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**Commentary on the key themes from the data**

**Relationships** are of paramount importance. It is clear that a strong relationship between Headteacher and incumbent is key to the success of the partnership as a whole. This partnership has been likened to a marriage or sense of journeying together. The relationship needs to be built on firm foundations; these may be historical, based on well established shared experiences and expectations, or may be re-defined at any point in response to change and circumstance, such as the appointment of a new head. Defining the end point of this journeying together is important; with open and ongoing discussion focused on defining and agreeing a shared vision and mission, purpose and principles. This might be described as church being ‘re-defined’ or ‘re-imagined’; perhaps church and school as one. Being child focused at all times is a given; spending time agreeing clearly defined, mutually beneficial outcomes which improve the lives of children and families are powerful focus points. So the out-workings of the relationship can make a real difference to people’s lives. How the relationship is conducted and how it is articulated , is perhaps as important as agreed outcomes; for example an acknowledgement of the importance of shared values such as trust, honesty and empathy, as well as valuing each others’ gifts and expertise. It is vital to give attention also to the practicalities of the relationship and how it works, for example investing in setting aside structured time, working on joint actions and the merging of systems ( such as joint strategic planning ). The modelling of the relationship and understanding that it can go beyond that of just Headteacher and incumbent, to include other members of both school and parish communities, can also enable a wider network of relationships to flourish and greater connections, which in turn broaden the scope and potential of the whole partnership.

**Children** are obviously central to the life and work of any school, and in a good partnership children in a church school are considered to be an important part of the Church in that locality. However, they are viewed by some in society as the ‘church of the future’, which pre-supposes they will make that choice when they reach adulthood. This assumes a different view of childhood to that agreed by schools and many parents today. Children and their families are considered by many clergy as part of their ‘flock’, in that schools are situated within their parishes, and therefore part of the mission of the Church. ‘Messy Church’, sometimes held in a school building after school, is one example of this. For some, perhaps particularly headteachers, the partnership is all about children and the wide range of benefits and outcomes for them as a result of it. For instance, there are examples of clergy using their teaching skills within RE and the wider curriculum. The partnership can enable children to experience faith and spirituality within a safe, secure and familiar environment and indeed this may be their only opportunity to do so. This can be as a result of the partnership offering varied worship opportunities in school and in the Church building. It can give children an experience of fun and enjoyment in worship, as well as a sense of belonging to their community. The partnership can also break down barriers for children in their perception of church and school as separate entities, as clergy and other church members become familiar figures in school, beyond the ‘collective worship slot’ and children and staff become comfortable in the Church building. It could therefore be said that the partnership can give children Jesus’ offer of ‘life in all its fullness’.

**Families** and other carers may be drawn inthrough the experience of Church school/partnerships they share with their children. They too can have a non-threatening experience of faith, through contact with an incumbent (who may themselves be a parent) and through attending worship in school or in church. This will often be at special times, perhaps the major festivals of the Church’s year. Whilst this may not translate into Church attendance *per se*, it offers a different opportunity for a wider group of people to access a more spiritual dimension to their lives, perhaps even to worship and to engage in matters of faith. Many modern families appear to be much more comfortable with this experience rather than with a more traditional experience of Church. Clergy say that it takes a long time to build up relationships of trust with parents and carers, but see it is as important, offering a pastoral opportunity and part of the mission of the Church. For families who are church attenders the partnership enables them to see their lives and that of their children as sharing the same consistent message. The drawing in of parents as a result of the Church/school partnership has been described as a way of enabling families to experience a more human and more immediate face of the Church. Beyond this is a simple offer of service and support to the community where families can enjoy activities and simply come together and *be* together. One summing up of the advantages of the relationship was that ‘it has allowed people to be real’. Another said ‘This school *is* Church’. This and other metaphors are explored further under ‘shared language’.

**A shared language** is helpful, with a common understanding of educational and ecclesiastical terminology. One member of the clergy sees the headteacher as a ‘presbyter’ and the school as Church. He said, “St …is not just a Church school, but Church”. Shared definitions of partnership, such as ‘one together’ or ‘partners in mission’ help to articulate the partnership itself.

Similarly the language of metaphors can lead to a shared understanding; for instance one school has been described as a ‘Home of Grace’ where for that school and parish inclusivity is paramount. Another described the Diocese as ‘a warm comfort blanket’ indicating that Diocesan support is valued in that setting. Partnership has been articulated as like a marriage or a journey where headteacher and incumbent are co-workers or fellow travellers.

**The complementary roles and responsibilities** of headteacher and incumbent can bring shared benefits to the whole community, particularly when there is open and frank discussion about how each’ s gifts can complement the other’s, and where both share common aims and vision. It is unlikely this will happen overnight, but take time, patience and trust. Some clergy consider they play a significant and important role on the school governing body; for instance bringing their experience and wisdom when the school is appointing a new headteacher, or ensuring governors take their responsibilities seriously in upholding the school’s Christian foundation. Equally several prefer a more informal chaplaincy role, where they can exercise a largely pastoral role in the school, for children, their families and teaching staff. Some clergy bring skills from their previous careers, for instance in teaching, where they can particularly support the school’s religious education. Many clergy support the worship life of the school, in one case feeling they contribute to the ‘SIAMS success’ of the school as an outstanding church school. This more formal and measurable recognition is seen to be important. In some cases, where this partnership is flourishing, shared strategic planning happens, including with other schools, Church denominations and community groups. This may even lead to the construction of new buildings in a locality, for future community life, worship and learning. This can be seen as contributing to the Common Good. Part of the role of the headteacher within the life of the local Church might be as a regular or occasional worshipper, which can help to keep the school in the mind of the congregation. Although this is rarely an expectation, where the partnership is strong, the headteacher is likely to have some contact with the Church community, perhaps through visits to a PCC meeting, articles in the Parish Magazine, or prayer requests. In a Voluntary Aided school, where the majority of governors are appointed by the church, there is an understanding that they will actively promote the partnership between the church and school.

**Identity** of the two institutions of Church and Church School, head and incumbent, and the communities they serve emerged as a key indicator of the partnership. First, the partnership was demonstrably stronger when the incumbent and head fulfil their distinctive roles, one as leader of church and the other as leader of school. However, the overlapping identities, in terms of leadership, create a common bond. If this is explicitly shared and mutually respected, then it enhances the partnership, giving opportunity for support.

Second, the identity of the church and school as buildings and institutions was noted. In one case the school fulfils a role as church and the church is a place (in part) of education. The identities here are more overlapping than distinct, and the use of the school as a place of worship or the church as a place of education gives an enriched sense of holism. However, the point is made that churches or schools are not simply buildings or institutions. They are people and communities.

The community life is based upon a range of factors including the philosophy/theology in practice. Good partnership involves a philosophy/theology which is thought-out, human-faced, affirmed and distinct. The intention to do this and review it was evident. The evidence shows that the partnership will benefit from being tested, not to breaking, but challenged. The testing needs to be both internal - how the partners experience and approach the work of church and school, and externally, tacking issues from the world and government. The idea of testing is present in the way both churches and schools form their individual ethos. Testing provides focus and resonance between the partners. It is one of the components of identity alongside collaboration, self description (e.g. a marriage, travellers on a journey, disciples etc.), purpose, governance and inclusivity. Any and each of these can be emphasized in the context of the locale. However, attention to them all will create a greater foundation for the identity of the partnership to be enriched.

**Sharing** between Church and schoolwas evident in a variety of ways. There was a focus on the relationship between the headteacher and incumbent and how their sharing is vital in developing the one to one relationship they have. Sharing enhanced the relationship between school and church as a whole. For an effective partnership School and church need to be aware of the shared purpose they have and in practice there needs to be a followed through desire to work on things together. Rather than talk of working together there needs to be a “sense of urgency”. This is much easier when there is a common vision and shared end point for the partnership.

Sharing was evidenced in a variety of ways. These included planning collective worship together. Sometimes such planning involved more than one school and more than one denomination coming together making things more structured and enabling a more effective sharing of resources. There was work together on development planning with church feeding into school plans and the potential for church to learn from the methods of planning used in schools for their planning. Pastoral care was seen as shared both in an ongoing way and following on from specific crises. There were often projects to work on together and the importance of endeavouring to support one another was recognised through presence at events and through joint fund raising. The spirit of sharing can spread beyond the partnership. Good joint material produced by school and church could be made available to others and there could be a sharing of good ideas to assist in developing partnerships elsewhere.

**Faith and spirituality** brings positives for children and their families in terms of their experience of faith, the Church and God, particularly when there is a joint commitment to its exploration. The partnership can introduce a spiritual dimension to the lives of children and their families, which may influence them later in life. Some clergy talk of songs, hymns and prayers from school requested at weddings and baptisms. It has been acknowledged that there is a need to make space for physical, social and spiritual growth in school, and that the support of the partnership can encourage this. One headteacher and incumbent articulated the belief that faith needs a strong identity and inclusivity, and that inclusivity leads to the value of hospitality in the school and community.

**Challenges** exist in any relationship and the key thing is that they are recognised and, where possible, addressed. For headteacher and incumbent there are many pressures and on both sides finding enough time to meet is often a challenge. Lack of contact is to the detriment of the partnership and the challenge is exacerbated for an incumbent where they had more than one school to relate to in their benefice. The metaphor of a marriage was used and there were inevitably times when the two parties do not see eye to eye. Succession planning was a challenge and was particularly apparent where headteacher and incumbent had worked well together and there were fears of a new person not having the same philosophy. How can the school be involved in the appointment of a new incumbent and church in appointment of a new headteacher? A number of specific challenges were raised. These included working together to effectively operate with old buildings and differences of opinion over issues to do with admissions policy.

It is positive if the relationship between headteacher and incumbent is strong enough for each person to feel able to challenge the other. It is evident that where there is a strong relationship between them it is possible for each party to challenge the other constructively as critical friend and support them, thus enabling the partnership to develop.

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