Kevin Quigley M.Ed., M.Sc. is an educational consultant whose involvement in Catholic Education at Primary Secondary and Further Education levels extends over thirty four years.

He has been Head teacher of a large Catholic Comprehensive School, Principal of a Catholic VI form College and is currently a foundation governor of his local Catholic Primary school, a director of NECET (Networking Catholic Education Trust) and until recently was a trustee of The Stapleford Centre.

Kevin’s brief for the day was to explore Christian perspectives and approaches to school improvement.

**Session One**

Deepening Faith: Enriching Education -

A Small Scale Study into the Impact of the New Relationship with Schools Initiative on Catholic Schools in England.

**The Purposes of the study**

To gain insights into:

How the government’s initiative - A New Relationship with Schools-was impacting on Catholic Schools during the academic year 2006 / 2007.

How the Catholic Church helps and supports Catholic schools to gear up for / respond to public policy.

**Research Questions & Focus**

To assess awareness of / explore, the perceived impact / importance of the NRwS Initiative and the introduction of SIPs with the CES, diocesan representatives, school leaders in Catholic schools and other interested parties

To investigate the current capacity of dioceses, religious trustees and Catholic secondary schools to engage in the NRwS Initiative through the new Ofsted Inspection regime and the School Improvement Partnership (SIP) whilst at the same time preserving and strengthening ethos, distinctiveness and leadership

To examine the impact of the new Ofsted regime on Section 48 inspections, the frequency, influence and place of the latter in the triennial cycle of Ofsted inspections

To collect Head teachers' perceptions of the support and opportunities that the NRwS offers Catholic schools in their quest to maintain their distinctiveness, mission and ethos

To develop appropriate recommendations, consultancy processes and materials to support the mission of Catholic schools within the framework of the new Initiative

To trial and test these consultancy processes and materials with a significant number of Catholic schools

**Opening comments**

Faith schools constantly struggle to balance the demands of government and culture, to reconcile secular and faith-based values.

Religious Schools are caught in that dilemma of rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's yet staying true to their values.

The development of ‘The New Relationship with Schools’ brought with it a number of perceived challenges to faith schools. These were highlighted as follows;

1. **Appointment of SIPs**

The Government’s position:

‘A school has the right to be consulted over the choice of SIP and many choose to request a SIP sympathetic to the school’s faith affiliation. But the final decision on SIP allocation is for the school’s maintaining authority. It is a key expectation of SIPs that they should be able to respond to the ethos and context of schools of any type.’
Challenges were identified as follows:

The government position of the final decision on appointing SIPS not being with the school is surprising, given the fact that one third of schools are faith schools.

Appointment processes differed widely across different Local Authorities:

Some LAs are very supportive of appointing RC SIPS to RC schools, but find that there are not enough RC SIPS available.

The best case scenario is that the LA is supportive and the SIP is a serving or retired RC head. However, this is not always ideal for every school.

The worst case scenario could include an LA that is unsympathetic, LA advisers who are appointed as SIPs (and thus distrusted by heads), a shortage of RC SIPS, or a SIP who has less leadership experience than the head.

Why does it matter that the SIP is Catholic?

Catholic SIPS are potentially better informed and equipped to challenge schools on:

- The way they interpret and deliver their Catholic mission
- The way they incorporate this mission into, for example, training for their staff and governors
- The way they live their mission in respect of their school population and their wider community

Questions, comments, remarks from delegates

In response to Kevin’s initial comments a number of points were raised by delegates.

It can be difficult for dioceses with many LAs to deal with to help the selection of RC SIPS for their schools.

Do we, the faith community, take our schools seriously enough? How much structure, rationale, support and guidance are we willing to give?

Another issue raised was the question of whether the fact that SIPS identify themselves as members of a faith community is enough to ensure they would have shared values with a faith school?

In other words, even if a SIP is RC, would that be enough to ensure that they understand the link between faith and education?

This problem may be compounded for CE schools, since many people identify themselves as being CE, without necessarily having a full understanding of what is involved in living the faith.

Although many Primary SIPS in local CE dioceses are former CE head teachers, they often do not seem to be fully aware of how being a SIP can integrate into the faith, ethos and vision of a school (even among SIPS who profess a personal faith). This is a big worry.

The question was asked whether any research on assessing the general effectiveness of the SIP programme had been conducted? Kevin said he hadn’t seen anything yet, but that the SIP programme was supposed to be reviewed by the end of 2008.

One point that was made was the difficulty that results from the word 'performance'. How is 'performance' interpreted? Standards? Management? What is it? What is measurable? Mission, ethos and spiritual growth cannot be quantified as easily as the standards agenda.

Related to this, Kevin pointed out the importance of giving head teachers confidence to look at Christian character, not just at standards. The mission of a church school is bigger than the standards agenda. It all comes down to two different approaches, mechanistic vs. holistic. Unfortunately, the connection between a holistic approach and standards is often not seen.
2. Self Evaluation Forms (school self evaluation form)

- Heads welcomed the introduction of the SEF
- It is considered to be a useful, ‘powerful’ tool and ‘excellent for school improvement’
- The process itself was informative and helped schools to reinforce and formalise best practice
- A number of schools now have introduced departmental SEFs to enable continuous improvement
- Completion of SEF was a shared experience for staff / governors especially in completing sections on ‘leadership’ and ‘standards’

However

- The SEF is time-consuming to complete and to keep up-to-date
- It is difficult to know where to pitch (essentially value) judgements, e.g. choosing to label aspects of a school’s performance in a particular area as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’
- Evaluating the Catholicity of a school was ‘bigger than the SEF’

3. Diocesan SEFs

- Overlaps exist between the two SEFs but heads said that Section 48 influences Section 5 of the DCSF SEF
- Repetition exists within the two forms, especially with regard to the sections on RE and ‘leadership’, but ...
- Heads accept that there is a need to be able to describe the distinctiveness of RC schools
- Most heads interviewed would prefer an integrated SEF. Designing a (common to all Catholic schools) combined SEF with an ‘Appendix’ to the main SEF would allow schools to add a statement on RE, chaplaincy and pastoral care etc at the end of the main SEF which would address the question ‘What makes this a good Catholic school?’

NIBRIA looked at the idea of developing an Integrated Ofsted / Section 48 SEF which could have been universally adopted by the English dioceses.

4. Performance Management Procedures

- Engender a more managerial approach towards the running of schools
- Require clear targets, staff roles and responsibilities
- Professional development of staff is linked to pay and conditions
- Middle managers and departmental heads must actively manage target setting and the professional development of their subordinate colleagues
- All staff must have individual development plans in place
- Teachers are entitled to have a minimum of 10% of curriculum time for lesson planning and preparation and are supported by non-teaching assistants
- Professional performance is now linked to pay thresholds adds a new element to relationships between classroom teachers and their line managers.

Challenges for RC schools

- Would RC schools be able to deliver their distinctive mission within the new arrangements?
- Would the new ‘built-in’ accountability in some way erode the goodwill which has existed in many schools, based on ad hoc arrangements and understandings
- Would this more mechanistic approach in turn erode the central ethos of such faith-based schools?

Issues Arising

Critics of the new system say that it raises issues of ‘fairness’ – requires ‘judgement calls’ (e.g. some staff to progress through thresholds / others may be held back).
There were some schools in our sample where the new arrangements were not yet running smoothly (2006-7).

Heads found it hard to break down the existing ‘cosy arrangements’ between teachers and their line managers. In one case union activity had hampered progress.

This was a more demanding issue for new heads to tackle than those with more experience.

Heads have had to carefully steer through changes, to ensure that staff and governors have sufficient information / appropriate INSET.

One Diocesan Secondary Heads Association had organised a mini conference.

‘It is important to link the CPD to the process and to train people who are going to do the delivery in line management.’

Governors are being drawn into the process through target setting for heads. In one school, a governor was ‘taking on responsibility for Performance Management and overseeing quality assurance.’

PMPs make ‘second class citizens’ of non-teaching staff who are excluded from the new arrangements (unless heads take steps to actively apply their school’s PMP system across the board, which some have).

New arrangements can marginalise heads from some decisions on pay, where negotiations on thresholds take place between staff and middle managers—possible budget implications in the longer term.

Some activity at diocesan level to help schools gear up for the new arrangements - heads felt that further guidance could be provided at national level to help schools cope with issues of PMPs & distinctiveness.

School Profile

DCSF claimed that the School Profile had been:

‘designed after extensive consultation with schools, local authorities, governors, parents and pupils’

But:

Our small sample of heads said that they found it:

‘awful’, ‘depressing’ ‘disgusting’ ‘bloody nonsense’ and ‘a disaster’.

Published too late in the school year to be of use, there are better ways of communicating with parents.

E.g. websites (now beginning to be used in a sophisticated way by schools), newsletters, parents’ evenings, ‘options’ evenings and events. Local press for messages to the wider community.

The school profile was particularly disliked by heads because:

‘It is pre-populated by the DfES [and] does not portray the school as it really is.’

It was unclear who the SP is really aimed at—Ofsted and parents ‘aren’t interested.’

Head teachers’ final thoughts

New arrangements were often considered to be too time consuming. Some lamented the fact that they were being ’locked into their offices’, i.e. they were being left with less time available for day to day contact with staff and pupils.

Is the ‘vocational’ aspect of the job being compromised through this?

There seems to be significant impact on workloads of senior and middle managers.

The procedures were often found to be ‘excluding’ - applying only to teaching and not to non-teaching staff.

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Workload and succession planning

Heads and diocesan officers feel the Church needs to actively plan succession by:

- Early identification of potential candidates. Providing encouragement so that they undertake appropriate professional development.
- Ensuring that there are no blockages to the advancement of individual groups of potential leaders, e.g. female applicants.
- Encouraging return of Catholic teachers who left the Catholic sector for promotion to move back into Catholic schools - ensure that they are not excluded from applying for senior posts.
- Dissemination of examples of good practice in terms of identifying and developing those with potential (possibly through diocesan offices).
- Ensuring that new heads in particular are provided with induction/support/mentoring, lasting for more than one year if necessary.
- Ensuring that experienced heads give out positive signals that ‘headship is demanding but satisfying’.
- Having a more flexible attitude towards the personal circumstances of potential applicants
- Ensuring parishes take an active role and send out positive messages to those interested in becoming leaders in Catholic schools.

Recommendations

SIPS

We recommend that:

- The RC community – at national and diocesan level – becomes proactive in providing conferences/workshops outlining issues for SIPS (particularly non RC SIPS) operating in Catholic schools.
- Dioceses should encourage serving and retired senior leaders from Catholic schools to become SIPS.
- There should be guidance for, and documentation given to, SIPS who are unfamiliar with the language of faith and with the distinctive nature of Catholic schools. E.g. heads could provide their SIPS with a copy of useful publications in an effort to give an insight into and a better understanding of Catholic education.
- The Catholic Church as a whole should consider challenging the idea that Catholic schools do not have a right to appoint a Catholic SIP given that a SIP is charged with ‘discuss[ing] a package of support and challenge for the school (provided both by the local authority (LA) and/or external sources) and ensur[ing] that this is appropriately managed to give the school maximum value.’
- The Catholic Church should consider approaching leaders of other faiths and making joint representations to government about the right to appoint a SIP who has a good understanding of the context of schools which are attempting to deliver a distinctive (faith-based) mission.
- The feasibility of constructing a database of SIPS who are either Catholics or who are qualified to judge school performance within the Catholic mission should be investigated. This should be done at national level.
- SIPs should voluntarily register with a database if they feel that they can operate in Catholic schools and if their current contract does not prevent them from doing so.

Performance Management

We recommend that:

- Training on the introduction of PMPs must be available to new heads.
- Up-dated national guidelines should be published to provide exemplars of PMPs for Catholic schools which explain how issues like ‘Ethos’, ‘Mission’, ‘Distinctiveness’ etc can be accommodated.
School Evaluation Forms

We recommend that:

Dioceses discuss the idea of designing a national Section 48 SEF template. This should be simple to use, map onto the DCSF SEF and should help schools demonstrate their Catholic Mission, Ethos and Distinctiveness alongside the demands of delivery of a modern day RE curriculum.

Dioceses co-operate more where this is practicable to enable better services to schools in terms of inspection and support.

Conclusions

This small scale study looked at policy into practice in respect of NRwS. It raised wider questions about:

How the Church does business with itself.

How easy / difficult is it for the Church to respond nationally to school policy?

How easy or difficult is it for the dioceses to act collectively for the benefit of their school communities.

How can these systems be improved?

Background reading:

'On the way to life' (CES 2005) – an attempt to analyse culture in respect to education, the Catholic church and postmodern culture.

A very good document addressing a difficult topic.

Donnell O' Leary, Begin with the Heart - An attempt to unpack the 'On the way to life' document.

'A New Relationship with Schools' (Ofsted / DfES 2004)