



**York Diocesan Board of Education
York St John University**



**Parishes and Schools Survey
Action Plan**

The DBE has become increasingly aware that the rapidly changing nature of parochial ministry, including the growing number of parishes within a single benefice, means that incumbents in the Diocese are finding it difficult to maintain their traditional ministry to schools. Anecdotal evidence from CE schools also suggests that the mounting pressures on both schools and clergy are leading, in some cases, to difficulties in sustaining the particularly crucial relationship between CE schools and their parishes in a meaningful way, notably during periods of interregnum. There has been an increase in the number of Foundation Governor places being filled from other denominations, but only patchy evidence about the extent to which other 'gaps' are also being plugged in this way. Everything seems to point to the need for action, but the DBE needed a much fuller picture of how church-school relationships are working out across the widely differing contexts of the Diocese to inform its mission and help it to be an effective resource to all those working to support Christian education.

York St John University was therefore commissioned to work with diocesan officers to conduct a wide-ranging survey of parishes and schools. Some background information as to how this was carried out is attached in appendix A. It is important to note that clergy and churchgoers were asked about their involvement with ALL schools (not just CE schools); however, as far as Heads and Governors were concerned, only those in CE schools could be approached. This has inevitably led to more data being available on the relationship between parishes and CE schools, but it is clear that many of the issues which have arisen apply more generally.

There is much to celebrate in the report. Relationships between schools and their parishes are generally very positive, with nearly 40% of CE schools seeing their incumbent weekly for Collective Worship, and around a third hosting worship for the parish a few times a year. Schools also have very healthy relationships with our Methodist colleagues, who are by far the biggest contributor from other denominations. It is apparent that clergy give a lot of time to their schools ministry, with around one in ten spending more than six hours a week in schools, including significant commitment to and engagement with community schools. However, it is also apparent that in school-church relationships, too much currently depends on the incumbent and that clergy do not feel adequately supported in this area of their ministry.

The need to equip clergy and lay people to take up a new sort of ministry in schools has never been more pressing. Last year's Chadwick report, *The Church School of the Future*, highlighted the need for improved training for clergy in schools ministry and for work to be done on the sustainability of small rural schools. Both of these are important in the York context. Morale in schools generally is shaky in this time of unprecedented change, with ever higher expectations of teacher and pupil performance matched by ever more rigorous – and frequent – inspection. An 'academy solution' will be a positive move for some, but an alarming threat for others, and recruiting Governors willing to take on these extra burdens is no easy task - often in the very areas where they are most needed. If we are serious about our desire to see "*each church and school community seeking to be at the heart of what God is doing in each parish and deanery that they serve*" (Generous Churches Making & Nurturing Disciples), then we must surely respond to need on the ground as we find it.

The following Action Plan identifies key issues from the survey and suggests some ways in which we might, as a Diocese, begin to respond to the challenges.

Appendix A - Rationale

After several weeks of discussion between the DBE and YSJ University, it was decided that four different groups needed to be canvassed, each with their own particular questionnaire. Headteachers and Governors of CE and CE-affiliated schools, plus incumbents and churchgoers (mainly on PCCs) were asked to complete a survey, either on paper or online, which aimed to gain factual information about who in parishes interacts with schools, how often and in what contexts, including during interregnum periods. Other questions were designed to provide an indication of prevailing attitudes and perceptions about the involvement of the Church in Education today. This was a complex task, and it took several months to develop four different questionnaires that could gather the necessary information without being too long or complicated. The survey was structured for respondents to tick a series of boxes rather than having to write a lot of open answers. This not only speeds up the time it takes to fill-in questionnaires, but also speeds the analysis and ensures that respondents answered the sorts of questions to which we wanted answers. The downside is that some people find this format rather restricting, so all questionnaires had a blank section at the end in which people could raise anything they wished.

Questionnaires were sent out from April 2012, with responses continuing to arrive until the end of September. The majority (for all groups) completed paper rather than on-line versions, probably because the main way of distributing the governor's and churchgoer's versions was at governing body or PCC meetings, where time was allowed for everyone to fill in a questionnaire and they were then returned in a batch. This greatly improves return rates compared with sending people away with them to fill in later.

Resourcing

This study was partly funded by a 'Students as Researchers' grant awarded by YSJ University to Michael Batt, reporting to Andrew Village, Reader in Practical and Empirical Theology. This covered the costs of sending out questionnaires (but not postage) and the coding of the bulk of the returns. Other costs, including the principal investigator's time, were met by YSJ University.

The Sampling

	Sent out	Received	Return rate
Heads (of CE/affiliated schools)	129	59	46%
Incumbents¹	224 (i.e. all benefices)	101 (54 with one or more CE schools)	45%
Governors	c. 2000 (1 – 13 per school)	359 (from 74 schools)	*
Churchgoers	c. 2800 (in 129 parishes with CE schools, plus 60 others)	612 (from 93+ parishes)	*

* Return rates for these two groups are difficult to estimate because it is not certain how many were actually distributed, and the actual size of the sampling base.

¹ For simplicity, the term 'incumbent' is used to cover incumbents and priests-in-charge. Where there were vacancies, assistants / wardens were asked to complete the questionnaire to the best of their knowledge.

Challenges identified in the York St John Survey	Evidence (page refs are to York St John draft report)	Action
<p>1. Lack of contact between school and incumbent</p>	<p>Response from Incumbents and Parishes: 22% with Church schools say they lead worship no more than once a year 18% say they never lead worship and never just ‘drop in’ to school. (p. 20) In Community schools the amount of contact is less, particularly in the secondary phase.</p> <p>Response from Church Schools: 9% of Church school Heads say the incumbent leads worship no more than once a year (p.4)</p> <p>Notes and comments from the draft report: “There was a strong relationship between visiting for Worship and for other reasons in all categories. So it is not the case that incumbents may visit a lot but not to take Worship” (p.5)</p> <p>It is not clear how strictly Heads will have interpreted the term ‘incumbent’ – they may for example have included worship led by a curate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with Bishops and Archdeacons around the outcomes of the Survey and our action plan to seek their support for it. • Explore with Bishops and Archdeacons how engagement with schools is covered in ministerial reviews and visitations and how the DBE might better support clergy. • Liaison with Training Team re events for clergy on SIAMS, sharing good practice on engagement with schools and models that work for clergy • Sharing good practice event to include examples of how to support Church and Community schools in a multi-parish benefice • VT to follow up where schools/clergy asked to discuss a specific situation
<p>2. School/parish relationship is too heavily dependent on the incumbent and therefore deteriorates during an interregnum. <i>Note: There are particular implications for Church schools in light of expectations under the new SIAMS framework.</i></p>	<p>Response from Incumbents and Parishes: Most incumbents feel they are the only ones working with Church schools day to day, though there may be laity attending special occasions or serving as Governors. (p.22) A very high percentage of churchgoers said they never volunteer in schools (p.30). Although an overwhelming majority of clergy welcome the idea of laity taking a leading role in school ministry, most also feel that it is hard to get lay volunteers for schools (p.24)</p> <p>Response from Church Schools: Only a small sample of Heads could compare situation with and without an incumbent. Evidence suggests that the gap left by incumbent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing good practice event to include examples of how to encourage lay involvement • Provide additional support and training for PCCs on the role and appointment of Foundation Governors and interregnum issues • Produce complementary guidance documents for parishes on working with their school (Church or Community) and for Church schools on working with their parish.

	absence is not filled by others (p. 5) There were also significantly fewer visits from school to church during a vacancy for both teaching and worship (p. 7)	
3. Reluctance to take on Foundation Governor roles, both among incumbents and churchgoers	Response from Incumbents and Parishes: Nearly 40% of incumbents would prefer not to be governors (p.26) Only 11% of churchgoers indicated that they might volunteer for this role (p. 32)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address in part through sharing good practice event • DBE to review how it communicates its mission in education and its message about governance as a ministry to and through schools
4. Negative response from schools to clergy engagement	Response from Church Schools: Over 30% said that clergy were not sufficiently child-friendly, and that children did not respond well to clergy input (p. 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address in part through trainings already planned (eg Fit for Post; 'Solid Rock, Shifting Sands' training in May) and further through sharing good practice event • Discuss implications for training with the Training Team
5. Clergy do not feel well supported by the Diocese to work in schools.	Response from Incumbents and Parishes: 25% said they did not feel well supported, another 36% were not sure (p.26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBE to review its strategy for supporting clergy, the opportunities for engaging with clergy training, and the resource implications • DBE to review how it communicates its mission in education and publicises the support it currently provides