A Distinctive Church School Ethos

A Practical Handbook
Ethos

inherent spirit; character; ethical elements

How do we care for, nurture and educate children – and in doing so, what messages do we give them? A Church School offers a unique opportunity for all staff to model Christianity to children and parents – in management speak – to ‘walk the talk!’ Across the whole school day and across the whole curriculum we can show our pupils, parents and school community how being a Christian makes a difference. Not just in worship and in RE lessons, but in the way we approach everything that goes on in our establishment. In everything we do, in all our documentation, in the school organisation and management, it should be obvious that the school is distinctive. There is a huge difference between a good school and a good Church School.

Every Church of England school in its Instrument of Government has an ethos statement, usually:

Recognizing 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.

What does this mean in practice? The report, ‘The Way Ahead’ (which can be downloaded here) recognises “The way this ethos statement is interpreted will reflect the individual circumstances of schools, which vary greatly. But it will be the aspiration of all that Christian values and principles will ‘run through every area of school life as the writing runs through a stick of rock’.”

This handbook attempts to provide some practical ways in which the ethos can be demonstrated and encourages discussion to give a Christian perspective on the organisation of a Church of England school. It is far from the complete answer and you are encouraged to add your own ideas and school practices to make a really useful resource for staff training and the continuing development of your Christian school.

You will know them by what they do (Matthew 7:16)
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What makes a good Church School?

A model of excellence is more likely to occur where all members of the school family are committed to the same aims.

**A good learning environment includes:**
- a deliberate attempt to link the gospel of Christ with the daily life of the school;
- an atmosphere of encouragement, acceptance and respect;
- a sensitivity to individual needs where children's self-esteem and confidence grow and where they feel able to make mistakes without fear of criticism;
- partnership between adults and children;
- sensitivity towards the beliefs, hopes and fears of parents;
- providing stepping stones to and from the community;
- a curriculum that combines academic rigour with fun, sensitivity and prayerfulness.

**A good Church School will offer the pupils the opportunity to:**
- reflect on the importance of a system of personal belief;
- recognize the place a Christian faith has in the lives of people;
- develop a sense of wonder, awe, curiosity and mystery;
- understand the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of their actions for themselves and others;
- be creative, questioning and imaginative within a broad Christian framework that recognizes the importance of experience, personal values and respect for the beliefs of others;
- recognize, respect and celebrate cultural diversity.

*If we subscribe to these values then it must affect what goes on in the school. We want the children and parents to know us by our actions and not just by our words.*
The first few steps

A Director of Children’s Services once said, ‘the most important part of a school is the first few steps’.

What greets visitors as they enter the school can clearly indicate the ethos of a school. The welcome it gives and the choice of words and displays used in the entrance area highlights the importance placed on the school’s Christian distinctiveness by its staff, governors and children.

The school sign

The first thing that most people see of a school is the school sign. It should tell people that this is a Church School and may also include a statement about its Christian nature to indicate the school’s distinctiveness.
Other visual statements
In addition to the school sign there are many other ways schools can visually express their Church School distinctiveness.

A permanent piece of artwork declaring the Christian nature of the school.

The entrance hall is an ideal area for the school to creatively state its Christian foundation, indicating a place dedicated to nurturing children within a Christian family atmosphere.

Christian symbols, words and artefacts will be present throughout the school with explicit reference to their significance to the Christian faith.

Displays, etc, which are evident in non-church schools will have Christian values associated with them.

Displays will value children’s work and be regularly updated.
Reflective areas

Worship is an ideal vehicle for spiritual growth, but by no means the only one. Another important area to be developed in the school is the incidental opportunities for reflection throughout the school environment, either inside or outside the building. It is appropriate to provide a special place where children can be quiet and think. This area might be used for children who need some ‘time-out’; to be creative or read; to repair a ‘fall-out’ with a friend or simply ‘to be.’

It is important that this place is not seen as any one thing, the naughty area or the reading area, but rather a reflective area for thought. We want children to think about their own feelings, their relationships with others and especially their place in God’s world.

These reflective areas should be sympathetically sited (not in a corridor), comfortably furnished and contain artwork and objects conducive to a sense of awe and wonder. They should be linked in some way to Christian values and have a greater depth than just the normal SEAL (Social and Emotional Acts of Learning) material.

School reflective areas are also useful as a place of conflict resolution. Make a space at school – a comfortable space where conflicts can be resolved and where children can begin to learn to sort out their own problems. Many schools share this concept of conflict resolution and actively create an environment in which the children can be active.

You could use a corner, an old office or part of a class room, a sort of ‘den’, a child friendly area. Make sure the area is NOT in a corridor or too public a place and make sure that the area, in its design, is conducive to the idea of resolving problems. When children come along with an issue, a fall-out or something similar, make sure that your first response is to ask them to sit and discuss the issue together. It’s amazing how often this works... for a number of reasons.

Children feel enabled to help resolve their own problems – they don’t get into the idea of telling tales in order to get someone ‘in trouble’. It is so good for their independence and well-being. Always make sure the area is
discretely supervised (near the office or staffroom) and always ask the children to stay there for a little while. Say ‘I’ll call in and see you in a few minutes to see how you are going on’. This uses and develops the children’s natural ability to see right from wrong and to create their own lasting relationships. Most situations in school are caused through more than one person making a childish error – ‘six of one …’ Children should be given the chance to see this for themselves and to be involved in reconciliation. You will notice that some individuals have a particular talent for this type of activity and they can be given some degree of special responsibility – try making school friendship councillors.

Reflective areas in the classroom also give teachers an ideal opportunity to explore links between curriculum areas and spiritual development. It also allows them to give the children spiritual ‘prompts’ which may be appropriate throughout the week, Christian season or year. Although all of these elements may not be present at one time, it would be the mark of a good Church School to find some of them. A dusty bible in a corner propped against a candle does little for a classroom and nothing for the spiritual development of children. A thoughtful, prayerful and challenging classroom however awakens children’s spirituality and can help them grow into caring and active Christians.
### A cross or other Christian symbol
- This may be purchased by the PTA or local parish or made by the children or parents. It could be a cross from another culture. An Ichthys (the Christian fish symbol) is an easy symbol for the children to know and can be displayed in a number of ways, as hangings, or on windows.

### A reference to the Christian season
- This could be an advent calendar (not ‘countdown to Christmas’) from Fairtrade or made by the children. A Lent project (‘Love Life, Live Lent’) or a Saint’s day, Harvest thoughts or any part of the Christian year. More information on the seasons can be found in the DBE publication ‘Season to Season’ available from Church House.

### A reference to a moral issue
- eg Fairtrade fortnight, Christian Aid week, Shoebox appeal, or any charity or issue supported by the class or school.

### A thought for the week
- eg ‘Jesus said ...’; ‘When you think...God listens’; ‘God always forgives you’ etc. These provide a good opportunity for teachers to raise an issue which gets some discussion in circle time or RE.

### Class curriculum displays supported by a scriptural reference or quote.
- eg A display on the creation headed by a quote, ‘In the beginning ...’ Genesis Chapter 1; a display on The Lost Sheep ... Matthew Chapter 18 v 12 – 14; a display on friends entitled ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ Matthew Chapter 22v39. There are lots of opportunities for using scripture in school in an everyday way, so that the children learn to appreciate where these phrases originate.

### RE display brought to life by reference to the child’s own experience.
- eg a display on Joseph and his brothers might have some children’s writing about how they sometimes feel jealous. A display on the Resurrection might have an element of children’s opinions about not believing people, just like the disciples didn’t believe Mary.
Reflective areas are also a great opportunity for private prayer and there are many ways in which you can help children pray:
As you put another brick in the wall to help build this house, say a prayer for someone who shares your home.

Say a prayer for peace somewhere in the world. Write the name of that place on a dove and add it to the cross.
Worship and Prayer

Worship
Worship is a central element of a Church School. It should be for everyone, for the teachers and for the children. It should bond the group and be the most important time of the day. It certainly shouldn’t be a time for extra maths, music tuition or reading for less able pupils.

For the staff and the children school worship is the major contact with God in the week. Church Schools shouldn’t see worship time as an opportunity for a phone call or a bit of marking or an extra coffee. Worst practice would be teachers being in for worship only when visitors or inspectors were in school. What message is given to children if they see the teachers abandoning them during daily worship?

Governors are responsible for the Collective Worship Policy and should be involved in the monitoring and evaluation to ensure that worship remains an integral and positive part of the school day.

Foundation governors may wish to take a role in the planning or leading acts of worship (only if they feel comfortable and able to do so effectively).

 Collective worship guidelines

The Diocesan Collective Worship Guidelines give ideas of themes, planning, preparation and resources for worship. A copy can be downloaded here or in printed form from Church House.

Worship Workshop

Here you will find some teacher and child-friendly ideas and systems for worship. There are sections on worship planning, resources, songs and hymns and lots of seasonal ideas too.

Go to www.worshipworkshop.org.uk
A good weekly pattern of worship might be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>service taken by teachers and TAs in turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Family service taken by a visitor, parents and parishioners invited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Songs of Praise – everyone in for a good sing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Roundabout worship (see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Sharing (good work, celebration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This could vary this from term to term, but should always engage the children.

If the local minister is really good at children’s worship then the school is blessed. If he/she isn’t, they should not be put in the position of boring the children to death. There’s no worse advert for the church, and children have long memories. You can encourage the vicar to go on some training to help them in their work with children or ask another member of the ministry team or congregation to lead worship if they are particularly skilled in this area. The vicar can still be involved but doesn’t have to plan and lead the whole worship if children’s worship isn’t their strong point. Perhaps they can finish the worship with a blessing?

Try something different:

- **Children sitting wherever they wish in the hall**
  Just like they do in church. They need help with this but when it works it is wonderful.

- **Roundabout worship**
  On a set day of the week each member of staff takes worship in their own classroom but the children take it in turns going to each teacher.

- **Children choosing the hymns and music**
  Let them make a plan - what hymns are going to be sung and what music everyone will enter to.

- **Dads’ services**
  A special service where just dads are invited. Give them plenty of notice and the hall will be full.

- **Year 6 sitting with reception**
  Have a worship buddy. Year 6 love to sit and help the new reception and they are spellbound by year 6. everyone is happy.

- **Services taken by children**
  use 'Worship Workshop’ with the children to help them plan.
This is a worship opener from Woodcock’s Well CE Primary School. The words in normal type are said by the leader (adult or child) and the bold words are said by the whole school as the elements are placed.

We come in this act of Worship

In our need, and bringing with us the needs of the world
(The candles are placed)
We come to God who has come to us in Jesus
And who walks with us on our way
(The bible is placed)
We come with our faith and with our doubts
We come with our hopes and with our fears
(The cross is placed)
We come as we are, because it is God who invites us to come
And God has promised never to turn us away
(The candles are lit)

Praying

Children are really good at praying in fact very often better than adults. They haven’t got the liturgical clutter that we have developed. Give them opportunity to be involved in school prayers.

- In the classroom – children can take turns to say a class prayer;
- In the dining hall – let one child start off the prayer;
- In your daily worship – children love being involved.

Ways to encourage children to pray:

Picture praying - where you ask the children to close their eyes and make a picture in their head (children’s meditation). The leader asks the children to put things into the picture.

Prayer cards – a small card available in the school entrance or anywhere accessible to children and parents. The card can be written and put in a post box or basket which is checked daily. Completed prayer cards are brought into the worship and read out. The minister can also take them, if appropriate, to church to be read at the weekend. This system gives children and parents a direct opportunity to have the community pray about something which is important to them.
Encouraging prayer in the classroom – by supporting teachers in making children understand that prayer is important and is a part of everyday Christian life. A prayer area in the classroom can help, maybe the focal point of a candle or a piece of artwork, maybe a group of stones or a basket of shells, something to give a sense of awe and wonder. Then a notice ‘When you think, God listens’, or, ‘Is there something you would like to pray about today?’ Prayers could be registered with ‘post-it’ notes or by placing marbles in a jar, anything to make prayer part of a child’s daily experience.

Make prayers meaningful. Pray about REAL things.

Example prayers
For young children physical actions can help them focus their minds and prayer. One way is to help children to learn how to pray by using their hands:

Your fingers can be used to bring to mind different things to pray for. Teach the children to hold each finger in turn, starting with their thumb! As they hold each digit they can think about what it represents. Lead the children through together.

**Thumb**
Thumbs up is a sign of happiness. Give thanks for all the happy things in your life, like home and family, friends and all the things that you are thankful for......count your blessings.

**Index finger**
This is the pointing finger. Pray for all those people and things in your life who guide and help you. Friends, teachers, doctors, nurses, emergency services and so on.

**Middle finger**
This is the tallest finger. Pray for all the important people who have power in the world, like world leaders and their governments, members of parliament and local councillors, the Royal Family, other world leaders and their governments.

**Ring finger**
This is the weakest finger on your hand. It can’t do much by itself. Remember the poor, the weak, the hungry and the sick. Think about those who are not as fortunate as you are.

**Little finger**
This is the smallest and the last finger on your hand. Pray for yourself.

Amen
Prayers at the start of a meal:

God bless this bunch
As they munch their lunch.

Amen

For every cup and plateful
God make us truly grateful.

Amen

Teacher says ‘Rubadub dub’ Children say ‘Thank God for our grub!’
(A fun prayer for a special occasion)

For what we are about to receive
May the Lord make us truly thankful.

Amen

Thank you Father for our food
Thank you Lord for all things good.

Amen

For ham and egg and buttered toast, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Amen

Give us a heart as big as our belly, and a keen eye which sees the smaller plate of those in need.

Amen

These are all good prayers, try changing them, or making your own up each day so that it doesn’t become ‘a chant’. Perhaps you could get a child to start the prayer.

Prayers for the end of the day:

Lord keep us safe this night, secure from all our fears
May angels guard us while we sleep, 'til morning light appears.

Amen

Hands together softly so little eyes shut tight - Father just before we go hear our prayer tonight

Amen

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

Amen
Whole School Prayers – it’s good to have your own school prayer which you use daily. There are many books of such prayers or else you could write your own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father God, Bless our school That working together And playing together We may learn to serve you And to serve others. Amen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is our school Let peace live here Let the rooms be full of happiness Let love be all around Love of one another Love of all people And love of life and living Let us remember That as many hands build a house So many hearts make a school. Amen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Father God, Bless our school That working together And playing together We may learn to serve You And to serve others. Amen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father God, Help us to work together to make our school a safe and happy place, Where we can look forward to learning and having fun. Make us good listeners, kind and caring, welcoming to newcomers and polite and respectful to each other. May our school be a thoughtful place, Where everybody has the same chance to be the best that they can be. May we know that when we make mistakes we are forgiven and that each day is an exciting new beginning. And may everyone in our school family live peacefully together in Your love. Amen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear God, Help me to remember The importance of my smile. Throughout the day at school Keep me cheerful all the while. Whether I am working, Or if I am at play Help me pass my smile around To others through this day. Amen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written by Olivia Hamer

Tushingham School Prayer

Dear Father,
Thank you for our families, grass, trees and flowers. Say thank you for best friends and teachers who help us to learn. Show thank you for the world around us! Yell thank you for nature and all your creatures! Scream thank you for Tushingham School! In Jesus’s Name, Amen.
The Christian life

Churches link with schools in many ways but in a Church School the link is even greater and made stronger by the inclusion of the regular presence of the local minister. This gives schools the chance to offer children the opportunity to experience an Anglican rite of passage that may not be otherwise available to them.

Baptisms – a second chance

For many families, a child starting a Church School might be a wonderful opportunity to think about baptism. If the child wasn’t baptised as a baby – well, here’s another opportunity. Discuss with your minister if it is appropriate to try a letter to all new starters.

**Dear Parents and Carers,**

*Have you thought about baptism for your child?*

*Many of you will, I know, already have taken this step, but, for one reason or another, it may have been overlooked. It’s never too late to have your child baptised and indeed, many of those baptised in our church are small children rather than babies.*

*As your children start their Church school education, now would be as an appropriate time as any to seek baptism for them. Over the next seven years they will be involved in daily acts of worship and all things to do with Christian celebration. If, later in life, your child should wish to be confirmed, they will need to have been baptised. This year twenty children from Y5 and Y6 decided to be confirmed.*

*Baptism, or Christening, as some call it, is a beautiful way to celebrate a child’s life and is a sign of membership of God’s Church (and is also a terrific excuse for a family party!)*

*Baptism is free of charge and is easily arranged by contacting the vicar, ... on ....*

*Why not think about it.*

*Yours*

*Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Vicar*
Confirmation
Schools will need to follow the lead of the local church as different churches offer confirmation at different ages, however, some churches may wish to offer Confirmation to the children, perhaps in year 6. They may start a tradition of confirmation classes, in or out of school time. It could be a big celebration supporting the children and their families attended by staff and governors as children make their commitment to God.

Dear Parents and Carers,

Your child is coming to the end of their time at ............... – a new step is in front of them and a chance for a fresh start in a high School setting. It’s a time of mixed feelings, and a time for review of where we are up to. For many of the children ........... will be their last experience of the Church School situation, with its worship, its Christian values and its family atmosphere. What will your child take away from this Primary School? For the last seven years they have been totally involved in the work and worship of the school – daily assemblies, weekly family services, special services at Christmas, Easter, Lent, Fairtrade week – the list is endless. Just think how many times your child has been involved in Christian celebrations! It seems a shame if it is all lost and there is no lasting rite as the children move on.

Each year one of the Bishops from the Diocese of Chester comes to visit us to perform the Service of Confirmation. This year it will be Bishop ... who will perform the confirmations at ............. on the evening of Sunday ............. This is a wonderful family celebration which will be with your child for life. Having spent so much time in a Christian environment it would be a fitting rite of passage – and an opportunity which may not present itself so readily in the future.

As with previous years we would like to ask the parents of Y6 whether their children would like to be confirmed (we stress that this is always a joint decision between parent and child) and if they would, fill in the tear off strip below and return it to ............. by ............., even if you have already given us your child’s name. Confirmation classes will mostly be held in the church on ............., beginning on .......... and continuing until the ........... (excepting school holidays) giving us around 9 sessions. These are an essential part of confirmation but fun too.

Each year we also offer confirmation for adults. The adult confirmation group is more informal than the one for the youngsters and usually involves a chat or discussion over a cup of coffee with input from the vicar. We meet when it is mutually convenient and try to fit in about 5 or 6 sessions before confirmation. If you would like to know more, please put your name and telephone number on the reverse of the reply slip and return it as above. It does not commit you to confirmation.

Yours faithfully

Vicar and Headteacher

.................................................................
Halloween or All Saints?
As the secular society chases down the Halloween road, how should Church Schools view this time of year? Young people increasingly feel pressurized by their friends to join in the trick-or-treating, and the sale of Halloween associated merchandise is now second only to Christmas. Is it time that we reclaimed this religious festival as a time of light and hope not witches and monsters?

Make All Saints’ a special day for the children, have a Saints’ quiz or dress up as Saints. Have an All Saints’ Party or a Bright Party with apple bobbing and games. There are lots more ideas in Nick Harding’s book ‘Better Than Halloween’ ISBN 0 7151 4101 5. Nick Harding is the Children’s Mission Support Officer for the Anglican Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham and he gives some great ideas and resources for churches and schools who want to create a positive experience for children during this season – an experience that has the Light of the World at its centre.

Lent
This is a major Christian season with so much potential in a Church School. Children can be involved in a whole range of useful activities which bring real practical meaning to Lent and the preparation for Holy Week.

- Have you tried an ashing service?
- Do the children have palm crosses to take home?
- Do they have a Lent project to help someone or something?

Lots of brilliant ideas for children at www.livelent.net

WARNING
Your Lent actions could seriously affect you and the world you live in.

Easter
Easter is a time for celebration in a Church School to share the good news of Easter and all it means for Christians around the world. You could set up a large wooden cross outdoors reminding the school and wider community of the Easter story. A display indoors and special Easter activities (not based around chocolate eggs and bunnies) help make the time special for the children. It is also a good opportunity to work in partnership with your local church as both church and school explore the story and celebrate together. A good resource for churches to use with schools is ‘Experience Easter’ published by the Diocese of Gloucester. It provides ideas and resources for churches to work with the local schools by setting up six stations which take children through the Easter story. More information is available here.
Christmas

Christmas of course is a major celebration in the Christian calendar and in this increasingly secular country we need to stand firm. It’s great fun to have the Santas and all the tinsel but Christian Schools should always have a strong message about the birth of Christ. Sometimes Christmas productions can get carried away with reindeer and snowmen and the nativity story is forgotten, this should never be the case in a Church School. Make sure your Christmas productions give out the message you want them to.

There are lots of Oxfam and Christian Aid projects at this time, why not get involved? Oxfam ‘unwrapped’ and Christian Aid ‘Present Aid’ are really good ways of helping the children, parents and staff to rediscover more of the meaning of Christmas. See their websites for details.

Christmas Cards

You might like to save your own personal Christmas Cards from year to year so that the children can look at them and assess their meanings. You could get them to group the cards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secular Cards</th>
<th>Victorian Cards</th>
<th>Biblical Cards</th>
<th>Humorous Cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Trees</td>
<td>Victorian Snow Scenes</td>
<td>Jesus’ Birth - stable</td>
<td>Little Baby Cheeses!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robins</td>
<td>Stage Coaches in the</td>
<td>Wise Men</td>
<td>Santa stuck in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>snow</td>
<td></td>
<td>chimney!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baubles</td>
<td>Victorian Feasts</td>
<td>Stars</td>
<td>Singing Reindeer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candles</td>
<td>Dickens themes</td>
<td>Angels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and so on. This activity is really good for children as it helps them to understand the complex nature of the Christmas celebration. It is a lesson for life!

Education Sunday

Education Sunday is always the ninth Sunday before Easter – and an opportunity for Church School to be celebrated.

The Churches Together in England website has resources and these can be seen [here](#). This is an occasion when many churches ask the headteacher to preach!
School life and curriculum

Circle time
One of the best classroom practices that there is: a chance for children to bond, to show and share their feelings, to learn about and listen to their teacher.

Circle time is a space within the school curriculum into which each person comes with unconditional acceptance.
It is not the place for judgement or coercion.
It provides an opportunity to learn and explore through the discussion of experiences and individuality.
It encourages children to take responsibility for each other in the school community and to develop a sense of responsibility towards their ‘neighbours’ near and far.

Circle time builds up self-esteem and positive behaviour towards the group.

Go to [www.circletime.co.uk](http://www.circletime.co.uk) for lots of information – rediscover one of the best classroom tools ever thought of. There are lots of ideas for circle games at:

- [www.primaryresources.co.uk/pshe/docs/circle_time_games.doc](http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/pshe/docs/circle_time_games.doc)
- [www.users.stargate.net/~cokids/Circle.html](http://www.users.stargate.net/~cokids/Circle.html)
- [http://www.antibullying.net/circletimeinfo.html](http://www.antibullying.net/circletimeinfo.html)

School Buddies
Older children are given a younger one to be a buddy. This may be to help with ‘issues’ or special needs. It may be because the child arrives early or has been suffering some bullying. Whatever the reason, a buddy can be just the thing. Older children love this role – they know that it is a position of trust and usually rise to it.

A Buddy Bench is a useful addition to a play area.

A nominated bench for children to sit on if:
- they want some time out.
- they want someone to play with
- they want to talk to another child
- they want to talk to an MDA

Who checks the bench? How can it be organized?
**Play leaders**
Older children enjoy looking after younger ones, at playtime, lunchtime, wet playtimes, and before school. They need some training and resources and access to their own special equipment (balls, ropes etc). They can be taught yard games and wet play activities and given credit for their expertise.

**Bullying**
Bullying is one of the most common causes of child and parent concern in school. Bullying is real – it happens in all schools at all levels. In fact, it is a human condition. Sometimes it seems to be a particular type of child who is the bully or the bullied – but there are no rules and we can all remember incidents in our own school life. Bullying is something which schools can do so much to help – and should celebrate the fact that they do. Bullying week can be a focus and also really good PR. School theatre groups can provide useful input. The post box can be part of the week. Children can use drama to act out bullying situations and parents can be involved.

**Special Person**
A class teacher, at the end of the day, may choose someone to go out of the room. The children remaining make lots of positive comments about the child – everyone contributes. Some of the comments are written on the card by the teacher and then the card is presented to the child. A lovely way of giving one of the team a boost!

**Christian Clubs**
Many of our schools have Christian clubs of one sort or another, sometimes meeting at lunchtime or after school. They can be Christian Unions, Jam clubs (Jesus and me) or anything else. It is important to give them a high school profile – let them have a slot in the newsletter – put up posters etc – give them a notice board. Good leaders are crucial – maybe a volunteer from the parish, a Brownie leader, a local minister etc.
Residential visits

Maybe one of the areas of the curriculum which is under pressure is the whole area of residential education. However, it remains one of the most exciting things that can go on at school and creates lifetime memories. It binds together children and staff – and staff and staff. There are endless safe places to take children, and they really do look forward to it and appreciate it.

In a Church School, if a class is going on a residential visit, then they should ALL go - not just the wealthy ones. There are lots of ways of subsidising families, helping them through saving schemes or even using the school budget. Anything rather than leave children behind, something else that creates life long memories of the wrong sort.

Staffing residential visits

A strong staff will put together the year’s residential visits and then decide which one everyone is attending or helping with regardless of whether it is their class or not. If the staff decide residential are worthwhile then all the staff should be encouraged to support them. This creates an excellent opportunity for staff development and fellowship. Residential should be good fun for the staff as well and valued for it. Questionnaires for the children and input from the school council – all raise the profile and let the children and parents know that it is taken seriously.
Cultural Diversity

A particular issue in dioceses which may be largely mono-cultural is ensuring children understand and respect cultural diversity. However it is also an important aspect in all dioceses, ensuring Church Schools reflect the diverse culture of the country in which we live. We therefore need to weave into our curriculum opportunities to bring other cultures to the children, in the books that are chosen, in the music that is played, in the visitors that are invited and in the RE schemes.

Our aim is that the children should have a balanced view of their society and their world. Most of these issues are just as relevant to teachers and parents as they are to children and therefore ‘Valuing Cultural Diversity’ can be seen as parent education or teacher’s CPD.

Information and resources can be found at www.cheshiredec.org
An example ethnic diversity policy
St. Mary’s has an ethnic diversity policy which outlines the reasoning for both multicultural education and anti-racist education. Cheshire is a predominantly white area with very low numbers of ethnic minorities. Our children do not experience the rich diversity of cultures which are evident in other areas of the North West and of the UK. In order to address this balance it is more important than ever that we tackle multicultural issues and plan input into all areas of the curriculum.

How do we do this?
Valuing Ethnic Diversity is not a ‘bolt on’ subject. It is an element of inclusion and should be an element of every subject of the curriculum and considered at all stages of planning and delivery.

- **Reading books**
  When selecting children’s reading materials the school pays attention to the rich cultures from other parts of the globe. We also make sure that illustrations on and in reading materials take account of the fact that Britain is a multicultural society. The school has a rich variety of reading materials from structured reading schemes through to library materials. All of these books have a balance which enables children to access all types of literature, both fiction and nonfiction, and also reflects the world culture.

- **Music**
  Amongst St Mary’s music resources is an extensive collection of CDs. These CDs contain a range of musical types as well as a significant number of styles from other cultures. We also have in school an excellent range of musical instruments – many of which are purchased with multicultural education in mind eg djembe, tabla, cabbassa etc.

- **Objects d’art**
  In school we have pictures, drapes and ornaments etc which have been collected from other cultures. These are displayed around the school and used in appropriate lessons.

- **Maps**
  In each teaching area there is a Peter’s World Projection. There is also a similar world map in the hall. It is our hope that whenever our children look at the world map they will understand more accurately the proportion of the land blocks.

- **Visiting artists/musicians**
  Each year we book artists or musicians in residence in order to work with the children. We try to ensure that these artists have something else to offer apart from their skills. Cultural diversity is a usual ‘extra’. We have drummers, artists, sculptors, theatre groups etc

- **Christian Aid/ Oxfam/CAFOD/ Tear Fund**
  These resources are a permanent part of our school. There are always images about in the hall or in classrooms. It is important that these images reflect a world culture. Care is taken not to have stereotypes – eg African children always suffering from famine etc.

- **Fair Trade**
  St Mary’s always has an eye on trade issues and in particular has a major Fair Trade Week each year. Fair 4 All (a fair trade retailer from Warrington) sets up a fair trade shop within the school. We have lots of promotional activities both for children and for parents. World trade is, maybe, the most important issue facing us over the next generation. This fact is treated with significant importance within the school.

- **Fund Raising**
  At least two of our fund raising efforts each year have benefactors which are from other cultures. This enables us to raise major issues with the children and the parents ie Unicef, Jar of Grace Appeal providing wells for villages in third world countries.
Sex and Relationship Education
How do we approach this in a Church School? Is it important? How are parents involved? How does it fit in with the school philosophy?
Maybe Church Schools are particularly suited to tackle the more challenging areas of the curriculum ... they should certainly not avoid them! There are many excellent resources available and a wide range of suitable books to enable a school to put together a sensitive and structured programme of sex and relationship education.


Drug Education
Likewise, how do we keep the children safe and educate them? Does the school have a drug education programme? What resources are available and how are parents involved?
See ‘Barney and Echo’ – ‘A lesson learned. Let’s talk about tobacco and alcohol’.
Visit www.barneyecho.co.uk

Say ‘No’ to strangers
Keeping children safe is more than just locking the door – it’s teaching them about stranger danger and involving parents right from the start. Children need to learn independence and develop strategies of staying safe. How does the school help them?

Fairtrade
The Diocese of Chester is a Fairtrade Diocese. Using the school’s and the children’s buying power can make a real difference to third world producers. Use Fairtrade tea and coffee at school functions, celebrate Fairtrade fortnight. Get the children to collect Fairtrade labels and put the information in the newsletter. Promote Fairtrade products in school ie Windward Island Bananas, Geobars etc.

Healthy Eating
There has been a great deal of news coverage on this topic in the last year or two, but we are only just scratching the surface. You are what you eat ... and many of our children eat poorly.

Schools should make every effort to give the correct message to children and families – how often are 10p mixes sold at Brownie meetings or school fetes? Be consistent in your message.
School meals — there are some improvements nationally but always keep an eye on what children are being given in school and ask yourself, would you give this to your own child?

Packed lunches need guidance and monitoring —
Start young and tell parents what you would like them to provide (or not to provide). Make a sheet, maybe a picture of a lunch box, and put in ideas for parents. The fact that you are bothered about what the children eat shows how much you care for them.

**Singing and music**

Singing has many and varied benefits which help to raise standards in schools.
- Physical e.g. posture, breathing
- Emotional e.g. self-esteem, joy
- Social e.g. cooperation, team spirit
- Achievement e.g. immediate success for all, impact on learning in other areas.

The children and staff should love singing and music. It should be at the heart of the school — in daily worship and throughout the day.

You don’t need a musician – just confidence and a CD player.

From the very youngest children to the Y6 music can raise the spirits and bring joy to the school.
Communication

Effective communication is incredibly important. It lets children, staff and parents know that they are valued and kept well informed of the life and work of the school. It can also encourage prospective parents to have a closer look at your school when making choices about admissions.

School Documentation

It should be obvious in all school documentation and policies that this is a Church School so that the community is aware of the importance placed on the school’s Church School status.

- St Mark’s Church of England primary is a lively Christian School which will enable the children to realise their full potential, together with a conviction of their worth as Children of God and to live happy and purposeful lives.

- St Joseph’s Church of England Primary School seeks to develop in its children a knowledge and sympathetic understanding of the Christian Faith, its teachings and values, and to foster an appreciation of their relevance to both school life and their own lives.

- As a Church of England Primary School, and an integral part of the life of Holy Trinity Parish Church, our school seeks to fulfil its Christian witness and gospel outreach through the provision of quality primary education in a caring Christian setting for all children of the area. Confident in our own faith community, we aim to include all children, regardless of faith or creed.

There is an endless choice of wording but the point is that it must be something that everyone agrees upon and all stakeholders buy into and it must underpin all documentation. Such statements are just as relevant in the school bullying policy as they are in the school admissions policy.

School Newsletter

There are some wonderful examples of really good weekly newsletters about. They should come out on the same day each week and should read like an interesting magazine, celebrating things going on in school, advertising events, giving news about children and staff, letting parents know what’s going on in the church or even selling a bike or a pram. Children could write regular articles or match reports; the school council could have a slot etc. above all, fun to read - certainly not an opportunity for the head to moan at the parents. Link the letter onto the school website so that split families and grandparents can get all the information they want and you are not relying on ‘pupil post’ (It’s amazing how many letters are found in the cloak area at the end of the day). Try to make your school newsletter ‘weekly’, then parents know to expect it on a particular day.
**School Website**

There are some good examples of websites on the Diocesan schools website. Go [here](#) and you will be given a link to every school website in the Diocese.

Websites are an excellent addition to a school’s communication and PR. Design the site to be user friendly (computer buffs rarely do) and above all, interesting. Parents don’t want to read what Ofsted want to read (although you must include statutory information). **Keep it up to date** with lots of pictures of the children and their activities and, of course, the forthcoming week’s news. Grandparents and split families can then access all the information they need to be involved in their child’s education.

Can you ‘Google’ your school? This is the first thing that a prospective parent will do. It doesn’t give a good first impression if the last newsletter was two terms ago. Many schools have a system whereby a member of staff keeps the website up to date. That can be an extra member of the office team for just a few hours a week checking what’s going on in school taking pictures and keeping the site looking good.

**School Greeting Cards**

These could be designed by the children or by the teachers, a special card from the school for birthdays or other special events such as a new baby. They provide another opportunity to show that the school is different.

**Headteacher or Governor’s Talkshop**

This is really good PR and so easy. Every term the head or a governor puts an afternoon to one side and, in the school newsletter, advertises a ‘talkshop’ for parents. It’s a sort of ‘surgery’ where parents can come and talk about anything they want. It can be done in one large group (take over the staffroom) or else individually. Some heads or governors may feel threatened by this, but it’s much more pleasant than they think and parents love the opportunity to talk. It gives wonderful feedback on what the issues of the day are and schools can be seen to be doing something about it.

**Mornings**

Where should the headteacher be just before school starts? On the playground, meeting parents and giving them the opportunity to meet the headteacher and chat. The more accessible a headteacher is, the fewer parents need to make an appointment to see them.

**School Post Box**

This is a must for a school, and is crucial in allowing children to gain access and quality time with the head. The post-box can be a permanent feature; they are available from The Early Learning Centre or other such companies. Children, like adults, get worried about day to day school life, friendship fallouts, bullying, home worries, school worries. No problem is any better at 3 am and so it’s best to sort things out during the day. They can write a note to the head and post it. For the headteacher confidentiality is crucial and notes must always be acted upon on the same day. The children need to feel safe and supported no matter what the problem is.
The whole school family

Families are at the heart of our schools. Primary schools in particular have the opportunity to develop close relationships with the families of the children in the school and can provide support and guidance to parents and the extended family. Similarly families can be a source of great support for schools and by working in partnership, schools and families can enhance the learning and wider development of the children in our care.

Home visits
Many schools have a pre-school support system which includes home visits. This is an excellent idea and creates a good relationship between home and school. A child’s first teacher can make arrangements in the summer term to visit all her September starters in their home. The first message in school is ‘Don’t go with strangers!’ and a stranger is anyone who hasn’t been for a cup of tea with mum or dad. It gives the opportunity for mum and teacher to become acquainted and to build up a crucial level of trust – and it passes on invaluable messages to the child. The home visit programme needs careful thought and organisation but those schools that do it are always pleased to put in the necessary resources.

Home visit itinerary might include:

- Talk about the home school agreement
- Starting school arrangements
- School uniform
- PE kit
- Reading and homework
- Parents meetings at school
- What to do when your child is poorly
- Family services
- Talk about what to do when something goes wrong
Newcomers to the school
How does the school greet new families? How are they welcomed into the Church School? This is where we can get to know the families and begin to develop a relationship with parents and guardians as well as the children. It is also an opportunity for the Church School governors to illustrate the distinct ethos of the school through the way it welcomes its new families.

For example:
- The vicar or minister arranges a home visit;
- The school says a prayer for them as they move in.
- The child is introduced to the school in the first worship time;
- The child is assigned a buddy to show them the ropes;

Dads’ Afternoons
One of the most rewarding ventures you can have is to try a Dads’ Day. Fathers often don’t get much opportunity to be part of their child’s school – so why not make a special day.

You can call it a dads’ reading afternoon (to raise the profile of boys reading) and have dads reading to groups of children – or else ask them to bring their favourite book. Or you could just let their children show them around the school... or how about a dads’ and kids’ football match?

Grandparent days
Grandparents are the best ambassadors for a school. They are always very positive ... ‘It wasn’t like this when I went to school’

Why not encourage them in by having a grandparent afternoon. They can have tea and cake and a guided tour by their grandchildren – maybe even a singsong.

As more and more mums are working – then more and more grans are playing their part. They should be a part of the extended school family. Grandparent afternoons are always great fun and a chance for the school to really show off.

Think about having them on Friday or Monday – because lots of grandparents will come to stay with their families for the weekend.

Programme of Parental Education
For most parents, their child starting school is an anxious time. The school can help so much by getting in touch with families early. Have evening meetings when you explain to them the stages of development of their child, and how they can help. Give parents targets and help them. In most cases Granny doesn’t live around the corner anymore and so the school becomes more like an extended family. This work can carry on all the
way through school with regular meetings about curriculum areas. Make the meetings short and fun – and follow up if parents don’t attend. The more supportive the parents are – the better their child will do in school. Curriculum meetings might be:

- Teach your child to read
- Writing
- Games to play at home

Have a set programme so that parents know what is coming up. Tell them about it well before they start school and how important it is for them to attend.

Parents’ ‘Thank you’
If you rely on parental help in school then show your appreciation. How about a parents’ ‘Thank you party’ at Christmas when you could give them mince pies and a few well-chosen songs. Make them feel like you value them and their input.

A new family – a new name
Families break up and change; for a child it can be a distressing time. Children may find changing their surname difficult and it is sometimes surrounded by controversy. The school can help make the experience more positive perhaps by having a special celebration or giving them a card to celebrate their new family and new name.

Dealing with Loss
family breakdowns
the departure of grandparents
or worse!

How do we support the children through these major traumas of their lives? Buddies? A school counsellor? A trained member of staff?

Some schools have a stock of books ready for just such occasions and give one to the child, maybe writing something supportive in the front. It’s a thought that lasts for the child’s life.

Suggested titles

- Badger’s Parting Gifts by Susan Varney (Picture Lions) ISBN: 978-0006643173
- When Good-Bye Is Forever by Lois Rock (Good Books) ISBN: 978-1561484492
- Remember Grandad by Sheila and Kate Isherwood (OUP) ISBN: 978-0192723680
- Grandma’s Party by Meg Harper (Barnabas) ISBN: 978-1841013411
- Always and Forever by Alan Durant (Corgi Childrens) ISBN: 978-0552548779
- The Goodbye Boat by Mary Joslin (for younger children) (Lion Hudson) ISBN: 978-0745942643
- I Miss You by Pat Thomas (Wayland) ISBN: 978-0750260824

A really good site which gives lots of practical help to teachers and TAs is [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)
Staff
It’s important in a Church School that there is one message – and all staff need to feel part of that message. No matter what their role in school they need to agree some basic principles of dealing with children and parents. When visitors come to the school they often meet the caretaker or the secretary first! Yet staff meetings are often just for teachers and TAs! From time to time we need to have the whole team together to talk about what we want for our school – and how we are going to get there. Maybe a good inset day.

MDAs (Mid-day Assistants)
These are some of the most special people in our schools. They’ve got the job that can be so difficult. How do we train them? How do we communicate with them? Do they feel part of the team?
MDAs should have regular meetings and communication with the head.
How do the governors thank them for doing such a difficult job?

Performance management (staff development)
This is one of the areas in which a Church School can really stand out.

Teachers work so hard and so often all they hear are moans. In a way, it’s the sort of job whereby you can never get it right. Society has demands which are impossible to meet – and the ground is always changing. It’s amazing that teachers carry on giving so much – and so much extra. It really is a vocation and in our Church Schools there is an extra dimension.
Good Church Schools nurture their staff, expect a lot from them and are prepared to resource them and support them. In this way a confident school can be creative and use Performance Management as a positive tool to support staff. Many schools have a programme of staff development whereby teachers are encouraged to broaden their horizons and attend courses which give them something extra.

Our staff are our most important asset and we all want them to be fulfilled, contented and confident. We also want them to be a shining light to our children – someone to look up to – and someone to love.

The best sort of teacher a child can have is a happy one.

A school’s Performance Management system can therefore look at the Christian dimension as well as the academic one. It can focus on some of the many ideas in this booklet for example, and give teacher’s the opportunity to visit other schools where good practice is evident.

**Dress code**

In a Church School, what messages about dress do you think we ought to be passing on? Should teachers dress in FCUK tops? How about designer labels? Is it just a ‘free for all’ or do we want to practice what we preach? You might wish to talk about this in the staffroom – but a number of schools have a dress code which basically states that all staff will be conscious of what they wear so as not to present the wrong image to young minds. It is a good idea to discuss this as part of staff induction.
Church and school

A Church School is a real blessing in a parish and an opportunity for the church to be alongside young families as they grow. The relationship between the church and its school can really enhance the Church School ethos. Staff will appreciate the support and the church should see it as part of its mission within the local community.

Where's the Vicar?
The local minister has got such an important role at a Church School. They should be a guide, a comforter, an enthusiast, a confident and so much more. They should be such a regular visitor in a school that their presence is not a special occasion – maybe a cup of tea with the staff at break-time, or a presence occasionally on the yard at the end of the day. This is such a good opportunity for the local minister and makes him/her accessible to the school community.

The minister and headteacher should have regular meetings to discuss aspects of the school’s work in terms of its Christian ethos. It can also be an opportunity for the head to share any issues with the minister providing pastoral support. It might be appropriate to hold the meeting somewhere a little special for example lunch out.

Together
Working closely together can support both school and church. Such linking also provides a seamless link for families and children as they see the church and school as part of the same family.

- Run Christian Aid Week or other fundraising projects together
- School worship is advertised in the church and parish worship in school
- Joint events such as a Christmas fair
- Newsletters advertise events and services at both school and church

The school in church
Links work both ways and the school and church can support one another whilst forging strong links. Church then becomes as familiar as school with children and parents happy to attend both.

The school can become part of the local church in a number of ways:

- The school is included weekly in intercessions and other prayers.
- Having a wedding at church, a mock wedding is great fun (but everyone wants to be the bride or groom) Children can dress up especially for the occasion.
- Displaying children’s work from the school in church especially at festivals.
- Inviting a newly appointed headteacher to a commissioning service at the local church.
• Offering a Welcome Service to all pupils and families new in the autumn term. A German tradition is used in some church schools where the children and new members of staff are given a named and decorated cone filled with small gifts such as a bible story and fish shaped eraser, at the welcoming service all funded by the church.
• School events are advertised on the church noticeboard.
• Schools hold special services in the church (e.g. Harvest, Christmas, Christingle, Easter, end of summer term etc).
• Suitable church members (as well as the incumbent) are available when schools visit the church to give information and explain their Christian faith.
• Foundation governors report regularly to the PCC on local school issues.
• The headteacher is invited to the PCC AGM or to speak on educational issues at a regular PCC meeting.
• The school contributes articles for the parish magazine.
• Education Sunday is celebrated in church with the school invited to lead the service.
• Different classes take part in occasional all-age services.
• The church is made openly available to schools and with appropriate activities available (e.g. church ‘trail’, explanation of stained glass windows, child-friendly leaflet introducing the church etc).
• The bibles the children use at school are used in the church.
• The church finds out which are the children’s favourite school hymns and uses them in the church. Maybe there are some suitable hymns from church which could be sung in school.
• The headteacher is invited to lead part of a service in church.

The church in school
The church congregation can be a brilliant resource, providing support and also acting as role models for Christian behaviour.

The church can help support work in the school by:

• Running a school Christian Club, after school or at lunchtime.
• Different congregation members helping lead school worship, using some wording from church e.g. ‘The Lord be with you’, ‘and also with you’ or ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord’, ‘in the name of Christ. Amen’
• Purchasing suitable books or resources for the school (especially for worship, including music, and Christianity in RE).
• Sponsoring a ‘school chaplain’. This should involve pastoring the staff, children and occasionally parents and governors.
• Subsidising school trips to Cathedral Services and/or visits (especially the Year 6 Leavers’ Service for Church schools and the Cathedral Pilgrimage).
• Setting up a fund to help needy families who can’t always afford to pay for school trips.
• Buying the school an OXFAM Christmas gift, maybe a donkey or a water tap.
• Contributing towards the 10% costs for Church aided school building projects.
• Church members attending special school events.
• Asking the school to put the PCC secretary on the school mailing list.
- Offering to run a Christian alternative to Halloween – a ‘BRIGHT PARTY’ at the school.
- Sponsoring a Christian drama team or puppet theatre.

Individual Church members can get involved in school (following a CRB check) on a practical day to day basis:

- be a classroom volunteer
- accompany school trips
- become mentors in schools
- help show the children around the church
- run a breakfast club for children or for families
- help at school parties (or be Santa!)
- run a lunch-time club or a holiday club during an Inset day
- hear children read
- play the piano
- make costumes for plays

**Bibles for the Children**

The church can support the school by providing the children with bible. It is a lovely way of giving the children something lasting and worthwhile and highlights the interest the church has in its local Church School children. They can be written in and presented to children. Look at [www.biblesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.biblesforchildren.org.uk)

These are all good ‘gift’ bibles, the sort of thing to present and write in. The last two are New International Bibles which will be relevant to children when they are adults also.

There are also a whole host of bibles for younger children – keep an eye out for new ones as you browse in the bookshops.