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Title: The negotiation and articulation of identity, position and ethos in Joint Church Academies

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Abstract: This paper summarises the key findings of a research project into the identity, position and ethos of jointly sponsored church academies. The research sought to investigate how joint church academies are situated within the field, how they relate to existing academies and the maintained church school sector and how they articulate their vision and ethos. Using a case study approach and drawing on open interviews, documentary analysis and non-participant observation the researcher had the unique opportunity to document the process of opening two joint church academies and to compare this with data from a more established joint church academy. The research questions were: how do jointly sponsored academies articulate their objectives and Christian ethos and, what is the relationship between school structures and the ethos of the academy?

Introduction

This paper reports findings from a research project which sought to investigate how joint church academies relate to existing academies and the state-funded church school sector and how religious communities negotiated and articulated their identity, position and ethos in three joint church academies. The research comprised an interview based study and was carried out in three joint Church academies during the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11. This paper will briefly introduce the context of church sponsored state funded schools in England and Wales together with the policy context of academies before exploring the existing research around joint church schools and academies. It will then account for the methodology and analytical framework of the study before presenting key findings. Little empirical research has been carried out within Christian sponsored academies and so this study contributes to our understanding of their culture and ethos and their relationship to the

broader state-funded church school sector. This paper will argue that in the cases researched little attention had been paid either to the relationship of the new joint church academies to the existing academy and church school sector or to the views and aspirations of the two pre-existing communities coming together in the joint school.

Church Schools and the Academies Programme

The sponsorship of state-funded schools by the Church of England and Wales has been widely debated through the lens of social justice. Its persistence in the new educational landscape of academies, trust schools, federations and free schools is therefore worth examining. The debate commonly centres on the rights of parents to exercise their religious freedom versus the rights of children to individual autonomy, the nature of religious education and worship, inclusion and religious segregation and perhaps more fundamentally whether it is legitimate for a contemporary liberal secular state to fund religious schools. Different aims and objectives have underpinned denominational conceptions of church school education. Chadwick (2012) writes that for Roman Catholics in England, schools were primarily a means of protecting the interests of a minority community ‘discriminated against in a society that distrusted their loyalty to the Crown’ (p. 44). She writes that the Church of England charted a middle way looking both to the education of the nation and to the education of children in its doctrines. The relationship between different types of church school, the relationship of state-funded church schools to non-denominational state schools and the relationship between schools inside and outside of local government control has historically been an uneasy one.

The creation of academies, functioning independently of local education and enjoying greater freedoms and preferential funding arrangements is another contemporary issue largely explored in the research literature through the lenses of school choice, local democracy and social justice. The academies programme in England dates back to a Conservative government initiative of the early 1980’s. City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were established in 1985 (DES, 1986) to serve areas of urban social and economic deprivation. CTCs were sponsored by private business, philanthropists and Christian churches and foundations that originally had to invest two million pounds; CTCs received per capita funding but had independent school status. This model of sponsorship was adopted by the New Labour

government who extended the City Academy policy as it was then known, pledging to open 400 new academies by 2010 (Gillie & Bolton, 2010).

The present Coalition government continues to support the expansion of academies and their sponsorship by religious groups. The extension of the policy to include primary schools quickly increased the number of academies open. At the time that the fieldwork for this research was carried out, academic year 2011/12, there were 1,419 academies open in England (DfE, 2011). As of the 1st December 2012 there were 2543 academies open (DfE, 2013). Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland set their own education policy because of devolved government and they do not have academies. Every school which is rated as outstanding by the English inspection system the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) may convert to academy status and these are known as ‘converter’ academies, new academies are known as ‘sponsored’. The requirement to be in an area of low socio-economic deprivation has been dropped as has the requirement for sponsors to put in an initial financial investment. Schools judged by OfSTED to be failing may be converted into academies and run by sponsors of existing successful academies. The policy has generated fierce public and academic debate. General questions about equity, funding and the decline of the common school have been as controversial as the more specific concern about state funding for religious schools in view of a perceived rise in religious terrorism and sectarianism. This together with the sense that the landscape of education in England is undergoing considerable transition makes jointly sponsored church academies a fruitful area for considering how these relationships might manifest themselves today.

At the time of writing there were three academies sponsored jointly by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Whilst this is a small number there is also a small but distinct group of joint church schools within the maintained state sector who, as yet, have not taken up academy status (approx 20, source English ARC no date, accurate figures are hard to obtain since the Church of England and the Catholic Education Service list different numbers of joint church schools in their documentation). The Church of England is the largest provider of academies in England with 50 sponsored academies and 156 converter academies; the Roman Catholic Church has 8 sponsored academies and 140 converter academies (figures correct at January 2013, sources The Church of England and the Catholic Education Service).

To date there has been little empirical research available in relation to academies and none published in relation to those sponsored jointly by the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. A number of authors write about academies at a policy level particularly in relation to the issues of democratic models for both education and social policy. Ball (2005, 2007) has written extensively about the relationship between the academies programme and what he sees as an anti-democratic re-shaping of the public sector through the participation of unaccountable modern philanthropists and businessmen. Gunter, Woods, and Woods (2009) carried out a case study of a secular academy with a specialism in business and enterprise. They used the case study to test out a typology of entrepreneurialism and have argued that traditionally individualistic business models rather than those based on collective democracy still dominate conceptions of enterprise in academies (Gunter, Woods, and Woods 2009). This author found that these models were also dominant in the CTCs and academies sponsored by non-denominational Christian foundations (Green, 2009a). She suggested that Christian academies are adopting off the peg models of leadership and organisation without using their freedom to innovate as a means to critique dominant economic and utilitarian models of education (Green, 2009a). Hatcher and Jones (2006) raise questions about local democratic processes with their research into the consultation procedures surrounding the establishment of new academies. They argued that the process of creating academies fails to take seriously local opposition to the loss of their community schools and threatens parental and community rights. Hatcher (2012) has examined the response of the Labour opposition to Coalition education policies and argues that they offer no alternative vision for enhanced local democratic accountability. Gorard (2005) used the DfES own figures on school performance between 1997 and 2003/04 to contest the policy discourse that academies improve standards in education. He found that there was no evidence that CTCs and academies were performing any better than the schools they replaced.

Two research studies explore the Christian ethos and core values of academies sponsored by a non-denominational Christian foundation. Pike (2009) has investigated the relationship between the core values of the sponsor and the aspirations of pupils at Trinity Academy in Thorne near Doncaster. Trinity Academy was designated the most improved academy nationally in 2007 and is sponsored by the Emmanuel Schools Foundation (ESF). Pike (2009) concluded that the combination of business sponsorship, seven core values (honourable purpose, humility, compassion, integrity, accountability, courage and determination) and Christian ethos played a significant role in transforming opportunities for academy students.

This author's ethnographic study of a CTC and two academies sponsored by ESF was the first to be carried out in the UK (Green, 2009a). The study found (Green, 2009a) found that although students demonstrated good biblical knowledge and valued being informed about religion, there was little evidence that the core values and Christian ethos were a strong enough vehicle to radically reshape their worldview. Whilst both Green (2009b) and Pike (2009) agree that the use of core values in the ethos creates a consensual space where different conceptions of the origins of values and morality can coalesce, this author argues that the practical effect is a dilution of the Christian basis of the ethos being communicated to students (Green, 200b). Whilst this research was not carried out in church sponsored academies it raised pertinent questions about how ethos is perceived by students, how it is embedded or not embedded in structures, pedagogy and curriculum and whether it effectively communicates the distinctive Christian educational experience intended by sponsors. These questions overlap with those raised by Chadwick (1994) in the context of joint church schools; Chadwick's work remains the only significant research in this area and will now be briefly reviewed.

Using the story of St Bede's Joint Anglican/Roman Catholic School in Redhill where she worked as the Head of Religious Education (RE) Chadwick (1994) discusses a range of issues common to the creation and development of joint church schools. It is important to briefly identify these issues as they were used in the analytical framework for this study into joint church academies. Chadwick (1994) poses a number of questions which may rightly be asked of all church schools but which joint church schools have to explore from the perspectives of two traditions with their attendant concepts of parish, different theologies and different cultural norms and assumptions; all of which can create points of conflict. These questions are: how does the church school explicitly nurture the faith of its pupils, while educating them to be intellectually critical? What should be the relationship between the church school and the nearby parish communities? In what ways, if any, will the ethos or community spirit of a church school be distinguished from that of a county school? To what extent will that ethos affect the teaching of non-religious subjects in the curriculum and the way in which members of the school relate to each other (p. 5)? Chadwick's research shows that although there are issues particularly pertinent to the joint church school context (such as if and how to celebrate Eucharist or how to teach RE in a joint church school) joint church schools also wrestle with many of the same questions that other church schools do when working out their role in an increasingly secularised society. As school communities (staff

and students) become less familiar with the church and its teachings, issues around theological and spiritual literacy, what constitutes distinctive church school leadership, how to relate rightly to the expectations of parents and how to respond to the pressures of government policy become more difficult to resolve. The joint church academy research project afforded a unique opportunity to chronicle the process of creating two new joint academies and observe sponsors and senior leaders attempting to address these questions and issues; in this sense it builds directly on Chadwick's work updated for our contemporary educational context.

The next section of this paper will present the methodology of the study and demonstrate how these questions underpin the analytical framework for analysis.

Methodology

The data collection and analysis for this research was carried out during the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11. There were two primary research questions: 1) how do jointly sponsored academies articulate their objectives and Christian ethos? In particular how do they manage this in predecessor schools during the transition phase and 2) what is the relationship between school structures and the ethos of the (proposed) academy?

These questions were investigated through data collection in three joint church academies all of which were secondary schools (11-18 years). Two were in the process of development and officially opened in September 2011 and one had been open for over a decade. One academy amalgamated two predecessor schools, one academy replaced a Roman Catholic Church school and one academy was a new school. One of the academies was located in a large metropolitan city, the other two in provincial towns one a former manufacturing town; all three were located in areas of relatively low socio-economic status with a predominantly white working class population. Data was collected through documentary analysis and interview. Documentary analysis comprised documents available in the public domain such as prospectuses, consultation documents, expressions of interest from sponsors as part of the academy bid and other material which had been lodged with the Department of Education. Interviews were semi-structured, with topics and prompt questions organised around the following three themes: i) background (this refers to context and the nature of participants' connection with the academy); ii) sponsors and core values, and iii) transition (transition from predecessor schools where relevant). The participants comprised a purposive sample chosen because of their role in relation to the academy. These roles included: principals and vice

principals, diocesan education officials, governors, representatives of management consultancy and building management companies, clergy and sponsors. In all three academies access was gained via a letter of introduction using a known contact wherever this was possible. The interviews snowballed in that participants would recommend other people to interview and so further contacts were then followed up. A total of fifteen interviews were carried out. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher (this author was the sole researcher). All participants were sent a copy of the transcript and given the opportunity to amend the record if they wanted to, no amendments were made. All of the participants were over the age of 18 and able to give written informed consent, they were given written information as to the aims of the study, how the material would be used and how to withdraw; participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point and without giving a reason. Participant data has been fully anonymised but due to the small size of the sample it may be possible to identify the academies themselves even though they are not named in any writing about the research. As a result Academies are not reported on individually in this research and participants were informed that this would be the case. The gender of participants is not given in this paper nor their specific job title in order to further protect their anonymity, selected quotations from transcripts have been used to provide supporting evidence of key findings but summaries in the author's words are also used where it is necessary to protect anonymity. A delay of at least two years has been built in to the publication of this research so that no material appeared at the same time as the new academies opened.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework used for analysis in this research draws on an approach modelled by Grace (2002) in his research into Catholic school mission in the context of the marketisation and secularisation of the English education system and further developed by this author in relation to Christian sponsored academies (see Green, 2012). Grace framed a set of theoretical questions using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, capital and symbolic power to investigate what forms of capital leaders in Catholic schools may draw on in the contested field of Catholic education.

Bourdieu's social analysis assumes that being situated in culture regulates our assumptions, relationships and values and reproduces them in our social practice (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu used the concept of field to define the dimensions of the social space, so for

example a system of education would operate as a field. Grace (2002) would describe Catholic education as a field. This illustrates an important point about the concept of field, which is that different fields in the social world overlap; so Catholic education in England overlaps with the field of state funded education. In this study Catholic education also overlaps with Anglican education, a field that Chadwick argues (1994, 1997 & 2012) is traditionally regarded as less cohesive or tightly bounded and this will be discussed in relation to the data below. This overlap creates competition within fields arising from different assumptions about what education is for and manifesting itself in competition for position and cultural recognition.

Habitus refers to our deeply rooted assumptions, not explicitly reflected upon but held almost subconsciously, which stem from our worldview. There is a lot of discussion in the literature about whether Bourdieu equated habitus with ethos and it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore this (see Smith, 2003, for further discussion), however the concept of habitus within Bourdieu's work is very much connected with the idea of worldview particularly in the context of religion. Rey (2004) writes that Bourdieu understood the religious habitus to be 'the specifically religious dimension of an individual agent's habitus that manifests itself most apparently, though not exclusively, in the religious field' (p.337).

Bourdieu argued that the acquisition of cultural capital primarily through the social institution of education can confer distinction upon an individual and therefore material advantage (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, proposition 3.1.3. p.35). Symbolic power refers to the power that can be exercised by those groups in society who have more cultural capital. This power is often exercised institutionally via social structures such as education or religion. In Bourdieu's framework the concept of symbolic power is used to track the exercise of power within an institution and explores how certain practices are recognised and legitimated to validate and control the accumulation of cultural capital within the field.

In this study Bourdieu's concepts have been used in tandem with the questions that Chadwick (1994) posed in relation to church schools to frame a set of analytical questions with which to interrogate the data. A full list of questions can be found in the endnote to this paper but are broadly grouped as follows: i) questions for structural analysis, including questions like do joint academies constitute a 'field' or are two separate fields in operation (Catholic and Anglican) if so what is the relationship; ii) theological questions, such as what theological understanding underpins concepts of education and ethos and iii) Church school questions,

these comprised the questions posed by Chadwick and an additional question: what is the relationship of academies to the dual system? The key findings of the research are discussed below.

Key Findings

This paper presents three intersecting findings from the joint church academies research project: First, joint church academies are sites of intersecting and competing fields of education; second, they are relatively isolated from other joint church schools and third, there is considerable potential for the aims of the church sponsors to be diluted at critical points in the creation of a new academy. Joint church academies as sites of intersecting and competing fields will be discussed first and then the isolation from other institutions and the dilution of sponsors' aims will be considered.

Joint church academies as sites of intersecting and competing fields

Ball (1990) has written about the ways in which national policies are interpreted and often reinterpreted at a local level. The greater the number of stakeholders involved, the greater the potential is for competing understandings of the nature and purpose of education. Whilst academies are designed to be independent, innovative and relatively free from the politics of local education provision the number of sponsors involved, complex consultation processes and stringent levels of national accountability may in fact create a very complex web of competing interests (see Ball, 2005, Hatcher and Jones, 2006). With respect to the joint church academies these interests may be grouped under the following headings: denominational, socio-economic and political. Discussion in this paper primarily focuses on competing denominational interests and will seek to illustrate how these are overlaid with perspectives that stem from class or from status and positioning e.g. clergy and laity.

All three of the academies in the research sample had multiple sponsors. In addition to the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church this included a variety of organisations such as universities, and other independent schools. All three of the schools were located in areas of relatively low social and economic status where middle class parents educated their children predominantly out of area. One academy in the research sample was a new school and two others replaced predecessor schools, admissions arrangements were complex and did not necessarily replicate the catchments of previous church schools or overlap with parish boundaries. There had not previously been a Church of England secondary school in any of

the sample locations. This means that from the perspective of at least two local communities their local non-denominational school had been closed and replaced with a church school. In both of those instances there was also some opposition from Catholic parents to the perceived loss of ‘their’ Catholic school and this is an important theme to explore further as an example of competing denominational interests in the field overlaid with social, economic and political factors.

Where links with distinct local communities constituted geographically, or in the case of church schools denominationally, are diluted by the closure of a local school we might expect that the nature of the community in the new academy takes on even more significance. The research found that for some participants, expectations of how the denominational character of the school would explicitly manifest itself ran high and in all three sites the voice of the Catholic community, lay and clerical, was more clearly discernible than that of the Church of England. Grace’s (2002) work around ‘catholicity’ and the historic legacy of Catholic schools being closely connected to their respective communities helps to account for the strong current of feelings associated with the closure of predecessor Catholic schools in this sample; but so too does the social-economic context and political (with a small p) identity of the communities involved. Bourdieu’s conceptual tools help to reveal the inter-play between religious beliefs/assumptions and those associated with class and regional identity. Participants who lived and worked in the areas surrounding the predecessor schools pointed out that they constituted relatively insular communities. In one instance a Catholic school served a pocket of lower socio-economic status bounded by very wealthy communities in the rest of the town. The school roll had been falling and one Catholic participant articulated some frustration that wealthier Catholic families tended to educate their children out of area. There remained a strong perception that the Catholic school served the poorer community and hadn’t received the proper credit or support for hanging in there and offering a Catholic education to local Catholic families.

From the perspective of diocesan officials Catholic places in all three locations needed to be secured in the context of falling rolls regardless of whether places were offered in a Roman Catholic school or a joint Catholic and Church of England school. One of these interpretations is not necessarily right and the other wrong, the point is that they co-existed as narratives within the same space and they illustrate competing assumptions about the nature and purpose of religious faith and education. One of the dividing lines is undoubtedly denominational. In all three sites participants who identified as Catholic expressed some

uncertainty about how the Church of England understands its educational mission and ethos, in some cases this was expressed as outright scepticism. There was an assumption that Catholic education was somehow stronger with a more clearly understood vision. Of even more interest was that this view was articulated by both Catholic and Church of England participants. For example one Anglican participant described the presence of the two churches in one location as follows:

‘The Catholic church is very evident and powerful and structured, the Anglican Church less so. But of course there’s a weighting factor in that because the Catholic Church was strongly connected through [name of predecessor school removed to preserve anonymity]. And of course what this gave rise to as we moved forward into consultations was that the Catholic Church were better mobilised. And what really did emerge was, I don’t know what you’d call it really, vicarious religiosity...the Anglicans were new on the block in that sense, and our structures and processes were less well formed’.

[Interview Transcript, I2]

From the perspective of the sponsors it seemed that Anglican participants in the research acknowledged that *The Way Ahead* (2001) review had asserted a clearer vision for distinctive Anglican schooling but also felt that joint church academies could benefit from the clarity of purpose and structural power associated with existing forms of Catholic education.

In both of the locations where a new academy replaced a Catholic predecessor school the local opposition from Catholic parents was interpreted by Anglican participants as having more to do with class than religion. One participant argued that local parents whose children attended a community school:

‘were so thrilled by the fact their kids were going to have the opportunity to be in a new school they weren’t worried about the fact that it was going to be a church

school. They just wanted their children to have a chance. But the Catholic parents were very outspoken and the bottom line was they didn't want their kids mixing with [name of community school removed to preserve anonymity] kids'

[Interview Transcript, I1].

This research project did not interview parents and so the validity of this interpretation cannot be established; it has been included as an example of where the competing perspectives lie and how issues of religion and class intersect. It illustrates the positioning of 'other' denominational groups in the field as the problem and it may also reflect misconceptions on the part of other participants about how Catholic parents understand the place of the school in their parish community.

Another line that intersects with denominational difference in the field is the distinction between Catholic clergy and laity. Those members of the clergy who were interviewed regarded parents and students as part of the community of the church whereas lay participants pointed out that many families were un-churched and saw the community of the joint academy as distinct from that of the church. One Catholic lay participant reflecting on his experience of working with the Church of England for the first time in the creation of a new joint church Academy felt that the Church of England was more realistic about this and summed it up as follows:

"This is just what I got from the Church of England whereby there's no assumption that they [pupils] will necessarily have been churched...So even though they're coming to a, you know, it's not a joint faith, a Church of England school it's a recognition of where they're starting from, you know in terms of any journey that they have. Now I think with Catholic, you've got your primary schools. It's still, I suppose, how can one put it, there's still hope that people would have gone to a church, should be churched. And it's more 'they've never been to church isn't that awful' sort of approach rather than an acceptance of young people's lives or family life today and what the nature of the mission is"

[Interview Transcript, I7]

The point here is not to argue that Church of England schools are better attuned to the needs of an un-churched pupil population; rather this is evidence of the existence of different perspectives regarding the purpose of education and the nature of the community in a church school which all have to find a way to co-exist in a joint church academy. In this particular instance it is interesting that working with a different denomination enabled this participant to articulate a level of frustration with the approach of some Catholic clergy and to be confronted with different ways of representing the community of the school. Having identified this arena of denominational struggle the key question is to what extent is a new cultural understanding (Bourdieu would call this 'habitus') being formed in the site, how is this negotiated, who are the key spokespersons i.e. where does the power lie in the construction of ethos? To link this to the questions that Chadwick (1994) poses: in what ways, if any, will the ethos or spirit of the joint church academy be distinguished from its predecessor school(s)? These questions will be explored further as we discuss the relationship of joint church academies to joint church schools, to the local church communities and the articulation of sponsors' aims.

Isolation from other institutions and the dilution of sponsors' aims

Using Chadwick's (1994) research as a point of comparison the study found that all three joint church academies had faced a very similar set of issues to those encountered by St Bede's Redhill as it was established. Bringing two church communities together for worship, wrestling with identity as a church school, and deciding on an RE curriculum are all identified by Chadwick (1994) as potentially divisive issues that joint church schools routinely face. Due to the lack of empirical research in this area it is not clear whether they are resolved in similar ways across the joint church school sector. They were not addressed in the same ways in the three joint church academies. Two out of the three joint church academies had decided not to celebrate joint Eucharist in order to side step an issue deemed too controversial to tackle in their particular diocesan context. In one of these academies attendance at services in the chapel was voluntary; the chapel was a tiny room tucked away to the rear of the building and not the kind of focal point often found in church schools. In all three joint church academies the RE curriculum had been an issue of significant concern for Catholic parents and sponsors. Catholic sponsors had been adamant that RE should have 10%

of curriculum time; one participant explained that not achieving this would have been deal breaker in the creation of one of the academies:

‘I think if we’d said well actually it’s only going to be 9.5% I think the whole thing would have gone into halt.’

[Interview Transcript, I4]

In her work Chadwick (1994) acknowledges that resolving potentially contentious issues around worship, religious identity and RE can be painful but argues that in order for partnership between denominational groups to be real and meaningful they need to be openly discussed with the whole community before decisions are reached. Furthermore she argues that these kinds of discussions are a significant part of the process for bringing two church communities together and becoming secure in their identity. A participant involved in the opening of two joint church academies explained how important it had been for the sponsors to work together to drive through their vision. When asked how issues of disagreement had been handled this participant seemed to think it was better that such challenges be resolved by sponsors and if necessary dealt with behind closed doors:

‘there were different ideas around the table but at the end everyone wanted to achieve the same thing and I think these sponsors are the same and I think that is part of the journey that they’ve had...working together I think things get ironed out in the end and get sorted out.’

[Interview Transcript, I3]

This contrasts with the experience Chadwick (1994) writes about at St Bede’s where the staff from the amalgamating schools were encouraged by the head teacher to meet regularly in departments and working parties to discuss all aspects of schools life and to report to on what their contribution could be. Well-attended staff prayer meetings continued weekly for up to two years at St Bede’s after the joint church school opened. A significant area of difference

for the joint church academies of course is that they were opening as new schools. In one case the previous school, and by association its staff, was deemed by OfSTED to be failing, furthermore the failing school was the non-denominational school; leaving the Catholic predecessor identified in the community as the stronger academic partner. The institutions were going through a stressful regulatory process called Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) which protects employee's terms and conditions when a business is transferred to a new owner (ACAS, 2013). When asked to comment on whether staff had been consulted and included in discussions about the new academy, its ethos, its curriculum and its new building one participant argued that this was difficult to do this without raising people's expectations around what their own jobs might be. It was considered important by participants that the joint church academies be seen as completely new schools and that, what were perceived as, poor teaching practices and low standards were not simply transferred across:

‘you do want to consult with staff and engage with them but that’s also tricky because things will be different in the new academy, people might not be in the same role that they’re in now when they transfer across... And we’re going to start coming to a tricky part now with starting the TUPE process because I’m not sure if some staff realise that and I’m wondering if some staff just think yeah, I’ll transfer across and I’ll just do what I do now - which defeats the object of the Academy.’

[Interview Transcript, J3]

This is potentially one of the critical areas where the aims of the sponsors carefully written into the education brief and other planning documents may not be passed on to the wider community. The process of tackling potentially divisive issues and taking a position on the nature of worship, RE and determining the core values of the ethos in the joint church academies happened separately from the appointment of staff and often before the recruitment of principals and senior leaders.

What is interesting is that although these issues have also been contentious for other joint church schools the research found no evidence that sponsors had talked to the governors or diocesan teams involved in their creation. There had been some consultation with other academies and a sharing of experienced personnel, local authority and diocesan expertise during the planning stages. For example, participants who held posts in other established academies served on committees or offered advice, but the bulk of their contribution was to areas not considered 'religious' such as legal matters, finance and project management. The prevailing view was that the joint church school identity and Christian ethos was really a matter for the sponsors. This is partly explained by the fact that the academy policy has deliberately created a sector which does not have to operate in relation to other schools outside of Academy chains or federations. Government policy does actively encourage sponsors to take on chains of academies and to build on their experience of running them but this author has argued that this encourages the uncritical duplication of existing structures and operating processes (Green, 2009a). This author also argued that academy models were very hierarchical with top down systems of decision making and she found that this was also compounded by a theological hierarchy (Green, 2009a). In other words staff who shared the religious background of the sponsors were more visible in the academies both in relation to decision making processes but also as spokespersons for the Christian ethos (Green, 2009a).

In one of the locations in the sample there was a considerable history of the Roman Catholic and Church of England dioceses working together in partnership. It was not possible to thoroughly examine the theological frameworks written into the education briefs for the joint academies in the sample since they were not all publically available. Analysis of the interviews carried out with key participants who had been involved in writing the briefs and closely involved in the bid process for the two new academies suggested that the framework largely relied on the language of 'shared values' and articulated a commitment to be faithful to both traditions and welcoming to those of 'other faiths and none'. Some participants talked about the importance of sharing 'gospel values' and contributing to the mission of the church. The majority of the participants interviewed were frustratingly vague about the theological basis for the mission and ethos in the joint church academy that they were involved in. The exception to this were two Catholic participants who were able to clearly articulate a theology of Catholic education but who were very frustrated with the experience of working on the creation of a joint church academy, 12 months later they were no longer

working on the project. The wider research literature around church schools in England suggests that school leaders lack theological literacy and are not confident about articulating the ethos and mission of their schools in these terms (see Green and Cooling, 2009). One of the participants argued that appointing a head teacher and leadership team to take ownership of the sponsors' ethos and to mobilise it in the institution was a critical point at which a sponsor's mission and ethos might be diluted:

'The question for academies... is who is the guardian of the mission? Is the mission clearly identified? Is it owned is it checked on Is it in the heart of the pace or is it in the mind of one person? So I've seen academies I have to say produce great responses but along comes the head teacher: I'm going to do it this way. That's the autonomy of the profession.'

[Interview Transcript, I2]

This reflects contemporary discourse in which school leaders, in particular principals, shoulder almost sole responsibility for the success or otherwise of their schools. Within the academy model principals effectively function as Chief Executive Officers. In a church academy, let alone a joint church academy, this places considerable trust in their ability to lead a faith community and yet this will have been addressed only briefly, if at all, in their training. With the caveat that a detailed analysis of the education briefs has not been carried out the findings from this research suggest that a clear theological rationale for the distinctive identity of a joint church school may not have been handed on to senior leadership teams in the first place. The rhetoric around Christian ethos in the documentation of the academies researched often portrayed a community built around a shared set of values but in practice sponsors assumed that ethos could be 'created' in the new school using a top down delivery model. This model is often dependent on explicit ethos statements, teaching in RE and assemblies and in the pastoral care structure (Green, 2009b). Donnelly (2000) describes this as a positivist model arguing that rather the true nature of a school ethos needs to be researched in the gap between what is imposed top down and what is generated from the bottom up. This author's research in this gap found that structures and processes, curriculum and pedagogy communicate ethos to students often more powerfully than explicit teaching

about Christian values in RE and collective worship (Green, 2009a). Chadwick's (1994), Donnelly (2000) and Green's (2009a) research all suggest that ethos is not something that can be worked out in advance and handed on. If a joint church school ethos is best formed through negotiation within a community, as Chadwick (1994) argues, then the approach taken by the joint church academies in this study would appear to be flawed.

Conclusion

This research project sought to investigate how joint church academies are situated within the field, how they relate to existing academies and the maintained joint church school sector and how they articulate their vision and ethos. It found that joint academies are sites of intersecting and competing fields of education, operating in relative isolation from the wider joint church school sector and from the church communities associated with predecessor schools (where applicable). Whilst sponsors used the language of 'shared values' or 'gospel values' to talk about their aims and objectives it did not seem that the creation of joint church academies was rooted in a robust theological framework. Potentially divisive denominational issues such as the Eucharist, collective worship and RE were discussed and resolved by the sponsors, often before senior leaders or teaching staff had been appointed. This contrasts with the nature of collaborative working recommended by Chadwick (1994) as an essential component of establishing a joint church school committed to meaningful partnership between denominational communities. The research concluded that this approach had the potential to dilute the distinctive aims of joint church school education.

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EndNote Analytical Questions

Questions for structural analysis:

Do Joint Academies constitute a 'field' or are two separate fields in operation (Catholic education and CofE education) if so what is the relationship?

What assumptions do actors from different fields bring with them? What are the different tastes and dispositions?

What are the hierarchies?

Are strategic decisions and institutional structures entirely new? What assumptions are embedded in them?

What are the arenas of struggle?

How does a long run in time or a short one relate to embedding assumptions?

Habitus: Is a new habitus being formed? How is it being created, through crisis, imposition?

Which old beliefs persist? NB sub-consciously held, not necessarily reflected on thus might draw on ideological, theological, pragmatic conditioning.

Is geographical location and historical context significant and are these co-dependent?
Significance of local and national trends.

Symbolic Power: what are the symbolically powerful relationships? Who is the spokesperson? Are these traditional or different? What is intentionally being constructed? What will impact practice?

Cultural Capital: what has value? How are valued networks constructed, who is part of them? What has currency? What are the dominant discourses for Academies, faith academies in particular?

Is building and architecture symbolic?

Is there a relationship between class and ecumenism?

Theological Questions:

Do leaders speak in terms of faith formation?

What theological wells do leaders draw on?

What theological understanding underpins concept of education and ethos?

Do different theological approaches compliment, co-exist, conflict, dominate?

Where is religion in this space? Relationship to the marginalisation of religion (Chadwick, 1994, p. 5)

How is worship and word manifest?

Is there a common view of Christian education within an Anglican and RC context?

Church school Questions:

What is the relationship of Academies to the Dual system?

Questions posed by Chadwick (1994): how does the Christian school explicitly nurture the faith of its pupils, while educating them to be intellectually critical? What should be the relationship between the Christian school and the nearby parish communities?

In what ways, if any, will the ethos or community spirit of a Christian school be distinguished from that of a county school?

To what extent will that ethos affect the teaching of non-religious subjects in the curriculum and the way in which members of the school relate to each other? (p.5)