Journal of Studies in Social Sciences
ISSN 2201-4624
Volume 9, Number 2, 2014, 159-195

Towards Academy Conversion: Challenges and Opportunities for Catholic Schools

Dr David Fincham and Dr John Lydon
School of Education, Theology and Leadership: St Mary's University, London

Abstract: The Academies Act 2010 made provision for all publicly-funded schools in England to become academies. In principle, schools would still be funded by the government but they would enjoy an increased degree of autonomy. In this respect, it is possible to draw parallels with the introduction of Grant-Maintained Schools (GMS) in the 1990s. As then, the prospect of converting to academy status has divided opinion amongst Catholic school leaders. In response to the government's initiative, though, and despite initial concerns, the Catholic Education Service (CES) has worked with the Department for Education (DfE) so that, providing their Bishop agrees that they do so, Catholic schools can apply for academy status. This paper draws on the findings of an investigation based on responses to a questionnaire survey of seventeen headteachers in Catholic primary and secondary schools across eight of the twenty-two dioceses in England and Wales. The intention of the investigation was to elicit their views about the prospect of Catholic schools applying for academy status.

Keywords: Leadership; Academies; Catholic Education.

Introduction

In this paper, the benefits and challenges to the Catholic educational community of the introduction of converter Academies (conversation from VA to Academy status), following the Academies Act 2010, will be discussed. In order to locate this development in a broadly historical context it will be necessary to outline the significance of the 1988 Education Reform Act in the context of choice and autonomy before discussing in detail the introduction of Academies and their implications for the leadership of Catholic schools.

The Education Reform Act 1988 – the promotion of choice and diversity

The Education Reform Act 1988 is widely regarded as the most important single piece of education legislation in England and Wales since the 'Butler' Education Act 1944. While a detailed analysis of this Act is beyond the scope of this article, in the context of the current expansion of the Academies programme the following innovations are particularly significant:

- Local Management of Schools (LMS) was introduced. This part of the Act allowed all schools to be taken out of the direct financial control of Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Financial control would be handed to the head teacher and governors of a school.
- Grant-maintained schools (GMS) were introduced. Primary and secondary schools could, under this provision, remove themselves fully from their respective Local Education Authorities and would be completely funded by central government.
- City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were introduced. This part of the Act allowed new more autonomous schools to be taken out of the direct financial control of Local Authorities. Financial control would be handed to the head teacher and governors of a school. There was also a requirement for partial private funding. 15 such schools only were eventually set up.

In a paper entitled *Education for All*, Richard Pring and Andrew Pollard suggest that the 1988 Act reflected an increasing control of central government over education manifested particularly in the introduction of a National Curriculum from ages 5 to 16 and enabling schools to opt out of local authority control. (Pollard and Pring 2011:52) The latter development was seen to be a significant catalyst for transformation by the government, reflected in a White Paper published four years after the promulgation of the 1988 Act:

> The Education Reform Act 1988 and Education (Schools) Act 1992 have set in train a transformation of our school system. They have created more choice and wider opportunities as a springboard to higher standards. Central to this has been the development of school autonomy both within schemes of local management and increasingly as Grant Maintained Schools outside local government.
>
> (HM Government; 1992: 19)

Commenting on this White Paper from a philosophical perspective Pring suggested that it:

> ...embodied both a philosophical view about the supremacy of individual choice and an empirical view about the improvement of standards through the exercise of choice in an open market of educational providers. Subsequently the belief has developed that diversity and 'consumer choice' would 'drive up standards', new sorts of schools would provide the diversity, the independent sector would be welcomed to manage state-funded schools, measures of success or failure would be published (and league tables created) to provide the evidence for rational choice.
>
> (Pring 2013: 160)

The interlinked concepts of autonomy and choice are significant in that the Education Reform Act inaugurated what could be described an enveloping managerialism with its emphasis on accountability, inspection and an accent on

market forces. While John Sullivan and Gerald Grace have written extensive critiques on the subject, neither formally provides a stipulative definition the concept. Both, rather, rely on an articulation of its various manifestations which Grace lists as budgeting control, public relations and marketing research, performance indicators and management of personnel. (Grace 1995: see also Sullivan (2000)

Rob Flynn (1999) provides something close to a stipulative definition in suggesting that managerialism embodies a number of different assumptions and values, which are assumed to be unproblematic and include:

> ...the idea of progress through greater economic productivity, technological innovation, worker compliance and managers' freedom to manage. It is a diffuse ideology which privileges commercial organisation and management practice and insists that these can (and must) be transplanted to public sector services.
>
> (Flynn 1999:18-36)

According to Grace, commodification is central to the concept of managerialism, an aspect which he locates in the ideology of the New Right which attacked what it regarded as the weaknesses of social democratic schooling, among them the lack of choice and diversity and proceeded to implement a series of reforms "to bring the discipline of market forces into the insulated and protected world of state schooling". (Grace; 1995: 39) In the context of the expansion of the Academies programme, the two most significant initiatives arising from the Education Reform Act were the introduction of LMS and Grant Maintained Schools.

Managers' Freedom to Manage – Local Management of Schools (LMS)

On 1st April 1990, schools in England and Wales assumed responsibility for the management and control of their financial expenditure. The 1988 Education

Reform Act had required LEAs to develop schemes for the allocation of funds to all secondary schools (and primary schools with more than 200 pupils) within their districts. Pam Edwards et al (1995) point out that budgetary devolution (alongside the introduction of a National Curriculum) was one of the major institutional solutions advocated by the Hillgate Group within the Conservative Party (referred to by Grace and others as the 'New Right') to widespread parental and political concerns with the quality and accountability of schools. In this context, devolved financial control and the importation of business methods to schools were accepted as necessary tools for education reform.

Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State at the time, insisted that the introduction of LMS was a devolutionary as opposed to a centralising mechanism:

> So far as financial delegation is concerned, the purpose of the legislation is to ensure that responsibility is shifted—not from local education authorities to the centre—but from local education authorities to the individual schools and colleges. It is thus a devolutionary not a centralizing measure.
>
> (quoted in Grace; 1995: 80)

The Education Reform Act demanded more evidence of planning in the form of forecasting of priorities, value for money and matching resources to the curriculum. LEAs were charged with adopting a formula to determine each school's share of the budget. The following constitutes Section 36 of the Act in respect of devolving budgetary control:

The governing body of any school which has a delegated budget—

> (a) shall be entitled, subject to any provision made by or under the scheme, to spend any sum made available to them in respect of the school's budget share for any financial year as they think fit for the purposes of the school; and
>
> (b) may delegate to the head teacher, to such extent as may be permitted by

> or under the scheme, their power under paragraph (a) above in relation to any part of that sum.
>
> (ERA 1988 – www.legislation.gov.uk)

The fact that 75% of the budget related to age weighted pupil numbers reflected the marketization principle articulated it previously. The *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) produced an in-depth guide to the ramifications of LMS, which ranged from staffing salaries through all supplementary educational provisions (textbooks, heating and lighting, etc.) to the internal maintenance of buildings and equipment. This constituted a paradigm shift in terms of transference of financial forecasting and planning from LEAs to schools. The advice given highlighted the need to focus particularly on teachers' salaries since these represented 75%+ of a school's budget. Gary Holmes, then Head of the Centre for Educational Management at Oxford Polytechnic and Rod Walker, the headteacher of Larkmead School Abingdon, suggested, in a prescient article in the context of current realities, that:

> …Go for the meat, don't spend valuable planning time on trivia. Talk about what is important – that is what affects the quality of children's learning. You need a staffing policy and plan. Project your needs over the next three years and think now about likely mismatches by the end of the transition period. …The school development plan is an essential document."
>
> (Holmes and Walker; 1990b: vii)

This series of articles in the TES was permeated by the notion of winners and losers. Holmes and Walker spoke of a spiral in which "heads become isolated, staff alienated and valuable energy is diverted from pupils' learning into survival strategies (Holmes and Walker 1990a: v), while Ted Wragg asserted that "the most spectacular effect of transferring staffing costs to schools is the creation of winners and losers." (Wragg; 1990: xvii)

While the political oratory was evocative of a devolutionary rather than a centralising imperative, several scholars suggest that the oratory was simply a chimera, masking an underlying centralising strategy. Geoff Whitty, former Director of the Institute of Education, for example, suggests that devolving budgetary control related to market obligations alongside regulatory strategies (such as the National Curriculum) focusing on state control:

> Conservative measures were designed to make the educational establishment more accountable to the market by devolving power to parents and schools, while others sought accountability through state regulation by central government departments and their agencies. These policies were designed to increase diversity and choice in the system……Even so, Conservative central governments had meanwhile increased their own powers in a number of significant ways [such as the introduction of the National Curriculum Council]
>
> (Whitty; 2000: 2)

Grace (1995: 80) goes further in suggesting that the political rhetoric was indeed a mask which shrouded the reality of control by the centre:

> "..the devolution of education management responsibility to each school site level does in practice empower the centre as no unitary body will exist (if the local state is emasculated) to act as a 'check and balance' against the power of the centre. In other words, under the appearances of surface devolution of educational responsibilities to governors and parents, the deep structure of central educational control is actually strengthened."

Two other scholars, Richard Johnson and Janet McKenzie, reinforce Grace's point. Johnson (1991) observes that "the effect of the erosion of LEA competence is to reduce local power overall as a counterbalance to the centre" while McKenzie (1993) has argued that British governments have "'actually increased their claims to knowledge and authority over the education system whilst promoting a theoretical and superficial movement towards consumer sovereignty."

Managers' Freedom to Manage – Grant Maintained Schools

In the context of the Academies programme, the introduction of Grant Maintained Schools is of greater relevance since, in respect of autonomy, funding and admissions, they had exactly the freedoms offered to schools in respect of conversion to Academy status. The introduction of grant-maintained schools was perhaps the most controversial proposal in the Education Reform Act 1988, and one which was justified primarily on the grounds that it would extend parental choice in education and involved the diminution of the powers of Local Education Authorities and the concomitant growth in the powers of parental forums and the direct influence of central government on schools.

Grace (1995:144) sums up the dilemma facing Catholic headteachers at that time:

> In essence the dilemma was, should they participate in a market culture for the material benefit of their schools and their pupils or should they remain loyal to their own personal and professional values at the risk of disadvantage for their schools? This dilemma of *professional community* versus *autonomous advantage*, which was one of the outcomes of a market for schooling, was compounded by government incentives to all schools to opt-out of the control of the local state into a more autonomous grant-maintained status.

Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act outlined the legal requirements for schools choosing to opt out of LEA control and become Grant Maintained. Section 79 is critical in that it relates to the devolving of maintenance grants, special purpose grants and capital grants to governing bodies:

> The payments the Secretary of State is required to make in pursuance of his duty to maintain a grant-maintained school are annual grants, special grants to the governing body of the school in respect of expenditure for the purposes of the school incurred or to be incurred by the governing .body in the financial year to which any such grant relates (to be known as maintenance grants).
>
> (ERA; 1988:79)

From the point of view of Catholic schools, the following table represents a comparison between Voluntary Aided and Grant Maintained Status:

Funding/Activity	**Voluntary Aided Schools (Delegated Budget)**	**Grant Maintained School**
Funding Level	LEA Formula	LEA Formula
Central Services	LEA provides	Governors
Capital Projects	DFE funds 85% of cost according to national	DFE funds 100% of cost according to national
Staffing	Governors decide	Governors decide
Appointments	Governors decide	Governors decide
Accountability	Governors/LEA/Secretary of State	Governors/Secretary of State

The principal differences in respect of GMS focus on the provision of central services, the funding of capital projects and the exclusion of LEAs from the line of accountability. A briefing paper issued by the Commission of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton noted that "as building costs have escalated over the past decade, the 15% liability for a Capital project has become a serious, sometimes impossible, burden for the Catholic community. (Ryan 1992: 9) The paper goes on to point out that, while there was no guarantee of any greater degree of success in applying for capital grants than under Voluntary Aided status, "if a Grant Maintained school gets a place on a Capital Building programme, there is no 15% funding liability.

The Bishops Conference of England and Wales engaged in dialogue with the Department for Education (DFE) concerning the implications of Grant Maintained Status (GMS). Fearful that the critical solidarity built up over 140 years with LEAs would be eroded by the introduction of what amounted to a two-tier system of funding schools, the Bishops nevertheless retreated from their outright opposition to opting out, recognising that some Catholic schools would be compelled to seek Grant Maintained Status because of their individual circumstances, for

example being within a LEA in which the majority of secondary schools had opted for GMS. The Bishops, perhaps with the removal of the funding liability in mind, stated that "it will now be necessary to take account of local needs. Each diocese will have the primary say in considering whether the grant maintained option is the best available." (White; 1992: 1)

From a sociological perspective Jack Demaine suggests that the principal objective of the New Right was to create a situation as near to a fee market as possible by means of transforming schools into self-managing institutions free of LEA control, with education viewed as a commodity:

> The New Right argues that education should be seen as a 'commodity' and teachers as producers. Hitherto [prior to the ERA] education has provided an inadequate service because it has suffered from the effects of 'producer capture'….which involves education serving the interests of teachers and administrators rather than the interests of the customers. The hallmark of producer capture of education are said to include employment laxity, giantism and resistance to change. The New Right sees producer capture as a central characteristic of welfare state socialism typified by the British comprehensive school system.
>
> (Demaine; 1993:37)

From a Catholic perspective, however, John Ryan, the then Diocesan Schools commissioner for the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton, argued that Grant Maintained Status, undertaken in consultation with the Diocese, does not alter a Catholic school's distinctive character or its relationship with the Diocese. The statutory safeguards for the school's distinctive character remained intact and the only difference between GMS and Voluntary Aided status related to funding mechanisms. He regarded the latter to be a distinct advantage, allowing individual schools "flexibility to target its own educational priorities in responding to the needs of the local community". (Ryan; 1992: 5)

Ryan's view was not supported by Catholic critical scholarship. Grace suggests that the introduction of GMS contributed to a "survival of the fittest approach" leading to a hegemony of individual school self-interest at the expense of concerns for the common good (Grace; 1999: 5) while Pring (1996) argues that the philosophy of the marketplace is incompatible with the Catholic idea of the nature and purpose of schools. He goes on to suggest that, in placing the market and individual self-interest at the centre of educational arrangements, the ERA and subsequent reforms undermine Catholic educational values which emphasise the importance of community and concern for the common good. Such concerns will now be explored in the context of the Academies programme.

The Academies Act 2010

The Academies Act was given Royal assent on 27th July 2010. The detailed provisions of the Act in terms to financial arrangements and governance are analogous to those discussed previously in relation to GMS. The headlines were:

- Legislation which made it possible for all publically funded schools to become Academies
- Vastly increased degree of autonomy
- Described by some as the "re-branding of a 1980's idea – Grant Maintained Status

Analogous to the introduction of Grant Maintained Schools, conversion from VA to Academy status involves a legal framework which can be summarised as follows: Academies are

- funded by Department for Education (DfE) not the local authority (LA)
- independent of their LA
- automatically charities
- exempt from registration and regulation by the Charity Commission

- limited companies with charitable objects for advancing education

(http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Specialist_guidance/Education/acadamy.aspx)

A discussion of the complexities of the legal framework is beyond the scope of this paper. In the context of Catholic schools, however, the significance of individual schools becoming companies and the implications, in particular, for ownership of land and concomitant assets concentrated the minds of the Catholic Hierarchy which was, initially cautious, in its approach to Academy conversion, as it has been in the case of GMS. Bishop McMahon, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, suggested that the caution was borne out of concern that the successful partnership between VA Catholic schools and Government since the 1940's would not be compromised. Following protracted discussions with Government the Hierarchy was satisfied that the Church's commitment to the common good and especially its educational mission to the poor would not be affected pejoratively by embracing Academy conversion. The Hierarchy also sought assurance regarding the safeguarding of trustees' assets including land. Following the successful outcome of these discussions Bishop McMahon stated with confidence that:

> We are also aware of the legislative safeguards that have applied to our schools for many years; we have therefore sought parity with those safeguards and protection for our assets in the foundation documents and Instruments of Governance of Academies. We are feeling more confident that this can be achieved and we expect that each Catholic Academy be entitled a 'Catholic Voluntary Academy', a reflection of the distinctive nature of our sector, its history and what it brings.
>
> (McMahon; 2011:1)

The latest statistics from the Catholic Education Service indicate that there are 45 converter Academies in England. There has been, therefore, qualified support for Bishop McMahon's positive appraisal, reflected in the following comment of one

Chair of Governors of a Catholic School, Mike Craven:

> There is considerable enthusiasm for academy status among schools, heads, teachers and parents. They relish the freedoms that the new status confers – not being bound by the national curriculum, the ability to vary staff terms and conditions and the right to manage their affairs without interference from the town hall
>
> (Craven 2012:1)

Craven's reference to the enthusiasm for Academy status resonates with the concept "manager's freedom to manage" canonised in the ERA and articulated earlier in relation to LMS and GMS. It also reflects the zeal shown by headteachers in community schools, evidenced by submissions to a Conference held at a school in Surrey at which one headteacher, whose school had recently converted to single academy status, suggested:

> The freedom is more than just a physical freedom; it is a freedom of thought. This has enabled my governors and my leadership team to think innovatively and to start developing new projects we would not have considered before. We are developing new partnerships with the local community as well as globally."
>
> (Conference Paper; 2012: 2)

The tenor of Craven's article intimates a preference for single academy status, arguing that "the relationship of individual Catholic schools and the wider Church is unchanged whether the school is an academy or voluntary aided". (Craven 2011:2). In response to Craven's evocative title *Bring On Academies* Grace articulates a note on caution. The Bishops' Conference document *The Common Good in Education* (1997) constitutes a central feature in Grace's approach, particularly in relation to the potential disadvantaging of the poor in the context of admissions criteria and the effect of adopting single academy status on neighbouring schools. He insists that:

> If it does not, then those making that decision should reflect further on the matter. It may be that the Catholic Single Academy Model articulates less well, than the Catholic Multi Academy Model. It may be that Academy status per se, does not articulate well at all. These are the issues that all in the Catholic educational community should be considering at this time. It is not a question of 'Bring on Catholic Academies', it is a question of 'Bring on Catholic Values', before the making the decision.
>
> (Grace; 2012:2)

Grace refers to the multi-academy trust (MAT) model which, in official government documentation, is defined as follows:

> …an academy trust which governs a group of schools through a single set of members and directors. Each school will continue to have an advisory body which the MAT can choose to constitute as a local governing body to which it certain functions can be delegated. The MAT will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of schools in the chain. It has a master funding agreement with the Secretary of State and a supplementary funding agreement for each academy.
>
> (Academies Commission; 2013:137)

This is the model recommended by the Catholic Education Service since, in theory, it addresses the common good issues raised by Grace, resonating with the literature on grant maintained status retrieved earlier. Bishop McMahon certainly suggests this when referring to discussions with government around "the diverse Academy Trusts structure which may suit different local circumstances e.g. having an umbrella Trust or cluster of schools forming an Academy Trust." (McMahon 2011:2). Angela Squires, representing Winkworth Sherwood, legal advisers to the Bishops' Conference, echoes McMahon's point in listing the advantages of a Diocesan MAT, including strength of numbers and economies of scale, a powerful voice within the DfE and strategic central

management including a close relationship between Bishops and/or Trustees of Religious Order schools with all governing bodies within the MAT. (Squires 2012: 7) Recent research, does, however, resonate with Grace's concern regarding the potential of admissions policies to disenfranchise the poor. The Academies Commission expresses similar caution when counselling that, as the educational system becomes increasingly academised:

> …there is a need to ensure a level playing field, one that does not favour one type of school over another. Parity is particularly important in relation to funding and admissions, and in supporting fair access to all schools, particularly for children with special educational needs.
>
> (op. cit.; 2013: 8)

The Commission urged the Government to ensure that "academies and maintained schools should be placed on a common footing regarding admissions and should operate within a framework of open and fair compliance" while implying that there was some anecdotal evidence of manipulation of admissions in order to enhance school improvement targets. (2013: 7-9)

The fact that Academies, whether single or multi-academy, will enter into a direct contract with the Secretary of State is seen by others to be a far more significant peril. In an evocative presentation on the subject Pring suggests that increasing Government control inherent in the ERA has reached its apogee in the Academies Act. Describing the current system as the most centralised system since Calvin's Geneva in the 16th century, his comparison with the three powers of the Minister of Education between 1962 and 1964 (approve recommendations from LEAs – adequate supply of teachers – remove air raid shelters) being particularly illustrative. (Pring 2013b:1) Pring sees the lack of the protections afforded by the 1944 Act, the fact that funding can be withdrawn in the case of "failing schools" and the centralisation of power in one person to be the specific challenges in relation to this concentration of power.

In the context of Catholic schools in particular, Sir Peter Newsam, former Director of the Institute of Education, echoes Pring's concerns when questioning the desirability of irreversibly placing the future of each academy or MAT in the hands of the present or any future Secretary of State. Newsam argues that VA status has served Catholic schools well in the past and that it should not be surrendered lightly. With explicit reference to funding Newsam states unequivocally that:

> From the point of view of the Secretary of State, one obvious merit of academy funding contracts is that he can give notice to terminate them as and when he thinks fit. He has no need to comply with any of the regulatory provisions that used to make it impossible for a Local Authority or a Secretary of State to stop funding a school without the public being able to exercise a right to have its objections considered.
>
> (Newsam; 2013: 2)

The next part of this research paper will take the form of an analysis of a quantitative survey among Catholic headteachers, both primary and secondary, in the UK, focusing on attitudes towards the establishment of Catholic academies. The survey raises issues around partnerships with Dioceses, the common good and preference for single or multi-academy status.

Small-scale research study

The intention of this study was, by means of conducting a small-scale questionnaire survey, to elicit the views of headteachers in Catholic schools in England and Wales in respect of how appropriate it is for Catholic schools to apply for Academy status.

In order to conduct the survey, a questionnaire was designed (Appendix A). Questionnaires were distributed to 17 headteachers of Catholic schools located in eight of the twenty-two Catholic dioceses (across five ecclesiastical provinces[1]),

including 13 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and one all-through (3-16) school. All 17 headteachers responded, which, considering the workload of headteachers, was a very good response. The results of the enquiry are presented at the end of this paper.

The survey was carried out during February 2013.

Ethical considerations

In order to produce reliable outcomes, it is incumbent upon a researcher to conform to ethical principles. Ethical problems can arise from all methodologies and can appear at any stage but it is imperative to try to pre-empt any ethical contingencies that could confound the results. It was important, then, in conducting this study, to anticipate potential ethical repercussions of conduct and procedures that might impinge adversely upon the results of the investigation. In particular, Black (1999: 138), for example, advises that

> Confidentiality of results and anonymity of individual subjects, or even of whole organizations, must be maintained.

In this context, consideration was given to the confidentiality and the anonymity of respondents. As all participants were known personally by the researchers, it was important that, as well as wishing their views to be respected, they would feel confident that they could give their responses honestly and without fear of identification or prejudice.

Following ethical guidelines, each participant was assured that all information gathered would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and they were assured that their anonymity would be preserved. Consequently, all participants were guaranteed in advance that information that could identify them as individuals would not be disclosed to anyone else.

Hornsby-Smith (1993), moreover, emphasises the importance of gaining the

'informed consent' of potential participants. Therefore, the purposes of the investigation and its context were clearly established for the headteachers who were contacted.

A summary of the headteachers' responses to the questionnaire, together with relevant issues that were raised, will be set out in the next section of this paper.

Findings

In this section of this paper, the results of the questionnaire survey will be presented sequentially following the five sections of the questionnaire. The results of the survey will be examined and salient issues and concerns that emerge from the responses of headteachers will be explored and form the basis of a systematic analysis, discussion and interpretation.

Section One

In the first section of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to provide factual information about themselves and about the phase of their school as well as the diocese in which their school is located.

Of the 17 headteachers who responded, 13 were female and 4 were male. In addition, 13 headteachers were in primary schools, 3 were in secondary schools and one was in an all- through (3-16) school. This is roughly in line with the relative proportion between Catholic primary and Catholic secondary schools, which is, according to the most recent Catholic Education Service (CES; 2012: 8), five Catholic primary schools to every Catholic secondary school.

In relation to the dioceses and ecclesiastical provinces within which the schools were located, eight of the twenty-two dioceses in England and Wales were represented, i.e., Arundel and Brighton, Birmingham, Brentwood, Clifton,

Portsmouth, Salford, Westminster and Wrexham, which are located across all five ecclesiastical provinces, i.e., Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Southwark and Westminster. For the purposes of gathering information for examination, it was felt that this represented a relatively wide constituency.

Section Two

In the second section of the questionnaire, a Likert-type scale was used to elicit views of respondents in respect of their attitudes towards the establishment of Catholic academies. In this section, the participants were invited to rate, on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', their attitudes towards each of a set of 10 statements.

In examining the headteachers' responses to these statements in detail (Appendix B), there appeared to be no definitive picture, with most of the average scores situated around the 'not certain' category (which was counted as 3 for the purposes of calculation). However, it was remarkable that one statement (i.e., "I think that Catholic Academies will change the Catholic character of the school") obtained a relatively low average score of 2.06, which was close to the 'disagree' category (which was counted as 2). It would be difficult to interpret the reasons for this finding. Evidently, though, headteachers who contributed to this survey, whether or not they regarded the adoption of Catholic Academy status to be a catalyst for change, did not consider it to be a challenge to the Catholic distinctiveness of their schools.

Focusing exclusively on the views of the primary headteachers who contributed to the survey, their responses to the statement, "I think that Catholic Academies will change the Catholic character of the school", shows, when extrapolated, an average score of 1.92 (approximating to 'disagree'), showing stronger disagreement than the secondary headteachers (whose average score was 2.5).

Whatever one's view of Catholic Academies, these results indicate that, amongst the Catholic primary school headteachers who participated in this survey, there was a feeling that the Catholic character of the school would not be changed by a conversion to Catholic Academy status. This perspective evidently corresponds with the view of Bishop Malcolm McMahon OP, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales (CESEW), who, in a statement issued in January 2011, affirmed that the necessary legal safeguards are now in place for Catholic schools to become academies:

> We are feeling more confident that this can be achieved and we expect that each Catholic Academy be entitled a 'Catholic Voluntary Academy', a reflection of the distinctive nature of our sector, its history and what it brings.

Within the three following sections of the questionnaire, the Catholic headteachers who participated in the survey were invited to respond to open-ended questions and were encouraged to develop and elaborate upon their reflections.

Section Three

Section Three comprised two questions, one closed question and one open-ended question. In the closed question, respondents were asked: "Do you think that transfer to Academy status will change the nature of the school's relationship with the Diocese?" In response to this question, opinions were divided: seven headteachers responded with a 'yes' answer and ten responded with a 'no' answer. Thus, there was a slight tendency towards a 'no' answer.

The related open-ended question, "Please give reasons for your answer", elicited some interesting comments, however. Of the respondents who responded with a 'yes' answer, concerns were articulated by Headteacher 3 , for example, who said:

> At the moment Academies work with the Diocese – but in time they will become more distant – RE could become a problem. Property is signed over. This is dangerous for the future as VA schools we hold the freehold. Academies

> will perhaps become more selective.

Headteacher 7, who also responded with a 'yes' answer, commented that

> Although the relationship should not alter, I believe it is an unintended consequence, as increasing divergence in delivery models increases the potential for destabilised relationships between phases and across phases of school, making the Diocesan dynamic even more complex. A threat not an opportunity.

These concerns underlined the evident anxiety of headteachers that, if Catholic schools converted to academies, it would weaken the relationship between Catholic academies and dioceses and the relationship would, as a result, become more tenuous.

Overall, however, regarding whether or not transfer to Academy status would change the nature of the school's relationship with the Diocese, there were more positive and encouraging comments than concerns from headteachers who participated in the survey. Indeed, some headteachers expressed the view that the relationship between Catholic academies and dioceses would be improved. For example, one headteacher, who had responded with a 'no' answer, said:

> We have been an academy for 15 months and our relationship with the diocese and other Catholic schools has not changed – in many ways, it is now stronger.
>
> (Headteacher 6)

And another headteacher, who had responded with a 'yes' answer, observed:

> ...I feel the relationship will be strengthened through the Diocesan Educational Alliance – stronger relationships between the schools will feed this stronger

> relationship with the diocese.
>
> (Headteacher 16)

On the whole, whether or not they had replied positively to the question ("Do you think that transfer to Academy status will change the nature of the school's relationship with the Diocese?"), responses of the participant headteachers to the open-ended question in this section tended to reflect, with some conditions, an optimistic and supportive attitude towards the adoption of Catholic Academy status. Thus, for example, Headteacher 11, who had responded with a 'no' answer, opined:

> I don't think the change will make any difference to the relationship with the Diocese but will greatly change the nature of LA links and collaboration within LAs between schools.

And Headteacher 15, who had responded with a 'no' answer, considered that

> If the relationship is currently positive, it will strengthen if further. If negative, it needs a radical shift such as this to be on track.

Section Four

In this section, participants were asked to "Comment on to what extent you think the safeguards previously afforded by Local Authorities will be sufficiently compensated in the new Academy structure." Several headteachers expressed concerns that safeguards would not be available. In response to this question, for example, Headteacher 8 said:

> I do not believe that the safeguards will be afforded. I have MAJOR concerns about the future.

Headteacher 2, moreover, articulated specific concerns about current relationships of Catholic academies with dioceses, indicating that where Catholic schools

> ... benefited professionally and personally from the support of the LA at a time

> when there was no support from the diocese, there is a concern that there will be a significant gap.

There was also a concern that conversion to Catholic Academy status would have financial implications that would undermine the principles of Catholic social teaching:

> ...it is only sponsored academies that in the long term will continue to receive financial advantage and these are not suitable for Catholic schools if we want to preserve our actual catholicity. Sponsored academies seem to be solely about money and results with no regard to serving local communities or the common good!
>
> (Headteacher 12)

This responses reflects the challenge of marketisation, which is well articulated by Professor Grace (2001: 497), who points out that

> If a market culture in education encourages the pursuit of material interests, what would become of a Catholic school's prime commitment to religious, spiritual and moral interests? If calculation of personal advantage is necessary for survival in the market, how can Catholic schools remain faithful to values of solidarity, community and the common good?"

A number of headteachers registered concerns about the challenges posed for Catholic schools if they converted to academy status. Headteacher 11, for example, maintained:

> I strongly believe that the growth of Academies will do great and lasting damage to the principles of equal education for all.

Headteacher 5, addressing concerns about the effects of conversion to academy status upon local authority safeguards, expressed the view that

> ... I bitterly regret the demise of Local Authority safeguard functions and

> think the whole policy change is a waste of money and investment....

Nevertheless, Headteacher 16 identified some advantages that may accrue from schools that can work collaboratively within alliances with other schools:

> I feel that being part of an alliance or collaborative/cooperative chain may provide more reassurance for school leaders and governors that procurement of resources, CPD and service agreements/contracts are attainable and value for money.

Indeed, this view is endorsed by Headteacher 4, who said

> ...working together with local Catholic partners at the diocese will be crucial both practically and strategically...

Moreover, Headteacher 16 argued that

> There are already many examples of good practice available for successful academies. I believe that the interest goodwill and positivity of the Catholic schools community will build an equally professional set of safeguards, given time.

Whilst some headteachers expressed concerns that conversion to academy status would result in a deleterious effect on the safeguards afforded by local authorities, the overall picture was of optimism that Catholic academies would have the capacity to be able to cope with these challenges.

Section Five

Finally, in Section Five, headteachers were invited to add any other comments about their attitudes towards Catholic schools adopting academy status. In response to this invitation, a number of headteachers raised concerns about Catholic schools adopting academy status. Headteacher 11, for example, expressed anxiety that traditional principles of Catholic education would be undermined by

the adoption of academy status:

> I believe that the whole idea of Academies will damage education, goes completely against the principles of Catholic education's committed to providing educational to the poor and will encourage empire building and selection to improve results.

Endorsing this view, Headteacher 7 said,

> I consider the academy movement as hostile to the common good. The pace and steps for change within that same movement are too great, too rushed, too pressured – hence ratcheting up parental and professional uncertainty.

Headteacher 5 also raised concerns about a potential fragmentation of educational provision:

> It is destructive to the church, the community of school leaders and clergy grappling with this issue for the Bishops' Conference to fail to speak with one voice.

Offering an alternative view to adopting academy status, Headteacher 5 expressed the opinion that

> ... the Academy movement, whilst not one I would have wanted, could have been customised by the Catholic community to hold to account all Catholic schools to play their part in building the common good.

Also offering a different perspective, Headteacher 15 suggested:

> ...I believe that Catholic schools must now take advantage of the autonomy which academy status contributes to – and of the 'pulling together' which a Diocesan model would encourage.

Another headteacher, recommended an alternative approach that might compensate for potential dangers:

> It is disappointing that dioceses and the CES have not been more united and strategic from the outset. There is a real danger that by not having one united system that protects in law the Catholic identity leadership, leadership succession, Catholic appointments, curriculum, etc. (as in the Birmingham model) a significant proportion of Catholic provision across the country could be lost, incrementally over the period.
>
> (Headteacher 4)

Headteacher 2, whilst opposed to academy status in principle, justified reasons why the school would, in fact, apply for academy status, making it clear that the decision was based on a measured and pragmatic approach, deriving from financial considerations:

I am pushing my school towards academy status for no other reason than financial and the ability to access Capital Funding on an even level with other schools. The LCVAP Capital Funding[2] has failed my school (with VAT & 10% Diocesan levy). Each £1 is only worth 70p. I do not want Academy status but cannot see any alternative. Freedom? – No.

Paradoxically, whilst most of the headteachers who participated in this study were supportive of the adoption of academy status by Catholic schools, they also offered a number of reservations. Headteacher 3, for example, reflected this perspective, commenting:

> I have no problem about Catholic schools becoming Academies but have they thought through? Are they protected enough? 100% funding comes into it commitments and obligations and ultimately more control.

Headteacher 6, too, considered that

> There are many benefits - certainly financial in the first year – (but) for many converters (now), there is a reduced benefit. I regret that the CES did not take

all schools through as a national federation.

Some headteachers, indicated that, from experience, there had been positive repercussions following the adoption of academy status. Headteacher 9, for example, reflected that

> We have been a sponsored Academy since September 2007 and have taken advantage of autonomy but maintain strong links with the LA and Diocese to ensure we contribute to the 'common good'.

Headteacher 13, supporting this view, revealed:

> As a head I was concerned that the schools and academies would be in competition with each other but the opposite has happened. We work more closely as Catholic Cluster than before.

Again, the overall impression was of a mixed, though discriminating response towards the adoption of academy status by Catholic schools.

Limitations

An objective of this study was that it would potentially provide insights into the views of headteachers in Catholic schools towards the conversion of Catholic schools to Catholic Academies. As a small-scale enquiry, however, it is acknowledged that it was subject to limitations. One difficulty of a phenomenological approach is that any evaluation or judgement is inherently complex and subjective and is dependent upon a variety of influences on individual participants. Indeed, as an ethnographic study, confined to a relatively small number of participants, it would not be appropriate to broadly generalise from the findings.

Owing to the restrictions of time, it was only possible to contact sixteen

headteachers to contribute to the enquiry, so, admittedly, the findings can only represent a limited view of the attitudes of headteachers in Catholic schools as a whole. It has to be acknowledged, too, that there was scope for a broader geographical spread. In particular, the majority of respondents within this enquiry were headteachers in Catholic schools in the south of England and it would be of value to elicit information from more headteachers from the north of England. It would be difficult to determine whether or not the location of the schools could be an important contributory factor when considering the degree of support for Catholic Academies, though it might be speculated that responses could be influenced by the nature of the intake and the area in which the school is situated.

There is also a case that it would have been appropriate to include chairs of governors in such a survey, but, although this was considered, within the time-scale, this did not prove to be feasible. It is possible, though, that a follow-up survey of chairs of governors in Catholic schools would be undertaken.

Judging from the responses to open-ended questions, too, it would also have been advantageous to arrange follow-up interviews with individuals in order to gain more detailed information with regard to, for example, the motivation of the respondents and underlying reasons for their responses. Another advantage would have been that, in eliciting personal rather than statistical data, it would then have been possible to interrogate issues on an individual basis at a more profound level.

Considering that the interpretation of empirical evidence is based on the researchers' professional judgment, it should also be acknowledged that the analysis and construction of participants' responses is open to challenge. Observations elicited from qualitative information are necessarily subjective. In analysing the responses, however, the authors aimed to identify important themes in the data in order to draw conclusions about potential challenges to leadership in

Catholic schools.

On the other hand, although it might be argued that the scope of this investigation was limited and that, consequently, the analysis may be circumscribed, the results do nevertheless reveal significant concerns that are currently exercising headteachers with regard to their perception of the adoption of academy status in Catholic schools in England. The emphasis was on gaining an understanding of the perceptions of headteachers towards the adoption of Catholic academy status. To this extent, the findings can contribute to a continuing conversation in which perceived challenges to Catholic leadership can be identified and explored.

Summary

This paper has been concerned with questions related to the introduction of academy schools within the educational system of England, with particular reference to the views of headteachers in Catholic schools. There is a view, for example, that the adoption of Catholic Academy status does not necessarily sit easily with traditional Catholic values. There is a concern that, in extending autonomy and competitiveness in the educational system, support for solidarity and the common good and for the education of the poor and marginalised will be undermined.

On the other hand, according to the CES Census (2012: 8),

> At the time of the Census in January 2012 45 Catholic schools had academy status, the great majority being 'converter' academies rather than 'sponsor-led'. They were 17 primary schools, 27 secondary schools and one all through school. The number increases monthly and will certainly be well over one hundred at the next Census date in January 2013.

The apparently inexorable escalation in the number of Catholic schools adopting

academy status would suggest that there is increasing support for the conversion of Catholic schools to academy status, though, perhaps, it could be argued that the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) model might be preferable to the Single Academy model in the long run.

In identifying the need to interrogate the views of headteachers in Catholic schools, it was hoped to cultivate a discourse within which an evaluation of the notion of the Catholic Academy can take place. Examining the evidence of this survey, the results provide a mixed picture. Thus, whilst, on the one hand, headteachers registered concerns about potential implications of Catholic schools adopting academy status, they did not, in general, consider conversion to academy status to be a challenge to the Catholic distinctiveness of their schools.

Overall, the results of this enquiry were ambivalent, perhaps reflecting uncertainty amongst Catholic headteachers about the repercussions of adopting academy status. Consequently, it is argued that there is a need for urgent and critical consideration amongst leaders, including governors, within Catholic education regarding the ramifications about how, if at all, conversion to academy status might affect the Catholic identity of schools. The headteachers' responses to this enquiry provide a basis upon which a wider debate about the adoption of academy status by Catholic schools could take place.

It should also be underlined that this study should be regarded as a preliminary enquiry. In an area in which there are conflicting views, and there appears to be some doubt and confusion, there is scope for further investigation, with the possibility of follow-up interviews to explore deeper levels of understanding. Local circumstances, the attitudes of clergy (and, in particular, individual bishops), previous and current experiences of the headteachers who participated, may all be factors that contribute to the inclinations and motivations of individual respondents.

Whether or not Catholic schools would benefit from adopting academy status, the results of this survey have presented issues that the Catholic educational community needs to consider carefully. Whatever the case, it is maintained that adopting academy status cannot be left to chance by Catholic leaders or to the Catholic community in general. It is intended, then, that this study should promote a discussion about principles and practices that should be taken into account by Catholic schools that are considering adopting academy status.

Acknowledgements

The authors take this opportunity to thank all the headteachers who, despite the demands on their time, generously agreed to assist them in their enquiry.

Notes

1. The twenty-two Catholic dioceses in England and Wales are organised under five ecclesiastical provinces, of which, in terms of Catholic population, Birmingham, Liverpool and Westminster are the largest.

2. LCVAP: LA Co-ordinated VA Programme. According to the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, 'This is formulaic funding which is administered by LAs. There are no limits on the size of a project that can be supported by LCVAP, nor any restrictions on the type of capital project, as long as the capital work is the governing body's liability. Grant is normally paid at 90% with 10% Governors' liability. LCVAP funding must be spent in the year it is allocated; if not it becomes a commitment in the following year and will be lost if it not allocated to an approved project.'
(http://edurcdhn.org.uk/school/capital_funding/capital_funding_dfc.php)

References

[1] Academies Commission (2013) *Unleashing Greatness: Getting the Best from an Academised System*, London: Academies Commission

[2] Black, T. R. (1999) *Doing Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*, London: SAGE Publications

[3] Catholic Education Service (2012) *Digest of 2012 Census Data for Schools and Colleges*, London: CES

[4] Craven, M. (2012) 'Bring on Catholic Academies', in *Networking: Catholic Education Today*, Newark, Bellcourt: Volume 13, Issue 4, March 2012

[5] Demaine, J. (1993) 'The New Right and the Self-Managing School' in Smyth, J. (Editor) *A Socially Critical View of the Self-Managing School*, London: Falmer

[6] Edwards, P., Ezzamel, M., Robson, K., & Taylor,M. (1995) *The Development of Local Management of Schools: Budgets, Accountability and Educational Impact in Financial Accountability & Management*, Wiley Online Library, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/

[7] Flynn, R. (1999) 'Managerialism, professionalism and quasi-markets' in Exworthy, M and Halford , S. (Editors) (1999) *Professionals and the New Managerialism in the Public Sector* Buckingham: Open University Press

[8] HM Government (1988) *Education Reform Act*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

[9] HM Government (1992) *White Paper: Choice and Diversity*, London: Her Majesty's

[10] Stationery Office

[11] Grace, G. (1995) *School Leadership: Beyond Education Management*, London, Falmer Press

[12] Grace, G. (1999) 'The Future of the Catholic School: An English Perspective' in Feheney, M. (Editor) *From Ideal to Action: The Inner Nature of a Catholic School Today*, Dublin: Veritas

[13] Grace, G. (2001) 'The State and Catholic schooling in England and Wales: Politics, Ideology and Mission Integrity', *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 27 No. 4, 489-500

[14] Holmes, G. and Walker, R. (1990a) 'Winners and Losers' in *Local Management of Schools: The Guide*, London: Times Educational Supplement

[15] Holmes, G. and Walker, R. (1990b) 'Principles for LMS' in *Local Management of Schools: The Guide*, London: Times Educational Supplement

[16] Hornsby-Smith, M. (1993) 'Gaining Access' in Gilbert, N. (ed.) *Researching Social Life*, London: SAGE Publications

[17] Johnson, R. (1991) '"A New Road to Serfdom?" A Critical History of the 1988 Act' in *Education Group II, Education Limited, Schooling and Training and the New Right since 1979*, London: Unwin Hyman

[18] McKenzie, J. (1993) "Education as a private problem or a public issue? The process of excluding 'education' from the 'public sphere'" Paper presented at the International Conference on the

Public Sphere, Manchester, 8-10 January.

[19] McMahon, Bishop M. (2011) *Academies: The National Position*, London: Catholic

[20] Education Service

[21] McMahon OP, Right Reverend Malcolm (2011) *Statement on Academies* (http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/academies/item/1000029-academies-the-national- position)

[22] Newsam, P. (2013) 'Towards a Totalitarian Education System in England: Looking at the Academy Question in a Longer Policy Context' in *Networking: Catholic Education Today*, Newark, Bellcourt, Volume 14, Issue 3, February 2013

[23] Pring, R. (1996) 'Markets Education and Catholic Schools' in McLaughlin, T. et al (1996) *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context and Diversity*, London: Falmer Press

[24] Pring, R. and Pollard, A. (2011) *Education for All: Evidence from the Past, Learning for the Future*, London: Institute of Education (Teaching & Learning Research Project)

[25] Pring, R. (2013a) *The Life and Death of Secondary Education for All*, Abingdon: Routledge

[26] *Pring, R. (2013b) Academy Schools*, St Mary's University College, Twickenham:

[27] Unpublished Presentation

[28] Ryan, J. (1992) *Grant Maintained Schools for Catholic Schools*, Crawley: Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Schools Commission

[29] Squires, A. (2012) *Academies – Presentation to Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton*, Chertsey: Unpublished Presentation

[30] White, M. (1992) 'Retreat Over Opting Out', *The Catholic Herald* (27.11.92 accessed from the Catholic Herald Archive http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk/article/27th-november-1992/3/retreat-over-opting-out)

[31] Whitty, G. (2000) *Education Reform and Education Politics in England: A Sociological Analysis*, London: Institute of Education

[32] Wragg, T. (1990) *Staffing in Local Management of Schools: The Guide*, London; Times Educational Supplement

Appendix A. Questionnaire

The Academies Act 2010 made provision for all publicly-funded schools in England to become academies. This survey is intended to investigate the views of Catholic leaders towards this initiative. I should appreciate your time in responding to the following questions.

Section One: About You

1.1 Male □ Female □

1.2 Please indicate with a tick in which phase of education you work:

□Primary □Secondary □Other (please specify)…….....

1.3 In which diocese is the school located? .....

Section Two: About Catholic Academy Status

What are your attitudes towards the establishment of Catholic academies?
Please be honest in your responses to the following statements:

Please tick one box for each of the statements below

I think that Catholic Academies…		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Certain	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.1	…should adopt Single Academy Status.					
2.2	…should form part of a Multi Academy Trust.					
2.3	…should conform to a Deanery Primary/Secondary "consortium"					
2.4	...should conform to a Diocesan "consortium"					
2.5	…will assist parents, as primary educators of their children, in the religious formation of their children.					
2.6	…will financially benefit Catholic schools.					

2.7	…will change the Catholic character of the school.					
2.8	…will contribute to the Church's mission of making Christ known to all people.					
2.9	…will serve the common good.					
2.10	…will support those who are in most need.					

Section Three

Do you think that transfer to Academy status will change the nature of the school's relationship with the Diocese?

Yes □ No □ Don't know □

Please give reasons for your answer:

Section Four

Comment on to what extent you think the safeguards previously afforded by Local Authorities will be sufficiently compensated in the new Academy structure?

Please Turn Over

Section Five

If you have any further comments to add about your attitudes towards Catholic schools adopting academy status, I should be grateful if you would provide them here:

Your responses to this survey will be treated as confidential and any information that could identify you as an individual will not be disclosed under any circumstances. Data gathered from this survey will only be used for the purpose of this research. The questionnaire will be destroyed as soon as the project is completed. Information held on computer is subject to the Data Protection Act.

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire.

Appendix B. Summary of results

Head	**M/F**	**P/S/A**	**2.1**	**2.2**	**2.3**	**2.4**	**2.5**	**2.6**	**2.7**	**2.8**	**2.9**	**2.10**
H1	F	S	3	3	2	3	5	3	2	5	5	5
H2	F	P	4	2	2	2	4	4	1	4	4	4
H3	F	P	2	2	2	2	3	2	4	4	4	2
H4	F	P	3	5	5	3	3	1	2	1	3	3
H5	F	P	3	4	4	3	3	3	2	3	5	5
H6	M	S	5	4	3	2	3	4	1	5	4	5
H7	F	S	5	1	5	3	1	3	5	1	1	1
H8	F	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
H9	M	A	4	2	4	4	5	4	2	4	4	4
H10	M	P	1	4	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3
H11	F	P	4	4	1	1	5	3	2	2	1	1
H12	F	P	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	4	3
H13	F	P	5	4	3	4	5	5	1	5	4	5
H14	F	P	2	3	2	5	2	3	2	2	2	2
H15	F	P	2	2	2	4	4	4	2	4	4	4
H16	M	P	3	3	2	4	3	3	2	3	3	4
H17	F	P	2	3	4	4	4	3	2	4	4	3
	Average		3.06	2.94	2.76	2.94	3.35	3.06	2.06	3.24	3.29	3.24