**What does theological underpinning mean?**

**Vision - Leadership - Flourishing**

A Church of England school’s Christian vision should be based on and reflect a Christian understanding of the nature of God and how it motivates, underpins and expresses the school’s service to its community. This does not mean that everyone in the school needs to have the same beliefs about God. Indeed, Anglican educational provision is based on inclusivity and service to its community and not only to Christian believers. It does mean that for the vision to be Christian it needs to be based on and reflect something of Christian belief about God. The school’s context is important. Each vision, and its outworking, is consequently distinctive to the school, if it is to truly shape decision-making, priorities and outcomes. The Church of England’s Vision for Education: deeply Christian serving the common good (Autumn 2016) ‘unpacks’ this idea further. It is on this vision that the SIAMS schedule (April 2018) draws.

**Some possible questions to consider:**

* What is our Christian vision and how does it reflect and shape who we are and what we believe about God, each other, the world?
* What is the theological basis of our Christian vision and how do we show it in practice across our school (strategic and operational)?
* How does the theological underpinning link with biblical teaching?
* How does our Christian vision support and guide the work of leadership at all levels?
* How does our Christian vision influence our ambitions for our pupils (and staff, and the community) we serve? How does it lead to the flourishing (academic and personal) of our school community?
* How do we ensure that our Christian vision and its theological/biblical basis is known, understood and acted upon by stakeholders?

**Consequences for our Christian vision and how we apply it:**

Your school’s Christian vision needs to be specific to your context and to express your school’s Christian understanding of its service to your community.

A school’s Christian vision will often, but may not always, include an explicit reference to God or Jesus or to central Christian concepts and/or associated values. It may include a biblical reference. It is important that the vision, however it is expressed, is ‘unpacked’, relating Christian teaching and practice to the educational life and development of the school. For example, if a school’s vision is underpinned by the belief that all are precious to God and created in God’s image, how is this expressed in the policies and practices and the relationships and outcomes across the school?

What follows are some ideas to get you thinking and/or your school talking/reflecting on the implications of your school’s Christian vision (however it is expressed) and its theological underpinning. The bold text emphasises the importance of the outworking of the theological underpinning and is linked expressly to leadership (strategic and operational) and to the flourishing of the school community as an expression of its Christian service.

Key questions to think about are:

* How do we demonstrate the theological underpinning of our school’s Christian vision?
* What is the impact of the school’s vision on the strategic and operational life of our school?
* How does our school’s theological underpinning link to biblical teaching and interpretation?
* How will we ensure that all within our school appreciated the Christian teaching and associated values on which our vision is based?

The exemplars are offered to get you thinking about the implications and impact of your school’s Christian vision, drawing on your specific context.

We believe that God created and sustains the world (Genesis chs 1-2). We believe that all are created in the image of God (Genesis 1.26-27). **In educational terms therefore this means that we…**

We believe in God the Father, who created the world (Genesis chs 1-2); in Jesus who shows the overwhelming love of God (John 3:16); and, in the Holy Spirit who is God at work in the world (Luke 11.13, Galatians 5.25). **This means that that we…**

We believe that Jesus came to give life in all its fulness (John 10.10). **This is demonstrated across our school in the following ways…**

Our Christian vision is based on Jesus’ command, when summarising the law, to ‘love God and love each other’ (Mark 12.31). **In the life of our school this means that we…**

As a Church of England school, we believe in serving our community based on the love of God for everyone. **This means that we are an inclusive school who welcomes all.** In doing this we draw heavily upon Jesus’ teaching from John 15.12 where Jesus commands that we love as he has loved. **In the life of our school it also means that we…**

Our Christian vision is underpinned by Jesus’ example of love for all and summarised in St Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 (especially verse 13) which forms our strapline of, ‘faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love’. This means that **love is at the heart of all we do** and that our focus values of compassion, service and diligence are lived out throughout our school community and beyond. **This is shown through…**

**Please see Appendix 1 for an example of a possible summary statement to help you when outlining the theological underpinning of your school’s Christian vision.**

**Appendix 1**

**A possible framework for a summary statement**

**(no more than one side of A4) explaining your vision**

Agreed by governors, available on the school website, in teacher handbook, as supplementary evidence to your SIAMS self-evaluation, etc.

**Our Christian vision is…**

(Up to 50 words – in addition you could include a biblical reference/story and a strapline – short and sharp is the order of the day!)

**It reflects a Christian understanding of God**… (explain how – e.g. creator God, loving God, empowering God, how this inspires our work in education, etc.)

**It reflects our belief about ourselves and each other**… (as created by God, precious to God, unique individuals deserving of the best because they are loved by God, educational perspective on human flourishing (academic and personal) etc.)

**It reflects our belief about the world**… (responsibility/stewardship, respect for diversity and difference/living well together/hope/fulness of life etc.)

**Our Christian vision is lived out in…** (summary of how it applies to decision making, organisation, curriculum, standards (attainment and progress), character/personal development, including, for example, spiritual development and courageous advocacy and the impact of your associated Christian values, policy and practice, approaches to British Values, Growth Mindset, being a Rights Respecting School, Global Neighbours and other approaches/awards as fits your school’s Christian vision and your particular context, ongoing monitoring and evaluation (by whom?) etc.)

**Our Christian vision has been developed by…** (leadership/governors/faith group/in consultation with stakeholders etc.)

**Approved by Governors/Local Governing Body on… Due to be reviewed…**

**Primary linked documents:** e.g. curriculum and spiritual development policy, denominational ongoing self-evaluation and improvement plan; RE policy, Collective worship policy, Relationships and Sex Education policy, teaching and learning, behaviour and inclusion policies. Also addressed in all policies as they come up for review.

**Appendix 2**

**Some key terms**

It is important to be clear about the language used about a school’s Christian vision and associated values. Below is a brief consideration of some of the key terms regularly used.

**Vision**

A public declaration that a school makes to describe what it seeks to achieve as it fulfils its purpose (or mission). Within the context of a Church of England school it is based on its Christian foundation (trust deeds/articles of government etc.). This means that it should have a Christian theological underpinning that is clear to all, which links to and reflects biblical teaching, and which supports and drives forward the school. The best vision statements are clear, concise and inspirational.

The current SIAMS schedule asks schools to provide a summary statement of no more than 50 words to identify and celebrate the school’s Christian vision. It is possible to ‘unpack’ this with slightly more detailed document (agreed by governors) to express the theological underpinning along with any biblical links (see Appendix 1). Such a document may be useful in supporting consistency in expressing and implementing the vision.

Many vision statements are summarised by a ‘strap-line’ or biblical quotation that encapsulates the vision.

A vision is not the same as values which are a contributing factor to how the vision is expressed and delivered. In the current SIAMS schedule they are referred to a ‘associated values’.

**What makes it a Christian vision?**

How it explicitly displays Christian teaching and practice as reflected in and through the Church of England theological understanding of education, reflecting the school’s own context. This usually but not always includes explicit biblical linking.

**Theological underpinning - a basic definition:**

Theology is made up of two Greek words - ‘theos’ (God) and ‘logos’ (word or the study of). Consequently, theology is the study of the nature of God and of religious belief. Christian theology is trinitarian, in that it focuses on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In practice a theological underpinning will express biblical teaching although it may or may not relate specifically to a particular text or story.

Practical or applied theology is showing the impact of beliefs about God and God’s relationship to the world. In educational terms it is applying that belief to the life and service of the school in terms of academic and personal flourishing for both pupils and adults. (John 10.10).

The Church of England has a three-fold approach when considering the theological underpinning and outworking with regards to doctrine, decision-making and practice:

Scripture – What is the biblical teaching/justification? How can biblical teaching/justification be applied?

Tradition – What has the Church traditionally taught/practiced about this and/or related issues? How is that tradition relevant in today’s context?

Reason – What ‘makes sense’ in the light of the contemporary context?

The theological is often linked to and expressed through biblical teaching. For example:

* the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25 to 37) expresses how belief in God leads to the love and service of others since it springs from Jesus’ summary of the Law about loving God and loving your neighbour.
* Galatians 3:38 ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ expresses inclusivity and equality and could be linked, for example, with Genesis 1:27 where all are created in the image of God.

**What are values?**

Put simply they are principles or standards of behaviour, they reflect judgements about what is important in and to life. Values can be categorised in various ways, including as Christian values.

**What are Christian values?**

These values are principles or standards for life that are derived from the teachings of Jesus and taught by Christians. These values may be shared by other groups, faiths and non-faith traditions – shared human values. However, for Christians values spring from and express the life and teaching of Jesus and how the Church (different denominations) has interpreted and lived it out across the years.

Some examples of these central associated values, which are sometimes referred to as Gospel values, are:

* **Faith** – this may include the search for truth and meaning, fidelity/faithfulness, tradition, prayer, revelation, acknowledging the importance, relevance and application of scripture;
* **Service** – commitment (to God and to others), caring, compassion, concern, involvement empathy, charitable giving, making a difference;
* **Courage** – sacrifice, self-denial, restraint, self-discipline, patience, risk taking, standing up for others, perseverance;
* **Justice** – dignity, stewardship, prophecy, interdependence, peace-seeking and peace-making, equality, empathy;
* **Hope** – optimism, confidence, joy, realism, providence, trust, prophecy, aspiration (self, others, world), thoughtfulness and wisdom;
* **Love** – towards God (reverence, worship, submission, prayer), towards self (self-esteem, prudence, temperance, creativity); towards others (care, concern, respect, acceptance;
* **Reconciliation** – forgiveness, mercy, compassion, humility, conflict resolution, work to eliminate evil, love of enemy;
* **Community** – personal dignity, aspiration, belonging, equality, inclusion, fellowship, trust, care.

When internalised some refer to these values as virtues, defining and expressing the individual’s own moral decision-making capacity.

In the SIAMS schedule Christian values are referred to as associated values. This is because they are linked with and express a school’s Christian vision. Hence, they are associated with the vision. It is the vision which sustains and drives forward a school’s life and work and not the values which contribute to expressing the vision in action.

**What is character development?**

The distinguishing moral qualities, moral virtues and moral reasoning abilities (decision making) displayed by an individual. Within Church of England education this is seen as an important aspect of human development (educational and personal). It is a strong contributing factor towards human flourishing.

**What is courageous advocacy?**

It is phrase used in the SIAMS schedule (Strand 3). Its focus is on how, through the outworking of its Christian vision, a school encourages and enables pupils/students to consider and act upon how they can make a difference for the better in their local, national and global communities. It includes charitable giving and other actions such as writing to MPs/local councillors, recycling and conservation, based on and expressing the school’s Christian vision. Courageous advocacy is about how pupils/students develop positive attitudes to issues of justice and equality, hope and aspiration (for themselves, others and the world).

**What is ethos?**

A school’s ethos is the defining characteristic of the community as shown through its attitudes (linked to its associated values), priorities and aspirations.

**What is a Christian ethos?**

A school’s Christian ethos is the defining characteristic of the community, drawn from its vision and demonstrated through its attitudes, priorities and aspirations, and often summarised through the Christian values, biblically linked, that are associated with its vision.

The SIAMS schedule (April 2018) is a tool for on-going school development. It places emphasis on the school’s Christian vision being developed and promoted by leadership at levels and on the vision driving developments as a Church school. That vision should relate to the school’s context and reflect Christian and biblical teaching appropriately.