

Research Executive Summary

Diocesan Education Leaders' Programme

To what extent are Headteachers and School Leaders equipped and confident to lead as lay spiritual leaders within the Christian context of a Church of England school?

*Sam Johnson
Diocese of Blackburn*

*Tony Cook
Diocese of Bath & Wells*

*Yolanda Morley-McKay
Diocese of Leicester*

*Daniel Norris
Diocese of London*

*Mandy Christopher
Diocese of Salisbury*

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Introduction

The Church of England Vision for Education aspires for children and young people to have 'life in all its fullness', where education is:

*'the spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development of children and young people. A vision of human flourishing for all.'*¹

In order for this to be achieved there is a need for an increasing number of inspiring spiritual leaders in our schools and whilst it has been sometimes understood in the past that Church school headteachers were spiritual leaders, the impact of work in this area was not clear. The extent to which headteachers are prepared, trained, expected or required to fulfil this role is the subject of this research.

The research is both qualitative and quantitative and gathers opinions from Church School leaders across the country, across phases, and across types of school. It focuses on three things:

- the expectations and interpretation headteachers have of themselves as spiritual leaders
- the practical outpouring of the spiritual leadership of school leaders
- the training and ongoing support and development school leaders receive in their role as spiritual leaders.

Methodology

The key stages to the research were:

- A literature review exploring current thinking in this area
- Methodology:
 - 9 qualitative interviews with serving headteachers
 - Synthesis of key themes from these interviews to generate an online questionnaire
 - Online questionnaire completed by 183 school leaders
- Analysis of key findings from questionnaire
- Identification of potential next steps for developing headteachers as spiritual leaders.

Introductory Exploration of the Topic & Literature

We explored what wider educational literature says about the role of headteachers, in particular in church schools. As a result of our literature review, we decided that, at no point within the research, would any interviewee or respondent be given a definition of 'spiritual leadership'. The key themes that framed our enquiry were school leadership, school distinctiveness, spiritual leadership, moral leadership and faith & spirituality. The review included current and past publications from the Education office of the Church of England, CEFEL and the Department for Education.

¹ Church of England Vision for Education, (2016), London: Church of England, p2

To some extent, the review reflected the conclusion of Lucas and Spencer's 2019 paper reviewing evidence of Christian leadership in schools,

*' A preliminary analysis of Christian leadership in schools reveals a fragmented and diverse emerging field ... There is very little evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of Christian leadership in schools.'*²

Highlights of the Analysis of Questionnaire Data

- In only 27% of headteachers' interviews was spiritual leadership mentioned and only 23% of respondents then encountered the term during their induction. This means that potentially over 75% of headteachers are not inducted into their role as a spiritual leader of their school. Notably only 1.5% of respondents said that they had come across 'spiritual leadership' through their **school's** church and clergy links.
- It is encouraging that nearly three-quarters of the headteachers indicated that they had at least a good understanding of what spiritual leadership means in the school context. However, we have some caution around this as the question did not explore what that understanding was.
- 49% of headteachers do not feel prepared for their role as a spiritual leader, whilst 40% do feel prepared. It is notable that for many respondents who added further comment as to what prepared them, this was either personal faith or personal reflection.
- In responding to what supported their development as a spiritual leader, by far the highest answer was leading collective worship.
- 41% of headteachers have not taken the opportunity to explore their own personal spiritual development. For the 59% who do take the opportunity, only 2% of them report that that is supported by the clergy connected to their school.

Key Findings

- Appointment and induction processes are crucial in the understanding and development of headteacher spiritual leadership and these are currently not well developed
- The Church community and clergy are currently not making any significant contribution to the development of spiritual leadership of head teachers.
- Addressing this issue at the point of appointment at headship may be too late. Work with middle leaders and future heads is crucial.
- Opportunities for spiritual development of staff and headteachers is fundamental, because it is on this base that spiritual leadership is built.
- A shared understanding of spiritual leadership and/or spiritual leadership in a Christian model is needed to enable consistent training & development and conversation.

² Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2019) *Christian Leadership in Schools: An initial review of evidence and current practices. Summary Report*. London: Church of England, p1

- Not unexpectedly, we encountered a downward trend in positive responses as we moved from respondents encountering spiritual leadership, to having clarity around it, to having confidence in delivering it.

Recommendations

Recruitment and Induction

1. The development of specific resources for Governors to assist them during the recruitment process for new headteachers, setting out appropriate questions and enquiries with regards to the headteacher's role as a spiritual leader. Potentially, advisory support that enables Governors to explore the concept of spiritual leadership and their expectations during recruitment. This could be included in an online Governor Training Module covering all aspects of interviewing and the recruitment process, which can then be accessed at the appropriate time by Governing Boards.
2. The development of specific induction programmes and materials on being a spiritual leader within a Church of England school. This should include links to local clergy and the opportunity to establish recognised and acceptable relationship expectations between churches and schools. We also need to address the role and ability of the clergy to give ongoing advice and guidance in support and encouragement of the head as spiritual leader.
3. Standardised 'Greeting' and Introduction from the Church of England Education Office to headteacher applicants to be included in all Headteacher Recruitment Packs about what it means to be a head of a Church of England school – including the aspect of spiritual leadership.

Personal, Professional and Spiritual Development

4. The development of resources to support those who lead Diocesan training to construct and deliver training which highlights, explains and unpacks the headteacher's role as a spiritual leader.
5. Development of special resources on prayer, bible study and spiritual development for headteachers – to be relevant, timely, bespoke and to fit in with their lives.
6. Support middle and emerging leaders to engage with and understand the added dimensions of being a head in a Church of England school. Introducing them to the role of the head as a spiritual leader early in their career path could have significant benefits.
7. Capture and share examples of good practice from those heads that say they are well prepared in their role as Spiritual Leader (40%).

Church and School Partnerships

8. Work with wider diocesan teams to develop a shared understanding of headteachers as spiritual leaders. The development of guides and training for clergy on how to support the spiritual leadership of headteachers within their church school(s).
9. Developing ways to encourage churches who have school leaders in their church congregations to support and develop them in their roles as spiritual leaders. This is more significant than churches looking after the school leaders in their church school.

For the dioceses involved, this piece of research has already influenced our practice and is the beginning of a journey we want to take further with our school leaders. If you would like to work with us or discuss the report and research further, please do not hesitate to contact us:

- Sam Johnson (Blackburn)
- Tony Cook (Bath & Wells)
- Yolanda Morley-McKay (Leicester)
- Daniel Norris (London)
- Mandy Christopher (Salisbury)

Further information

For a copy of the full research report, please contact Jo Palmer, Operations Support Manager, at: jpalm@churchofengland.org

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Church House
Great Smith Street
SW1P 3AZ

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