission, they in turn will inspire and support their church members to be involved in Anglican schools in a variety of capacities.

### 3. **Opportunities and resources**

It was felt that the opportunities lie in the networks that already exist; the job to be done is to 'join all the dots'. The Church itself may not necessarily be the first port of call; secular networks may be the way forward. Our modus operandi should be one of seeking to contribute to the flourishing of all not of securing influence for a lobby position. It is important to stimulate grassroots actions and to facilitate networks that are already there like AASSH, and not just rely on centralised initiatives. The process experienced by the participants in this consultation needs repeating with practitioners. In this, timing and coordination will be very important, as will cooperation between agencies, particularly the dioceses and the free schools. In relation to free schools, research to enable the development of targeted bids based on sound demographic data will be needed so that properly coordinated and resourced bids can be developed.

### 4. **Theology and pedagogy**

This group wanted to emphasise that theology in the Church school should be regarded as part of the everyday conversation of school life and not as a specialist activity for particular people on sharply demarcated occasions. Indeed it should be an activity of every Christian teacher. An appealing idea was that pedagogy could be tied to theology through the notion that schools are places where wisdom develops. James KA Smith's notion that theology is essentially about what we desire and not what we think was also thought to capture something important.

Within the group an example of current theological work on John's Gospel as drama was shared by David Ford. The group discussed how it could support teachers in doing daring theologically improvising work following Jesus' injunction 'to do as I have done'. Similarly Andrew Wright talked about the critical realism project at Kings College, London and Tatiana Wilson about the work that she had done on theology for leadership for the National Society.

It was suggested that John Hull's work on Christian learning was worth re-visiting in thinking about why people struggle with thinking theologically in educational contexts. The counter-cultural nature of the activity of doing theology in education should not be under-estimated. David Ford pointed out that Job's friends did theology in an 'indicative and imperative' manner. This was not the model to follow, although it probably concurs with many teachers perceptions of theology! Rather we should aim for clarity of language which draws all into the act of doing conversational theology as part of their professional work.

## **Conclusion: The Way Forward**

The suggestions can be grouped in three categories.

### **a) Building the movement**

In building a movement, creating what was termed the 'John Lewis mentality' was thought to be central. A foundation stone of this will be developing a clear sense amongst the many stakeholders in Anglican schooling, of what it means to be a partner, having an investment in a shared identity and owning the mission. This will entail working closely with existing networks and encouraging collaborative and cross-network working, rather than setting up what is perceived as a new and independent initiative being imposed from the outside. At the same time it is important not to let existing structures limit the thinking; out-of-the box creativity is required. Certainly it will be important to identify and build strategic alliances. Our aim should be both to light new fires and fan existing ones in the cause of God's work in education.

The primary task is to develop a compelling message and to tell stories that capture people's imagination for that message. The focus of that message should be the formation of young people inspired and equipped for the task of the wise transformation of the world.

### **b) Changing the conversations**

Central to the task of building a movement is changing the nature of the conversations that people have about schooling. Two key elements of the required reframing would be putting excellence in learning at the centre of the conversation and encouraging theological reflection on that. At present it tends to be achievement talked about in positivist secular ways that holds people's attention. The development of the current values discourse into a virtues discourse, which values character development and is framed by the Christian Story, is probably very important. This new conversation will need to model the way in which the Christian faith is a significant resource for education so as to counter the current perception that anything religious is a potential threat.

### **c) Strategy and resources**

Finally there needs to be careful thought given to how these aspirations translate into a strategy that uses the opportunities and meets the challenges of the current context. Offering inspirational examples and case studies was thought to be very important in this, as was harnessing the potential of social media. Identifying gaps where the Church could provide inspirational schools of excellence was suggested as one potentially important strategy.

Trevor Cooling/ Alison Farnell, March 2015

### **Consultation Participants:**

- Helena Arnold, Director of Education, Diocese of Gloucester
- Joy Carter, Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester
- Bridget Cass, Executive Officer, The Jerusalem Trust
- Priscilla Chadwick, Chair, Association of Church College Trusts
- Trevor Cooling, Director, National Institute for Christian Education Research
- Tim Elbourne, Director of Education, Diocese of Chelmsford
- Alison Farnell, Convener, Grove Education Series
- David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge
- Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer, Church of England
- Elisabeth Gilpin, Headteacher, St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School, Bristol
- Malcolm Green, Executive Officer, Keswick Hall Trust
- Derek Humphrey, Secretary, Hockerill Trust
- Catherine Nancekievill, Director, Church Schools of Cambridge Trust
- Martin Seeley, Principal of Westcott House, Bishop designate of St Eds and Ips
- John Shortt, Professorial Fellow in Christian Education and Theology Liverpool Hope University
- Mike Simmonds, Education Consultant
- David Thomson, Vice Chair, National Society Bishop of Huntingdon Acting Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich
- Jeff Williams, Director of Education, Dioceses of Portsmouth and Winchester
- Tatiana Wilson, Education Officer, Diocese of Exeter
- Andy Wolfe, Vice Principal, The Nottingham Emmanuel School

- Andrew Wright, Professor of Religious and Theological Education, King's College, London.
- Chris Wright, Director of Education, Woodard Foundation

### **Consultation Background Paper**

The 'Dearing Era', the decade following publication of *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium* in 2001 brought in its wake a renewal of confidence in the value of Church schools. In establishing this review, the General Synod had affirmed Church schools to be 'at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'. The report commended the notion that Church schools should be 'distinctive and 'inclusive' and live by as well as teach 'Christian values'.

New denominational inspection frameworks and a website, <http://www.christianvalues4schools.org.uk/> were developed in the light of this. The report had commended increasing where possible total school provision, especially in the secondary sector. Thus, new Church schools were established some of them among the first wave of academies. Dearing had stressed also the importance of good leadership and teacher formation and a number of initiatives attempted to address that challenge. The period has been described as 'an exciting time for Church schools. In many respects the Church re-discovered its schools' (Elbourne, 2013, p. 239).

A decade later, the National Society initiated a new review and the Chadwick report was published in 2012 (Church of England, 2012). A main thrust of the report was to focus attention on the need to organise and develop, especially in dioceses, systems better to address the challenges created by the government's reforms since 2010. These included the radical extension of the academy programme, changes to the role and resources of Local Authorities and sharper emphasis on 'standards'. This time there was a funded follow-up process that enabled the production of a number of additional documents in the light of the main report. They included resources for local reviews of Diocesan Boards of Education (Church of England, 2013), and to support Rural Schools (Church of England, 2014). The Christianity Project has been commissioned with the intention of improving the quality of subject teaching of Christianity. External funding has enabled a number of additional projects such as to resource the training of school governors and address the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils.

Whilst the National Society is able to co-ordinate such efforts and influence those of Diocesan Boards of Education, it does not have a remit to directly co-ordinate the projects and initiatives of others or to dictate agendas. The Church of England is not a centrally managed organisation and its educational provision reflects this. Church of England schools, universities, charities and trusts work hard to advance projects but often work independently of each other. Also, there are many organisations committed to advancing 'Christian education'.

Many have Anglican roots but they are not denominational bodies. The English and Welsh maintained schools systems have evolved in particular ways resulting in very particular partnerships between Church and State. For many decades ours was described as a 'dual system' – voluntary and state schools side by side within a single overarching settlement largely shaped by the 1944 Education Act. Recent reforms, notably the proliferation of academies and academy groups and chains have introduced new levels of diversity, radically altering that landscape. Nevertheless, the fundamental principle abides; that our maintained system includes a very significant proportion of voluntary schools with a designated religious character.

Serving about one million pupils, the Church of England's maintained schools represent the single largest point of direct and structural collaboration between the Church and State. This brings considerable challenges as well as opportunities. To maintain our 'place at the table', the Church, like other providers has to adapt quickly to changes in government policies and programmes and is judged on its successes and outcomes in public assessments. In one sense it has considerable resources with which to do this; its diocesan teams, its network of universities, its 22,500 directly appointed foundation governors, its charities and trusts and, of course, its 4,700 schools themselves.

However, it remains a key challenge how best to harness this capacity, not just to meet expectations imposed upon it, but to influence and shape policy across the system of which it is such a significant part. It is hoped that this Consultation will assist this process and contribute to an important initiative the National Society is taking in 2015, described below.

The Church's place and freedom in the publicly funded schools system is not uncontested. Secularist campaigners have become increasingly strident and organised over the last fifteen years. It is inevitable that a Church operating in the public domain, using public funds and engaged in formational educational activity with children and young people will attract significant attention from those committed to its relegation to the private domain and to attacking its tenets. Whilst there is little evidence that secularisers yet enjoy overwhelming popular support in their campaigning against 'faith' schools, it is important that the public square is not left to them and that Christian apologetic and the Church's vision in continuing its educational involvement is effectively understood and communicated. The current climate of anxiety over 'extremism' and upholding 'British values' makes this especially crucial.

Schools are under increasing pressure as pupils find themselves negotiating complex local and global issues simultaneously, and the system provides precious little resource to equip them for this journey. If we are to offer a meaningful framework on which schools and students can build a response, it is important that the Church of England's education system regains a confidence about its vision and purpose.

Perhaps the Church's collective presence in education and school provision is most aptly described as constituting a purposeful 'movement' than a tightly co-ordinated organisation. It operates as a network of institutions and groups working toward its objective rather than as a single functional structure with local delivery units. Nevertheless, to be as effective as possible, there is an enduring need for the movement as a whole to reflect constantly on its purposes and priorities and to be purposeful in marshalling its collective resources towards such priorities. 'No movement remains static, certainly if it is alive and effective in engaging with the society in which it operates' (Worsley 2013 p.255).

This implies that activity is underpinned by continuous theological reflection around the nature, purpose and what constitutes effectiveness in Anglican schooling. If Church schools are 'part of what the Church is rather than just one of the activities the church does' (Elbourne 2009, p.27), it will prioritise ongoing reflection on schools' missiological purpose. It has been suggested that Church school ministry (in the sense of the whole lived out servanthood of Church schools) is an exercise in contextual theology intended both to 'bring persons into an encounter with God in a manner that is open, honest and respects their freedom' and that this 'cannot be separated from the pursuit of the common good' (Wright, 2013 p.198). This aligns the work of Church schools closely to three of the Quinquennial Goals of the Archbishop of Canterbury: of growing the church; contributing to the common good; and re-imagining ministry (Welby, 2013).

Schools express and live out formational narratives through their common lives and through what is taught and the ways the curriculum is shaped and taught. The vocation of Church schools is to align all those narratives with the Gospel rather than simply 'dropping Christian ideas into the machine' (Smith, 2009). A Church school's 'distinctiveness' is concerned not with emphasising its difference from other schools, but in cultivating dynamic practice that is rooted in Christian identity. 'We need to combine good strong roots, a robust sense of church and school alike as Christian or "in Christ", with a very open door, always inviting but never forcing, leaving room for questioning, doubt, disagreement, journeying and just looking.' (Thomson, 2014)

Theological reflection on Anglican schooling is crucial to the enrichment of schools themselves and for the vocational development of those who work in them; their leaders, teachers, governors and others. But such reflection has much to teach the Church itself about God's mission in the community. The Church of England's mass school movement had its genesis in the formation of the National Society (for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church) in 1811 and celebrated its bi-centenary in 2011.

Among the events to mark that anniversary were two events organised by individuals through external sponsorship; The 'Watson Symposium' that resulted in publication of Anglican Church School Education (Worsley, 2013) and a pioneering international consultation on Anglican schooling in London and Cambridge which drew delegates from around the world. From these events it was hoped that in time longer term networks might be established, perhaps within the structures of the Anglican Communion itself, to sustain and invigorate theological reflection on the multi-faceted subject of Anglican schooling. It is intended that this Consultation will draw on the perspectives and experiences of its participants in a reflective process for mutual benefit, but that ways of furthering that vision might be explored too.

Dramatic changes to the education landscape have resulted in greater flexibility over structures, an encouragement for diversity and imagination, the devolution of teacher training systems and a renewed emphasis on governance. These are all areas where the Church should come forward with positive ideas and make a significant contribution.

However, many headteachers around the country are frustrated. They have a clear sense of the distinctive kind of education they wish to offer – providing rigorous academic foundations and preparing young people for a world of work, whilst exploring their identity as human beings and enabling them to flourish and build relationships that improve society. The problem headteachers articulate is that, even with all the changes our schools have little control over how teachers are trained. They have to take what they're given, or get more involved in running school-based training courses like School Direct, but that is not easy for a small rural primary school. In essence, the Church can be proud of a prophetic vision for education, but currently has little power to do anything about it across all its schools. Diocesan leaders and church appointed foundation governors report that they find it difficult to recruit school leaders who share a vision for education which goes beyond the latest Ofsted framework or DfE initiative.

The way forward the National Society is currently developing to face the challenge is simple but ambitious. It aims to build the Church's capacity with a Church of England Institute of Teaching and Educational Leadership.

This will draw together the huge network of schools, dioceses, universities and parishes in a way that enables the movement to articulate more clearly the Church's vision for education. It intends to provide the means to recruit, train, nurture and develop the

human talent responsible for achieving the vision and will be rooted in research that develops a complementary pedagogical approach.

35% of all primary teacher-training places are, in one form or another, currently within the Church of England's network. Therefore it should be expecting to have a significant impact on how teachers are trained in this country.

The aim of the proposed Institute is to offer a way of bringing 4,700 schools, 11 Anglican foundation universities, 66 Church of England teaching schools and 41 dioceses together to provide a means of turning the Church's stake in education into a dynamic movement that will train and resource teachers, leaders and governors for schools within the context of a transforming vision for our society.

The National Society has embarked upon a 'big conversation' across the Church about vision for the common good, achieved through its mission in education, and is actively developing the proposal intended to offer long-term resilience for the Church's work in this all important area.

This Consultation is will be, in part, a contribution to that 'big conversation'.

Tim Elbourne/Nigel Genders

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