

Education and the whole child: enabling children to flourish and achieve in small primary schools

A resource for leadership development



Kate Adams, Anne Lumb, Rachael Paige, Jane Tapp



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**FOUNDATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP**

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The names of the following two partners have been fictionalised:
Pineview Primary School, Lincolnshire
Sanford Lane Junior School, Lincolnshire

Diocese

Dr Anne Lumb, Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham

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INTRODUCTION

Many educators have become increasingly concerned about the pressures on teachers and children in school which have accompanied the rise of the performance-driven culture. There are fears that schools' responses to pressures to raise standards, be accountable and manage ever increasing workloads have come at the expense of nurturing the whole child. The Church of England Education Office states that many schools report feeling under growing pressure to make artificial choices between academic rigour and children's well-being. ¹

In 2016, The Church of England established their Foundation for Educational Leadership, a partnership of schools, dioceses, universities and others dedicated to supporting the development of leaders in education working towards a vision for education based on a Christian view of 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). ² Through three strands - of networks, programmes and research - the Foundation is committed to empowering leaders to enable all children in all schools to flourish. In its inaugural year it funded projects which shared their aims, of which this is one.



Our project is designed to identify the factors enabling children to achieve and flourish in rural primary schools. The team worked with five schools with different Ofsted gradings, three of which have a Church foundation and two which do not. They conducted focus groups with school leaders, interviews with parents and worked alongside a year 6 child in each school. The team discussed enablers and challenges for schools in nurturing the whole child in the context of a performance-driven environment.

This resource is one outcome of the project: an evidence-based document designed to facilitate in-house staff CPD on leadership for the holistic development of children. It is intended to help you reflect on good practice, and some of the more intangible elements which often go unseen and take conscious actions to enhance practice. We hope you find it useful to stimulate discussion, reflection and action.

Jane Tapp, Kate Adams, Anne Lumb, Rachael Paige



USING THE RESOURCE

All of us on the research team have worked in schools and know that there are no simple answers to the issues schools face, and that time to take stock and reflect is a rare commodity. We value those (limited) opportunities to think and discuss and hence have designed this resource to initiate conversation and reflection in your teams.

Our approach is intended to be inclusive, and you may wish to use all of it, or parts of it, with teachers, teaching assistants, wider support staff, governors, parents, children, clusters and other partners as you wish.

All of the schools participating in this study are relatively small and located in rural contexts, none of which draw on highly affluent areas. We deliberately invited schools with different Ofsted gradings to take part so that we could gain insights into how they may or may not take different approaches. This resource begins with a short case study of each one to set the scene.

We then identify five key themes which emerged from the research. We approach each one in the same way:

- A summary of the theme
- Short, pertinent quotes drawn from the adult and child participants
- A 'Talking Points' box with questions which you may want to explore with staff, other partners and/or children as appropriate

A space for notes and plans is included at the end of the booklet.

Of course you can use this resource in any way that is appropriate for your school. However, whilst the themes are connected, we would suggest using the resource over different CPD sessions so that you can reflect deeply on each one. We encourage you to consider which elements of your practice are intentional, developed through formal plans together with those that have emerged organically.

Although initially aimed at supporting small, rural primary schools, we also hope that there may be some value for larger schools too. If you agree, please do pass on a copy to your colleagues.

The team and The Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership would love to hear your feedback on the resource. To contribute your views, please complete the form which accompanies this pack.



MEET OUR SCHOOLS



ALL SAINTS HARWORTH CHURCH OF ENGLAND ACADEMY, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

All Saints Harworth is an average size primary academy serving the ex-mining communities of Harworth and Bircotes. Most pupils are of white British heritage. There is a strong sense of community deriving from the villages' mining heritage. The majority of children come from households with a low percentage of adults with higher education qualifications. However, most parents are in employment so the proportion supported by pupil premium funding is lower than the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The school has held an Ofsted rating of 'good' since 2013. There are strong links with the local church.

COTGRAVE CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Cotgrave Church of England Primary School is smaller than average, with four mixed age classes. Most pupils are of white British heritage and come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of children with disabilities or special educational needs is above average whilst the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and therefore eligible for pupil premium is average. The school secured a 'good' judgement from an Ofsted inspection in December 2015, having experienced a period of 18 months as a 'requires improvement' school. There are strong links with the local church, with church and school being located at the centre of the community.

PINEVIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL,* LINCOLNSHIRE

Pineview Primary School is located in a village and consists of four mixed-age classes. Children are drawn from the village and surrounding rural areas and have to travel out of the village for secondary education. The social make-up of the village is varied including significant poverty and deprivation alongside wealth and privilege. The proportion of pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs is just above average. The proportion who have a statement for special educational needs or an education, health and care plan and those for whom the pupil premium provides support are above average. The mobility of pupils is also higher than other schools, nationally. At the time of the first phase of data gathering, Ofsted had graded the school 'requires improvement' and shortly afterwards the school became part of a Multi Academy Trust with new Executive Head and Head of School who were in post during phase two of the research project.



SANFORD LANE JUNIOR SCHOOL,* LINCOLNSHIRE

Sanford Lane Junior School is located on the edge of a small town, with two classes in each year group. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average and the proportion for whom the pupil premium provides support is above average. A small number of pupils experience circumstances that could make them particularly vulnerable and a non-teaching inclusion Leader/SEND Co who works across the Multi Academy Trust is based at the school. Pupil premium funding is received for over half of pupils. Although the school has not been inspected by Ofsted since it converted to an academy and joined a Multi Academy Trust, prior to conversion the school was graded 'outstanding'.

SUTTON-CUM-LOUND CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Sutton-cum-Lound Church of England Primary School is located in rural north Nottinghamshire and has three mixed age classes. An increasing proportion of children come from outside the designated catchment area. The size of cohorts varies year on year with a significant number joining the school mid-year, mainly from the Traveller community. After an earlier Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement', the school was inspected in 2015 and rated as 'good'. The parish church is located close to the school and there are strong links between school and church.

*These names have been fictionalised. The remaining schools are named with their permission.

THEME 1:

TEACHERS' WELL BEING AND THE WHOLE TEACHER



A concern for children's well-being was a constant theme throughout the research, with all schools placing it at the centre of their practice. However, an underlying, recurrent theme was the importance of teachers' well-being – as well as that of the wider staff base; a theme which was integral to leadership. This related to the idea of the 'whole teacher', comparable to that of the 'whole child'. One Chair of Governors was clear that this was part of his remit:

I see my role really as being supportive to Vanessa and to the staff ... I'm often just a listener ... I'm an outside sounding board for Vanessa, for Vanessa to let off steam and for other staff as well you know if they want ... I think that's a leadership role in its own right ...

Several schools reported a school culture of close professional relationships where well-being was prioritised and monitored informally by each other. By providing support and reminders about work-life balance, a caring culture prevailed amongst staff. Some had a more structured approach, for example one teacher described 'conscious decisions' to 'take care' of all in the school community. Following a low categorisation from Ofsted, one Head Teacher led a process of purposely deciding what was important. This included valuing staff and their well-being in the wider context of nurturing the whole child. A newly appointed Head teacher also talked about minimising unnecessary tasks so that staff could focus on 'what matters'. Other approaches to teacher well-being included:

- leading by example (Head Teacher explicitly modelling self-care and family time)
- giving staff time when pinch-points emerge
- providing INSET on stress management
- management actively monitoring staff well-being
- ensuring that 'extra' activities do not become an expectation
- making all meetings useful and time-efficient

Various participants talked about presenting their 'real' self to the children, drawing on their own life experiences and sharing them where appropriate. Yet knowing teachers holistically can be difficult given pressures on time. One leader noted how the emphasis on boosting maths in Year 6 had filtered down to Years 3 and 4 where there was a focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar which was:

... not getting the best out of some brilliant teachers we have got, or the creativity or imagination they have got, and therefore in a lot of ways, not getting the best out of our children

Such drawing on staff talents not only enables teachers to flourish but brings richness to the curriculum, in turn benefiting the 'whole child'. Specific examples of a rich curriculum that schools identified included the desire to be creative, rather than constrained by a narrow curriculum, the importance of outdoor education, sport, the arts, trips, being experimental, giving teachers freedom with curriculum design and children having fun. At times these were expressed as aspirations rather than as current everyday practice, but where expertise was shared and individuals were able to champion their passions these things were possible.

As will become apparent in the following sections, the notion of the whole teacher underpinned and influenced thinking and practice across many aspects of school life.

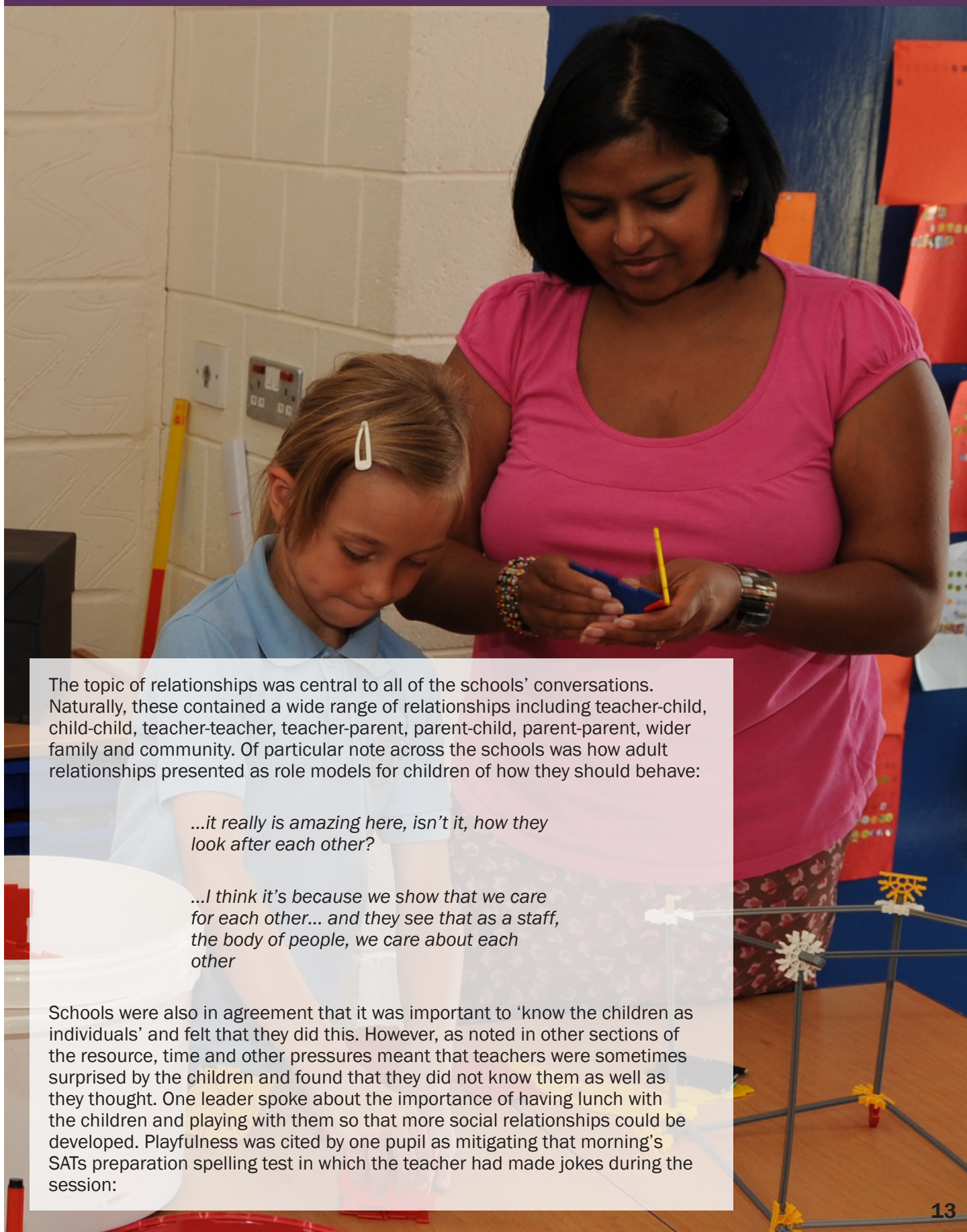


Talking Points

- How does your school enable teachers' well-being? Where is it visible? (e.g. valuing staff in school newsletters). Is there an awareness of the school's wide ranging expectations on teachers and the impact they have on their well-being?
- How do you recognise the teacher as a whole person? (e.g. being flexible when a teacher has personal difficulties)
- Where might teacher well-being be enhanced? Focus on one key area at a time, and brainstorm practical ways in which the school could support you (e.g. streamline expectations for paperwork)
- What structures are in place for monitoring and supporting teacher well-being?
- If teacher work-load is reduced through focusing on 'what matters', how do you decide what this includes? Who contributes to the discussion and how are decisions made and communicated?
- Could teacher talents and passions be used more effectively to enrich both pupil and teacher experience?

THEME 2:

RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR COMPLEXITY



The topic of relationships was central to all of the schools' conversations. Naturally, these contained a wide range of relationships including teacher-child, child-child, teacher-teacher, teacher-parent, parent-child, parent-parent, wider family and community. Of particular note across the schools was how adult relationships presented as role models for children of how they should behave:

...it really is amazing here, isn't it, how they look after each other?

...I think it's because we show that we care for each other... and they see that as a staff, the body of people, we care about each other

Schools were also in agreement that it was important to 'know the children as individuals' and felt that they did this. However, as noted in other sections of the resource, time and other pressures meant that teachers were sometimes surprised by the children and found that they did not know them as well as they thought. One leader spoke about the importance of having lunch with the children and playing with them so that more social relationships could be developed. Playfulness was cited by one pupil as mitigating that morning's SATs preparation spelling test in which the teacher had made jokes during the session:

[The best thing about this morning was] when we had Miss Williams for spelling ... Even though I don't like spelling I do like Miss Williams ... she makes me laugh, she makes everyone laugh.

Building relationships with parents was at the heart of all discussions, again with implications for time management, but with recognition that positive parent-school relationships support pupil learning most effectively. Parents valued these relationships too, citing a warm welcome in school and good communication as important factors.

[The school is] So warm and [like a] family, you know, they take everybody as an individual ... you can get a feel for what they do as a school and how they support each other and how they reward the children's achievements



Concern for the whole child and their social and emotional well-being extended to pupil-pupil relationships and parent-parent relationships. Most schools have strategies such as playground buddies to support children in the playground, and use collaborative strategies in the classroom. However, some of the schools in our study adopted approaches that extended the scope of pupils' potential relationships. One school planned mixed-age activities where older pupils worked alongside younger ones with both academic and social benefits for both. In another, older pupils were each paired with a younger one for collective worship. Staff relationships with each other were also seen as a model for the children, with teachers noting that their care for and support of each other was a direct influence on how the children acted in their peer relationships. Discussions indicated that lived relationships rather than lessons about relationships were at the heart of their approach.

Parent-parent relationships could also provide a model for pupil-pupil relationships and one school discussed the need to actively manage a difficult situation between parents so that children's relationships were not affected. However, the positive effects of supportive parents in welcoming new parents on the playground and informally inducting them into the school ethos and expectations were also noted and highly valued as a way of establishing a consistent approach.

The background of the page features a photograph of a school staff member, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a patterned top and a lanyard with a badge. She is interacting with a young boy with short blonde hair, who is wearing a dark jacket. They are both looking down at something out of frame. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Talking Points

- How do you manage all the different types of relationships?
- How do you maintain good relationships when challenging decisions need to be made?
- Are there any types of relationships which are more difficult to manage than others? If so, what strategies might be useful to improve them?
- How do your policies seek to manage relationships? What is the relationship between policy and practice?
- How do staff develop meaningful relationships with pupils and sustain them when time is at a premium?
- Do you use strategies to build cross-age relationships and what are the benefits of doing so in your context?
- How is communication with parents managed? Are there school-wide approaches to sharing information and how onerous are these? What individual approaches do staff take and could these be shared more widely?
- Are parents active in welcoming new parents? Is the potential of parents to act as advocates for your school encouraged and supported?
- How do lived relationships feature in your approach to relationships education?

THEME 3:

WHOLE CHILD – WHOLE CURRICULUM

The publication of league tables has been a key driver in shaping the curriculum, with increasing amounts of time being devoted to those subjects which are reported on. This is often to the detriment of subjects and activities which do not appear in the tables. All of the schools valued creative subjects and sought to preserve them in their timetables, and to celebrate them in various ways such as through awards, talent competitions or performances. However, pressures of time limited opportunities in some cases, as will be discussed later in theme 4.

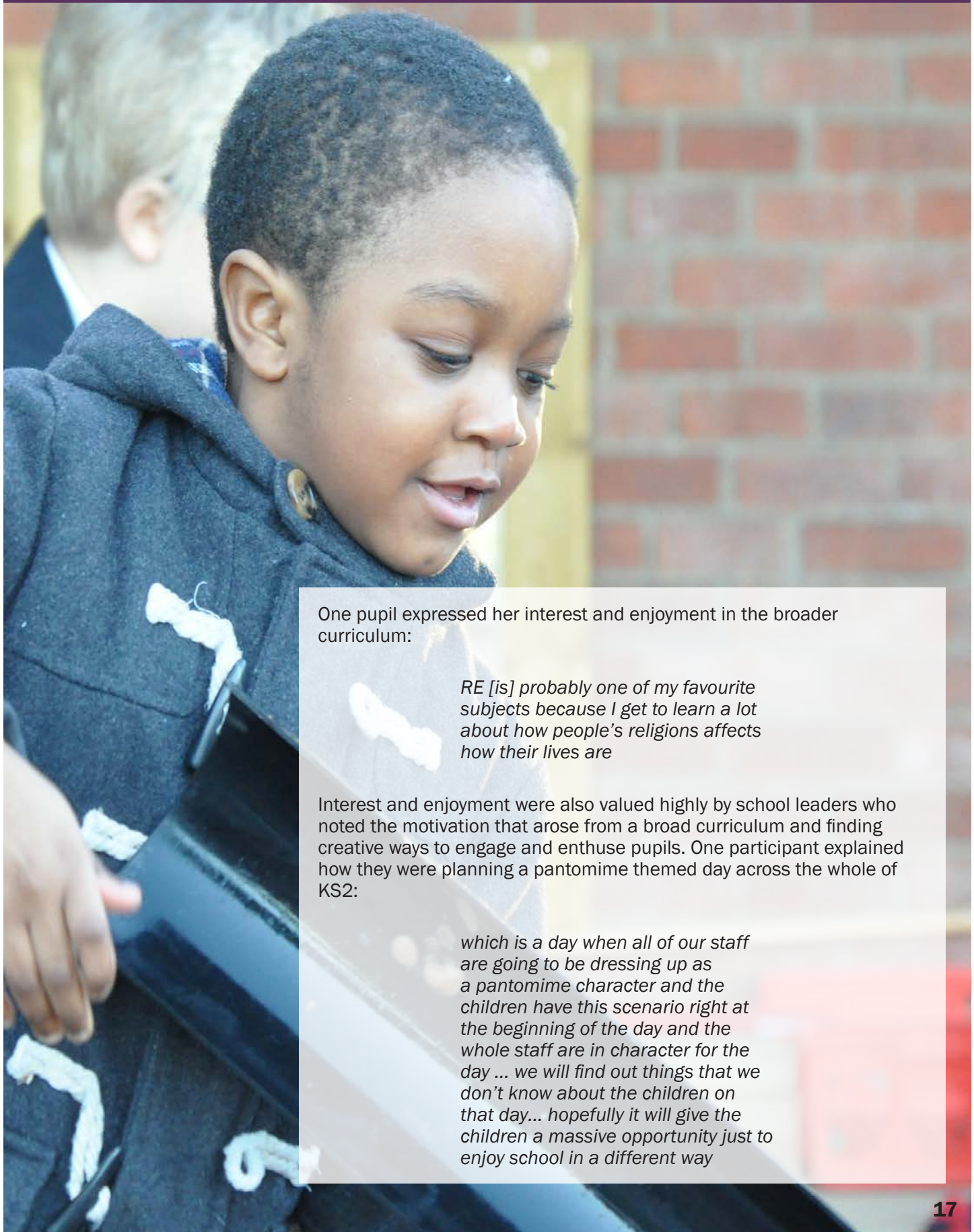
Participants in all schools talked about how they integrated creative approaches such as art and drama with topic work. One participant explained that, *'A lot of our children really love the hands-on experience and the creative learning, and I think sometimes if it is performance-driven... it is hard'*. Another participant talked about paying for pupils to have music tuition. Not only were these subjects valued in their own right, but one Head Teacher spoke about concerns that over-emphasising Maths and English on their timetable would be counter-productive:

We'd lose everything in that sort of sense and we wouldn't achieve levels that we needed to achieve if we [focussed so heavily on Maths and English]

Targets are often seen as leading to a narrowing of the curriculum, but achievement in the broader curriculum was seen as giving children a sense of achievement and aspiration that could build self-esteem. Participants were conscious that the focus on academic subjects being so high was potentially detrimental to those who did not achieve well in them. One leader said:

For children who struggle it's so much more difficult to keep them motivated, so you just have to find something else that they are good at... such as art... and try and put that alongside. So that when the results come through and they've not done as well as their peers and they know they haven't, you can say 'well you know you did your best... but look what you've done here, look at this artwork that you've done... But we shouldn't be having to do that






One pupil expressed her interest and enjoyment in the broader curriculum:

RE [is] probably one of my favourite subjects because I get to learn a lot about how people's religions affects how their lives are

Interest and enjoyment were also valued highly by school leaders who noted the motivation that arose from a broad curriculum and finding creative ways to engage and enthuse pupils. One participant explained how they were planning a pantomime themed day across the whole of KS2:

which is a day when all of our staff are going to be dressing up as a pantomime character and the children have this scenario right at the beginning of the day and the whole staff are in character for the day ... we will find out things that we don't know about the children on that day... hopefully it will give the children a massive opportunity just to enjoy school in a different way

A photograph of a male teacher with a beard, wearing a black shirt with yellow accents, leaning over a desk. He is looking down at two young students, a boy in the foreground and a girl behind him, who are both focused on their work. The boy is wearing a white t-shirt and the girl is wearing a blue shirt. They are in a classroom setting with a window in the background showing greenery outside.

For the children the day would provide a memorable learning experience but as staff explained, their focus was on inspiring writing:

even something as fantastic as this, so the speaking and listening they get from it from discussing who has committed the crime and how they know and that sort of side...

There is a good bit of inference and deduction

But it's geared towards inspiring writing

Another teacher noted the value of the broader curriculum that was not at the expense of Maths and English but enhanced learning in those areas:

Be ambitious... believe in yourself... sometimes taking that risk is worth it and that it's not all about text books and making sure that you just don't do English and those sorts of things, I am determined to do topic and do science and those sort of things... with certain children their faces light up more in that afternoon than they do [usually] because it is a different way of learning things... Don't be afraid to give it a go

Talking Points

- What do you consider to be the elements of the 'whole child'?
- How does your curriculum enable these different elements to be developed?
- Is this conception of the whole child a shared understanding or are there significant differences in colleagues' views?
- If there were no performance measures in education, how would you design your curriculum?
- Are there any aspects of your curriculum you could change to further enhance the development of the whole child?

THEME 4:

MAKING THE MOST OF TIME

Time is often a strong indicator of what is valued: either valued by the school and/or what is valued by policy and inspectors. Time can relate to a number of issues including:

- How time is allocated to different subjects and why, and the implications for the whole curriculum
- How time is used to focus on nurturing the whole child, either implicitly or explicitly
- How and when time is spent in informal situations to support individuals (colleagues, children, parents) in times of difficulty
- The amount of time staff give to work in the evenings, weekends or holidays, potentially impacting on their well-being

A common thread of conversation related to a lack of time to do more of what schools valued. In some cases this related to solving problems in the curriculum. One curriculum leader said:

Yes, I'd love to go in to school in the morning and say 'okay, who would you like me to take out into the garden for some creative learning for 25 minutes?' Ah, no, you can't do that, we're in the middle of a maths lesson.

In contrast, another school noted that:

It's quite easy sometimes to slip into... we need to do this and we must do that... [it's easy to push] art or whatever to this side because they haven't finished this writing and all those sorts of things. I think it's just making yourself do it because it's so important to those children

Swimming was offered as an example related to time constraints in three schools: Two lamented the loss of swimming from their curriculum, with it having been too expensive for one to sustain, and with insufficient time in Year 6 for the other. A third school also struggled to maintain it but valued it highly so they altered their timetable to start the swimming lesson before the start of the normal school day rather than lose it from the curriculum.





In other cases, the lack of time related to people, staff and children alike, especially in relation to knowing them well. Two schools acknowledged that in some cases they had not recognised talents in some of the children. One described how the school had put on a production and had been proud of how, with their parents sitting in the audience, the children ‘raised their game’ on the night. She continued:

You put them on stage and they do solo singing and I thought, even I thought, I didn't even know they could sing. You know, that was amazing... some of these little shy ones and all of a sudden they've got this solo spot, difficult to start with for them... they've been fantastic

The ‘busyness’ of the school day can leave little time for reflection and collective worship in can offer a time when all pupils and staff can step away from the demands of the curriculum. One pupil noted:

[I enjoyed] having two minutes silence (for Remembrance Day) ... because it gives you time to be in silence remembering the people who died in the war

A Head Teacher explained the temptation to withdraw pupils from collective worship but argued that this was counter-productive:

Of course the easiest thing in way would be to say well you know collective worship let's put that in a less prominent part of the day, let's have that so staff don't need to come in, let's work with the child during that time because the focus is all on standards. But yet you would lose, if the staff weren't in, you'd lose the ability of the staff to translate what's gone on in collective worship and pull it into any other bits of the day, the children would be missing out on things

There is a relationship between use of time and pupil and staff well-being. Current concerns about mental health suggest that time supporting individuals in difficulty is essential to maintaining well-being. Additionally, as noted in Theme 1, identifying ‘what matters’ can help to alleviate time pressures for staff.

Talking Points

- If use of time is a reflection of what is valued, how are your values visible in how you prioritise your time?
- To what extent are your values similar to and different from those of your inspection body(ies)?
- If you had more time, what changes would you make in school to facilitate the development of the whole child?
- What is the most valuable time you spend with children in school?
- Could you create more of these opportunities for valued time?

THEME 5:

LEADERSHIP FOR A VALUES-BASED ETHOS



Schools have many priorities. Some identified by our participants included:

- Nurturing the whole child
- Nurturing the whole teacher
- Caring for the well-being of all children and all staff
- Offering a balanced whole curriculum
- Making the most effective use of time
- Achieving high educational outcomes
- Achieving high ratings from inspection bodies

How, then, do school leaders in small schools manage to balance these potentially competing priorities? A key theme underpinning conversations in this project was the place of the school ethos. All schools participating in the project valued the whole child and had high expectations for outcomes; but these alone are not sufficient for high rated inspection outcomes. Only one school had a current 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted, one was 'good', one was in 'requires improvement' and two had recently moved from that category to 'good'.

Whilst there is no straightforward solution for leaders working within the pressures of a performance-driven system, the specific context appeared to influence the perceived agency of individual schools. Whilst participants in one church school spoke of feeling 'channelled' and that their teaching lacked the spontaneity they would like, participants in both community schools expressed a more explicit sense of lack of agency, with one leader explaining:

You know, if somebody said suddenly, 'OFSTED are not going to look at your SATs results: they're just going to look at the spirituality of your kids' then that's what we would be doing all next week. Or if OFSTED said 'we are going to concentrate on how good the children are at football', we would all be out training

Another from the other community school spoke about spending time in the school garden looking at beans:

But you're shoe-horned into this thing of performance based and showing progress... you know if I was out there for twenty-five minutes that's twenty-five minutes of something that I'm not ticking off to say it's written down that they know

Church schools operate in a slightly different context from community schools since they also receive judgements through the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS). SIAMS arguably places stronger emphasis on the whole child than OFSTED does, albeit that OFSTED inspects provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Having a clear narrative for decisions about policy and practice enables schools to articulate their vision and ethos.

This resource was the result of research in a small number of schools and so any findings are tentative. However, it may be that the explicit language of the Christian narrative embedded in SIAMS provides a context that supports school leaders to articulate their vision and ethos in relation to a broad curriculum and spirituality.

The emphasis on staff teams working together to articulate their values in relation to the whole child across different but related themes also underpins the approach taken in creating this resource. We conclude with quotes from a parent at a church school about the way in which Christian values are put into action, and a pupil at a community school who knows that his teacher values effort, team-work and persistence. Both return our thoughts to a central theme that lived values emerge through relationships:

[The best thing is] General caring about all the children ... they are a Christian based school and it is you know coming through, it is not just by word but it is by action ...

[My teacher] was proud when we did the ... tag-rugby tournament and even though we came fourth out of four teams he was still proud because we never gave up and we kept going even though some of us got hurt but we didn't stop we still carried on



A group of students are sitting around a table, focused on writing on papers. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the backs of several students as they work. The papers have some handwritten notes, including "Students in 1000", "150 books", and "lots of". There are also some boxes and a cup on the table. The overall tone is educational and collaborative.

Talking Points

- Without using the name of your school, can you describe in 3 sentences your school's distinctiveness? Try to avoid using generic phrases such as 'friendly' which might be applicable to most other schools
- What are the sources and foundations of your ethos?
- How was your school's ethos established and how has it been developed?
- How do you ensure that you 'live' your ethos?
- How might your current Ofsted (and SIAMS) rankings affect your approaches to leadership? For example, do you feel compelled to act more cautiously if you are not an 'outstanding' rated school?

MOVING FORWARDS:

PLANNING GRID

	General points arising	Points for action	Time scale
THEME 1: TEACHERS' WELL-BEING AND THE WHOLE TEACHER			
THEME 2: RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR COMPLEXITY			
THEME 3: WHOLE CHILD – WHOLE CURRICULUM			
THEME 4: MAKING THE MOST OF TIME			
THEME 5: LEADERSHIP FOR A VALUE-BASED ETHOS			

USEFUL RESOURCES

Websites

British Red Cross: *Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC)*:

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/FAQs/SMSC>

Christian Values for Schools: **www.christianvaluesforschools.org.uk**

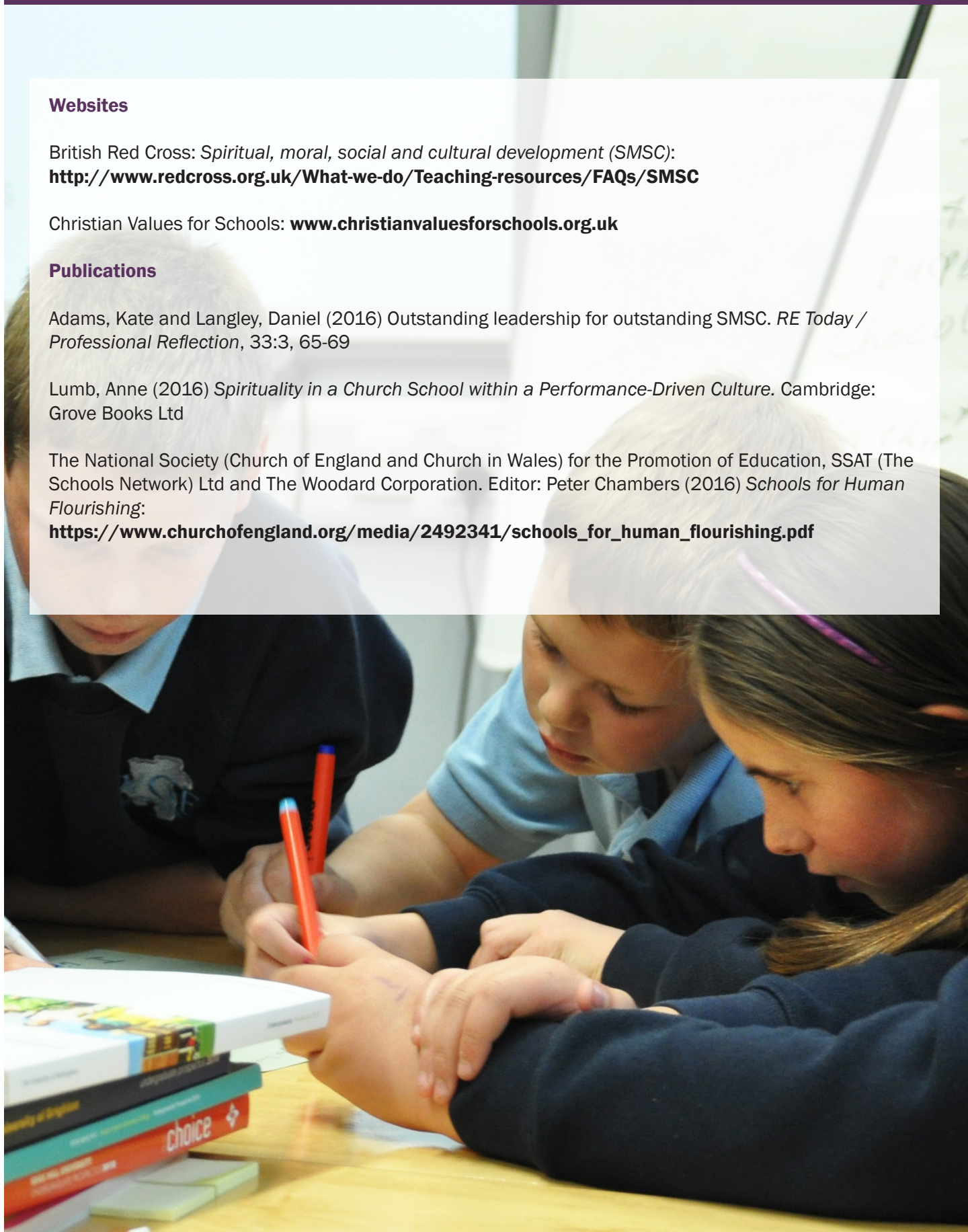
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Lumb, Anne (2016) *Spirituality in a Church School within a Performance-Driven Culture*. Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd

The National Society (Church of England and Church in Wales) for the Promotion of Education, SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd and The Woodard Corporation. Editor: Peter Chambers (2016) *Schools for Human Flourishing*:

https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2492341/schools_for_human_flourishing.pdf





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¹ Church of England Education Office (2016) *Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*. London: Church House

² The Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership (2016) Available at: <https://www.cefel.org.uk/>



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