

School Leadership



Paul Dunning
Diocesan Director of Education

Welcome back to the start of a new academic year. I truly hope you had time to enjoy the summer and the 'unforced

rhythms of grace' that Jesus speaks about in Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message version). Whilst term time is busy, please be kind to yourselves and find time and space to rest and just 'be'. You have the Director of Education's permission!

In the pages that follow you will read inspiring stories of leadership at various levels. As a group of Church of England schools, it is not surprising to read how important our Christian vision and values are. It is encouraging to see how they are drawn upon and thus shape the culture of

our schools so that all can flourish.

As schools you are well-practiced in letting pupils have their voice and play leadership roles. In the last academic year the Diocese Board of Education began to work with pupils in schools on specific areas of the DBE Strategic Plan 2024-30. We are keen to place pupil voice at the heart of our work and discussions. Three examples follow of what has been undertaken. The DBE hopes that these examples inspire you to further engage pupils in leadership responsibilities in your school.

Pupil Leadership

Millie, Evelyn, Beth and Elsie
Eco Council Members, Necton Church
of England Primary School

Our Eco Team raise awareness about problems that affect us and our environment. We also represent our school by going to meetings and by sharing the consequences our actions have on the environment. Before automatic lights were installed in multiple rooms of the school we had a team who would make sure that all lights had been switched off but this is no longer

necessary. To show even more leadership our team organised an Eco Day for Thursday 12 June. This day was a success and made more people aware of what is happening in the world. The day included many activities that classes could take part in: Bee bottle making with recycled plastic, tree planting, cloud watching and bird feeder making.

We recommend that other schools install automatic lights so that if you forget to turn them off they automatically do it themselves. We also recommend that more eco teams are established around the world to raise more awareness and



to be the change. You can find out more about our Eco Council by watching our film via www.necton.norfolk.sch.uk/OurSchool/Welcome

Keeley Walsh (RE and SIAMS Lead)
Teacher, St Nicholas Priory Church of
England VA Primary School

The children at St Nicholas Priory have a passion for service. The golden thread through our school is the quote of 'I come to serve, not to be served' and this is seen heavily within our pupil led groups. Our Priory Parliament, Eco Squad and RE Leaders have undertaken courageous advocacy projects throughout the year to make a change locally and globally. Our biggest project this year was led by the Priory Parliament group who paired with a local school to raise money to build a new school in Sierra Leone. To do this they hosted 'Priory's Got Talent', raising funds while creating a community spirit. In a local context the children took action to raise money for the local church that had a window smashed, immediately



reaching out to the church and asking our 'Priory Family' to step in and help! To build community links and celebrate our diversity the children helped to host International Evening, gathering our community to celebrate the different cultures, languages and nationalities that make up our unique setting.

Our child led groups have also started to host governor cafés, engaging governors and pupils in informal

chats allowing adults to gain a deeper understanding of pupil voice and children to express ideas and push forward change.

Why not try a governor café and engage pupils and governors in informal chats developing relationships, understanding and pupil voice? Or an International Evening to bring everyone in your community together to celebrate the diversity in your school community?

Mariam
Pupil, St Michael's VA Junior School

At St Michael's, we have a Culture Society and it's one of the best things about our school! It's a group where children like me work with teachers to help everyone learn about different cultures, religions, and traditions. We believe it's really important that all pupils feel proud of who they are and where they come from.

We learn about each other's cultures by asking questions, sharing stories, and even bringing in special objects or food from home. We invite people from our community and families to talk about their traditions and beliefs, which is always really interesting. We also help plan for festivals like Diwali, Eid, Chinese New Year, and Black History Month. That means we get to help with decorations, activities, and even lead assemblies for the whole school! Sometimes people don't understand

something about a culture, but we talk it through kindly and help them learn, not judge. We believe everyone should have a safe space to speak confidently about their culture.

One thing we think other schools should do is start their own Culture Society! We'd love to help you set one up. You can even contact us at St Michael's. We are just kids, but we know how powerful it is when everyone feels included and celebrated.



Nick Read

Executive Headteacher
North Star Federation

Headship can sometimes feel a solitary business with often only one's own instincts, motivation and experience of success (and failure) as a guide to what to do next. Over time I've come to recognise that the conviviality that the children and staff bring to school is what keeps me coming to work, despite the challenges of being - in the villages my schools serve - the last public service standing. Children bring energy and life to our work.

So there remains solitude and vulnerability as a school leader when day-to-day one is ultimately responsible for the

education and wellbeing of so many – a responsibility that can weigh heavy. However, I am buoyed by the longevity of our mission as church schools. My two federated primary schools, The Belfry and Worstead, have been doing their tireless work since 1830 and 1845 respectively and I am therefore a relative newcomer, although I'm at the point now where I've known every child in the school since Reception (at Worstead at least), which is a source of great professional satisfaction that can't be replicated in other roles.

Recently I've been thinking about that word, 'mission' and its original meaning; the sending of a message or messenger. I wondered to myself; do our small church schools still have a genuine mission, separate from the operational objectives all schools pursue? I believe we do.

When federating two separate schools, the challenge was to formulate a vision I personally could believe in (and therefore promote wholeheartedly), and my school communities could believe in, which still encompassed their separate legacies and therefore had to be broad. It had to stand almost independent of the comings and goings of government policy or curriculum and I feel that church schools are uniquely positioned to grasp this. In the end, our vision became one of hope. Because after all, as teachers (and parents) we all hope for a bright future for our children as adults. We nurture the faithful certainty that if we do our best for children, they will go on to shape society guided by the Christian values they have flourished under, in those all-too-short primary years they are in our care.

Hayley Sonnex

Executive Headteacher
Neatishead, Salhouse and Fleggburgh
Church of England VC School Federation

Why I Chose to Return to Church of England Schools

In January 2024, I chose to return to church schools because I believe they offer a unique and special environment. These schools are founded on Christian values, which are widely recognised as crucial for a child's personal development, regardless of one's personal beliefs. I've spoken with parents who specifically chose Fleggburgh C of E Primary School for this reason. These values promote restorative conversations among pupils and are instrumental in guiding their behaviour. By teaching Christian values, we help children consider the feelings of others.

Being part of a church school also means children frequently visit their local church and learn about Christian traditions. During Collective Worship, they are exposed to Bible stories they might not hear otherwise. I've heard heartwarming stories that highlight the impact of this education, such as a former Fleggburgh student being the only person to show kindness to a visually



impaired peer in high school. Another example from my time at Alburgh with Denton C of E Primary was a pupil who, after learning about compassion, was so moved by the plight of homeless people in Norwich that, with his parents' permission, bought them Christmas presents.

Our federation of Neatishead, Salhouse, and Fleggburgh schools operates under the biblical foundation of Isaiah 40:31: "Those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles." Our goal is to give our students every opportunity to "soar." This means not only being aspirational for their academic achievements but also helping them grow into well-rounded individuals ready to flourish in the next chapter of their lives.

At Neatishead, our Eco Committee students are already making a positive difference in our world. I am also a strong advocate for trips and visits, which allow

children to experience new things, broaden their horizons, and see a world of endless possibilities. Singing at Salhouse is a great joy, and it's well-known that singing is beneficial for mental health. It's a privilege to introduce children to classic hymns and modern worship songs. One of my favourite moments this year was taking the Neatishead children to a local Baptist church to sing for elderly residents. It was a moment where we truly felt we had made a difference, and that's what it's all about.

Like all schools, we face many challenges, but we are encouraged by the support of the Diocese and the sense of being part of something greater. I'm grateful for the support of the DSSO initiative, which provides a listening ear and cares about staff wellbeing. Knowing that people are praying for us is a great source of encouragement as have been positive relationships with local vicars and lay people.

Governance Update



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The leadership of a church school is a distinctive partnership reflecting the Christian vision and values at the heart of its educational mission. A key part of this leadership is the governing board (maintained schools) or LGC (academies), which plays a vital role in making sure this Christian character is woven into every aspect of school life. Two relevant strands of the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework are:

- **IQ1: How does the school's Christian vision enable pupils and adults to flourish?**
- **IQ4: How does the school's Christian vision create a culture of respect and dignity?**

Christian Vision and Flourishing (IQ1)

Governors act as the guardians of the school's Christian vision. Under IQ1, they must ensure the school's leadership has a clear, theologically rooted vision that guides all strategic decisions and daily activities. Their responsibility is to monitor how this vision helps everyone – students and staff alike – flourish academically, socially, and spiritually.

Effective governors don't just approve the vision; they help shape it, making sure it's theologically grounded in Christian principles through engagement with

scripture and tradition. For example, a vision based on "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10) can inspire a curriculum that fosters curiosity, creativity, and compassion. Governors are expected to ask challenging questions about whether the vision is making a real impact, particularly for vulnerable students, and if the school is a place of flourishing for all.

They also ensure that the school's self-evaluation for SIAMS is thorough and integrated into its improvement plans. Governors must demonstrate how Christian values underpin teaching, relationships, and leadership, and how these elements contribute to the flourishing of the school community.

A Culture of Respect and Dignity (IQ4)

IQ4 focuses on how the Christian vision creates a culture where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Here, governors must ensure that school policies – from behaviour management to staff wellbeing, safeguarding, inclusion, and diversity – are shaped by Christian principles like love, justice, and reconciliation. Whether an academy or maintained school these core Christian principles must always be evident.

A strong governing body models servant leadership and supports senior leaders in creating a nurturing and inclusive environment. Governors must both challenge and support leaders to ensure the Christian ethos authentically shapes the school's culture. They are actively involved in reviewing how well the school lives out its vision in practical ways, such

as how it includes pupils with SEND and supports staff wellbeing.

Furthermore, governors must ensure that the Christian vision guides the school's response to challenges. In difficult times, such as budget constraints or disciplinary issues, they are expected to ensure decisions are made with compassion, fairness, and prayerful reflection. They must "walk the talk" as role models for the school and the wider community.

In essence, governors in church schools are not passive overseers but spiritual and strategic leaders who ensure the Christian vision is lived out in both policy and practice, making the school a place where everyone can flourish and relationships reflect the love and justice of Christ.

Prayer

Loving God,
We thank You for the gift of Church schools and for all who lead and govern them. Grant our governors wisdom rooted in Your Word, courage in their decisions, and compassion in their leadership. May the vision of each school be shaped by Your truth and love, That every pupil and adult may flourish in mind, body, and spirit. Creating communities of dignity, respect, and hope. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Useful resources

www.DofN.org/Anti-Bullying
www.DofN.org/Framework-Academies
www.DofN.org/Framework-VAVC-schools
www.DofN.org/SIAMS-hot-topics

Welcome

Dan Pickard – Ashill VC Primary School
Dan Bagshaw – Open Academy
Emma Bournier – Pathfinder's Federation
Julie Leader (Interim) – Wreningham VC Primary School

Farewell & thanks

Steve Creasy – Ashill VC Primary School
Jon Ford – Open Academy
Rob Jones – Wreningham VC Primary School

Academy Conversion to St Benet's

Pulham VC Primary School

SIAMS congratulations

Congratulations to the following schools that have had their SIAMS inspections this term:

Happisburgh Church of England Primary Academy
Cringleford Church of England VA Primary School
Ashwick Church of England Primary School