

Guidance for Church schools on being both distinctively Christian and inclusive of all faiths and none



Background

In 1811 the **National Society** of the Church of England set out to establish schools for children of every parish in the country. The schools were to educate the poor of the parish, and not specifically for Christian children. However, from the outset schools were to be both 'distinctively Christian' and inclusive of all members of the community. The state introduced its own 'community' schools in 1870 and in 1944 there was full integration of Church and state education. Foundation governors were retained to ensure that links with the parish church and diocese remained.

In **Voluntary Controlled**

schools the local authority took control of the budget, the upkeep of the school building and the admissions policy.

Foundation governors formed a minority of the governing body.

In **Church Aided** schools governors maintained the

finances and admissions and **foundation governors** formed the majority on the governing body. The same Act of Parliament enacted that all state schools were to include a daily act of collective worship and to teach Religious Education.



Church of England schools welcome everyone – Christian families and families of all faiths and none. They strive to be inclusive while not compromising their foundations. In some areas communities around a school may now predominantly comprise those of other faiths. Schools recognise that the inclusive nature of their school should ensure the best education for all children. The Christian ethos should not be as 'add on', but instead enhance the teaching of the National Curriculum. Christian beliefs and values should underpin the daily life of Church Schools. Pupils should be given a sound basis for making life choices. Pupils should leave a Church School having been offered the opportunity to experience and understand Christian beliefs and the Christian narrative.

The School's Legal Position

The Christian foundations of a Church School are laid down in three legal documents:

- The Trust Deed
- The Designation of schools having a religious character order
- The instrument of government. The latter includes an ethos statement:

'Recognising its historic foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church at parish and diocesan level.

The school aims to serve its community by providing education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers all its pupils.'

A Church School remains as a Church School for its entire existence. On conversion to academy Church Schools retain their Church foundation. The importance of this foundation should be made clear on the school website, within policies and should be clearly explained to prospective parents. All interviews for employment at a Church School must ensure that candidates are aware and supportive of the school's Christian status. Although foundation governors have a particular responsibility for Church School matters, all governors are leaders of a Church School, and should support this partnership from appointment as they seek to move the school forward in all areas, including as a Church School. The school's leadership team should together formulate and drive a clear vision for the school which includes promoting the best possible education for the pupils, within the context of a distinctively Christian community. This is usually articulated in a mission statement that reflects the school's Christian ethos. It is best practice for a school to select a set of core Christian values to underpin the life of the school. Shared values are essential to promote respect and integrity in relationships. Values rooted in the Bible and the Christian narrative can empower children and give the school community a model to live by. Church Schools have a role in nurturing those of Christian faith, and have a freedom to speak openly about their beliefs. For those of personal faith there are opportunities to model and share their own beliefs, while in no way imposing these on others. The **impact**

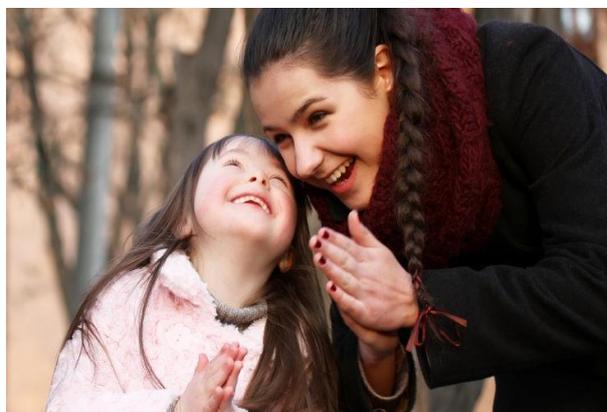


and effectiveness of this distinctive Christian character is monitored through the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools.

Worship

For all schools a time of 'assembly' is a legal requirement. In Church Schools this time should be spent in an act of **collective worship** 'in accordance with the Trust Deeds' – distinctively Christian, indeed Anglican, in its content. It should be marked as a special time when all children and members of staff have the opportunity to come together and celebrate the Christian character of the school by sharing prayer and reflection, engaging with Bible stories and songs, celebrating festivals and welcoming visitors from the local church and parish.

The values driven approach at Church Schools makes them popular with families of a variety of faiths. Church Schools respect the integrity of different faiths and life stances. Worship should be inclusive, engaging with its diversity as it builds positive relationships with families and local faith communities. The way in which worship reflects the foundation of the school



should be made clear to prospective and new parents. It is important that children and their families are reassured that their presence in collective worship is valued and that, by attending a Church School, children are expected to respect the rights of those for whom the faith is important.

Those leading collective worship use inclusive language. For example, 'You may like to pray or reflect with me' allows those present to adopt whatever stance they find helpful, be it another faith's prayer position or a reflective posture. It is important to encourage pupils to use prayer times for their own devotions or reflections to enable children to make a personal response. However it is important that children are taught that many people, including many Christians, find it helpful to close their eyes and keep their hands together. The school should also raise awareness of shared values and celebrate achievements which cross cultural and religious boundaries.

There may be particular times when worship is used to nurture those who profess the Christian faith. Participation in a service where bread and wine is shared should be

discussed with parents and children beforehand. Christian clubs should be extra-curricular and open to all.

There is a legal right for parents to withdraw their child from worship (or sixth formers to withdraw themselves). This right was introduced in the 1944 Act in response to Jewish and Roman Catholic families who wished to retain their right to take their children out of the new state schools to receive religious instruction from their own priests or rabbis when a school of their faith group was not locally available. All parents have the right to withdraw their child from worship. Schools are strongly advised to discuss each case of potential withdrawal individually. Appropriate provision must be made for the child during the time of worship and parents informed of this.

School Life

Church Schools should declare their special status. The signage must state that the school is a Church of England school and opportunities should be taken to display the school's mission statement, vision, Christian values and links with the local church and parish. Planning across the curriculum should include regular opportunities for teachers to refer to the Christian values.

Within the school environment, areas should be set aside for quiet, reflection and prayer in order to nurture children's spiritual development. These areas may include opportunities to write or say prayers, read Bible stories or meditate. They should be open to all, regardless of faith. **(See Guidelines for prayer and a separate advisory note on the facilitation on Muslim prayer available on the diocesan website.)**

Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) is a compulsory subject at all state funded schools and academies. It provides opportunities for all pupils to explore possible answers to life's challenging questions, to ponder and formulate their own views and ideas, and to understand and respect some of the various religions and beliefs across the world. RE has an important role in teaching children to respect and understand the views of others. In Church Schools RE should allow children to develop their ability to connect, critically reflect upon, evaluate and apply their growing understanding of religion, belief and philosophy for themselves, the world and human experience. RE should be seen as a journey of discovery, with pupils acting as detectives looking at the many questions and explanations offered by people of different faiths and cultures and of none.

For Church Schools the national Statement of Entitlement states that the teaching of Christianity should make up two thirds of the RE curriculum. Other faiths should be taught in the remaining third. However it is important that each faith covered is taught in some depth to explore what its members believe and why. This promotes 'religious literacy' and guards against stereotyping ideas and misunderstanding. There should be an understanding of the concepts and narrative at the heart of each faith studied. The curriculum should be spiral and revisit key areas with increasing depth. As children progress there should be more scope for them to compare and contrast different religions. However it is important to remember that every faith is diverse, and not all members of the same faith believe the same things about everything. It is important to use language such as 'Some Christians believe....' Or 'Most Jewish people believe....'. The recent resource Understanding Christianity models this well in the 'Creation and Science' unit for years five and six.



While the provision for withdrawal also extends to RE lessons, if taught well RE should be inclusive and challenging and further every child's understanding of the world. It should allow children to discuss their views and to respect the views of others.

Church and Community Links

Links with the local church are a key foundation of all Church of England schools. Members of the parish, foundation governors and the vicar provide a link between the church and the school which is be meaningful and ongoing. This contact is additionally supported by links with the Diocese and with other Church Schools and academies working together to ensure the best for their pupils.

Schools should visit their church regularly for worship and RE work. The school should feel part of the church community as well as the local community. Being involved with intergenerational work, fundraising for charity and inviting the local community into school are all ways in which the school can model the Church of England's Vision For Education as contributing to The Common Good.

Conclusion

The Christian character of a Church of England school should have an positive impact on the local community. This is monitored by SIAMs inspections because it is recognised as

essential to the character of a Church school that it is both distinctive and effective in meeting the needs of all learners. It is the aspiration of those who lead Church schools that their pupils will be given an opportunity to reflect on Christianity and other world faiths and to know what it is like to live in a faith community.