



Living well through challenge



Paul Dunning
Diocesan Director of Education

As always, the contributors to *Footprints* articulate so beautifully what church schools are all about and how their Christian vision underpins and influences school life on a daily and hourly basis. That's so vital at times of difficulty and challenge.

Life is full of challenges – my current one is not getting too emotional or nostalgic as I write my last introduction to *Footprints* after eight years as Director of Education, a role I have loved and been privileged to carry out.

In 2017 the Diocese was using the words

from Ephesians 3:20-21 as one of the key Bible passages in its mission strategy. What a gift! As we wrote our first Diocesan Board of Education Strategic Plan, we used the phrase '*immeasurably more*' from this passage to challenge and inspire ourselves, particularly focused on what this means for children in our schools.

Collectively we all do a huge amount to enable pupils to achieve '*immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine*' as we provide a rounded educational experience with amazing personal development opportunities and serious engagement with spiritual matters so that all can develop and flourish. Thank you for all you do to enable that.

However, our challenge remains that in Norfolk and our Church of England schools across our Diocese, the percentage of children not reaching the national standard in reading, writing and maths remains stubbornly below national averages. That is not through lack of

effort so what can we do to enable our children to live out our vision and achieve '*immeasurably more*'?

I have no slick answer, but I do believe we need to continue to challenge ourselves as adults as to what it means for each individual child to be given the opportunity to achieve '*immeasurably more*' in *every* aspect of their school experience and never limit their potential through low ambition.

As I pass on the baton to Chris Allen, who I know will be a wonderful successor, I pray for all of you in our schools as you love and serve your communities. My hope is that you all experience what Jesus speaks of in John 10:10 where he says, '*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*' That fullness of life has certainly been my experience working across our schools and academy trusts, and I feel truly blessed. Thank you for all your support, challenge and encouragement over the years. I'm going to miss you! God bless.



Sophie Dickson

Headteacher
Ashwicken Church of England
Primary School

Being the head of a small school means that challenge is part of daily life. With just over a hundred pupils, 10% with EHCPs and around a quarter with SEN, there are times when the needs feel bigger than our resources. Add to that the changes that come our way in education and it can feel overwhelming.

What keeps me going is our Christian

vision: "Caring for each other. Caring for our world." It's simple, but it grounds us. It reminds me – and our whole community – that we don't face difficulties alone. As Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Even on the hardest days, that gives me hope.

In practice, it's about people. Staff look out for one another and for the children. Older pupils take care of the younger ones, and parents know they will be listened to. Collective Worship gives us space to pause, to celebrate, and sometimes just to breathe. Those little moments of care and kindness

add up and make a huge difference when challenges feel heavy.

Of course, change also brings opportunity. Our pupils are full of curiosity and questions, and I'm proud that, even in difficult times, we can encourage them to wonder, to reflect, and to grow. They teach me daily about resilience and hope.

I certainly don't always get it right – none of us do – but I believe living well in a school community is about walking together with faith, courage, and compassion. That's what being a Church school means to us, and it's what carries us through.

Tom Snowdon

Executive Headteacher
The Pilgrim Federation

Responding to Challenges – How the Pilgrim Federation Supports Others

Due to the small size of the four primary schools in our Federation in North Norfolk – Blakeney, Hindringham, Kelling and Walsingham – we like to think of ourselves as one big family. Because the schools are so small, we're able to get to know our pupils and families incredibly well which means we can be in a unique position to support and help when difficulties, as they will always do from time to time, arise.

The way we're able to effectively support our stakeholders has been recognised in all of our recent SIAMS inspections, with examples of the feedback we've received including: "Superb care from a hugely dedicated staff team supports pupils and

families to flourish. This is enhanced by a particularly close and effective partnership with the local church."

The next step in our ongoing journey of improvement, linked to the 'all playing our part' element of our Federation vision, is the 'Purple Bricks' initiative. These are a new award that we launched at our annual Founding Day celebration which was held at All Saints Church in Upper Sheringham this May. They are designed to recognise and celebrate pupils who go above and beyond to support others in their local communities. Recently, this has included pupils volunteering at a retirement home and fundraising for a local animal charity.

During Collective Worship, these pupils have then fed back to the whole school about what they've done to support others, and this has helped all of our pupils to be further aware of the important roles they can play in society. Our moral purpose is to utilise the schools as beacons of hope in the villages to which they belong, and this initiative further enhances our work in this area.





John Neenan
Headteacher
Drayton Church of England Junior School

Living Well Through Challenge

At Drayton, we recognise that life brings both joy and difficulty – and that how we respond to challenge reflects who we are as a school. Whether it's a change in leadership, curriculum developments, or personal struggles, we remain rooted in our Christian vision and values.

Our commitment to living well together means we face change with compassion, courage, and hope. We support one another through a shared sense of purpose and direction. Our Collective Worship offers a



space to pause, pray, and find strength, while our curriculum encourages pupils to explore resilience, empathy, and faith.

We live this through our vision: "In whatever you do, don't let selfishness or pride be your guide. Don't be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too" – Philippians 2:3-4

Cherishing each individual
Aiming for everyone to flourish
Relationships rooted in care and respect
Embacing collaboration and compassion.

We are committed to fostering a community rooted in humility and respect. Guided by the principle of honouring others, as well as ourselves, we strive to cultivate an environment where everyone flourishes.

We encourage our learners to care for one another, embracing collaboration and compassion in all they do. Together, we aim to create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere that nurtures not only academic excellence but also the spiritual, moral and cultural development of every individual.

We encourage our pupils to care deeply for one another, and we remind our whole community that they are valued and loved. We nurture the understanding that we are all God's children, each perfectly designed to be who we are—unique individuals, yet part of the whole human race. Together, we find strength, and challenges become easier to face.

Living well doesn't mean avoiding challenge – it means growing through it. We must embrace challenges as an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God and reaffirm our identity as a Church school. Together, we continue to build a place of sanctuary, learning, and hope, where every voice is heard and every journey is valued.



Shannon O'Sullivan
Executive Headteacher
The Nightingale Federation

When Challenges Become Opportunities to Shine

At Thomas Bullock Church of England Primary and Nursery Academy, recent years have reminded us that times of challenge can also be times of growth. For 18 months, our school faced significant disruption when our main hall was closed due to the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in the roof. The hall, typically the heart of school life, had to be taken out of use immediately, creating both practical and emotional challenges for pupils, staff, and the wider community.

Without access to this central space, Collective Worship moved online, PE lessons were adapted or held outdoors regardless of the weather, and many school performances, concerts, and events were postponed or

relocated into cramped classrooms. The absence of a shared gathering place was felt deeply, particularly by younger pupils who had never experienced school life with this space at the centre of their learning and community.

Yet in the face of these challenges, our Christian values guided every decision. Staff worked tirelessly to adapt, and pupils showed remarkable resilience, perseverance, and care for one another. They embraced new ways of learning, continued to let their light shine, and demonstrated how faith, hope, and community spirit can transform difficulties into opportunities for growth.

This approach reflects the vision of living well, as articulated in SIAMS principles. Our restored hall now stands



not just as a physical space but as a symbol of togetherness, fellowship, and the importance of nurturing the whole child: spiritually, emotionally, and academically. We are grateful for the lessons learned and for how our community has grown stronger, more compassionate, and more resilient, proving that even in times of change, we can flourish together.

Governance Update



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Governance is the foundation on which a school is built. When it's strong, everything else becomes easier. One of the clearest expressions of Christian vision and values in schools is how people are treated – especially during challenging times. Governors and trustees play a vital role in ensuring that this foundation remains firm.

Central to governance is the idea of being a critical friend. In Christian terms, friendship is rooted in compassion, encouragement, and shared burden. It's kind, but not soft. In routine times, this might mean asking thoughtful questions that prompt leaders to reflect on their practice. In harder moments, it could be checking on a leader's wellbeing, offering prayer, or sending a handwritten note of thanks. These acts of accompaniment – walking alongside leaders – help ensure decisions are made with both strategic insight and human care.

The relationship between the Chair and school leaders is especially important. When built on trust, grace, and respect, it sets a tone for the whole community. The Chair can model servant leadership

by offering challenge with affirmation, encouraging rest, and prioritising staff wellbeing alongside performance. These gestures help embed dignity and kindness as core practices, not optional extras. This approach aligns with SIAMS Inspection Question 4 (IQ4), which examines how a school's vision is lived out in relationships and processes. A culture of treating people well isn't created by policy alone – it's seen in daily interactions. Governors and trustees can support this by asking: Do our policies reflect each person's worth? Are our processes compassionate and transparent? Do our relationships show forgiveness and respect? These are spiritual as well as practical questions.

Schools plan for inspections and resources, but unexpected events—bereavement, safeguarding issues, or societal disruptions—will arise. These moments test whether kindness is truly embedded. Governors and trustees must ensure contingency planning includes pastoral care. Their role will vary by setting, so referring to relevant guidance is key. For instance, after a staff bereavement, they might help bring in chaplaincy support or create space for reflection and prayer. In a leadership crisis, they can support continuity not just through interim appointments but by being present, speaking with staff, and reassuring parents.

Practical examples of this culture include

governors attending school beyond formal meetings, arranging thank you events, opening meetings with prayer focused on staff wellbeing, and checking how decisions are received by the wider community. These simple actions affirm the belief that every person has God-given worth and demonstrate that culture is shaped not just through policy, but through presence, relationships, and example.

I encourage all governors to begin and end meetings with a moment of peace and prayer, as a small but powerful way to nurture this culture.

*God of wisdom and compassion,
We thank you for the privilege of serving
our school community.
Guide us to lead with courage and humility,
to challenge with grace,
and to encourage with kindness.
When decisions are heavy,
help us share the burden.
When relationships are tested,
fill us with patience and understanding.
When the unexpected comes,
keep us rooted in love,
so that all we do may honour the dignity
of every person,
made in your image and held in your care.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.*



Bishop of Norwich Environment Prize for Schools 2025

Congratulations to St Peter and St Paul Carbrooke Church of England Primary Academy on winning the award to help purchase items for a new garden.

Further details can be viewed via www.DofN.org/bishops-prize

SIAMS congratulations

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

Harleston Sancroft Academy