

DIOCESE OF YORK

DISTINCTIVENESS AS A CHURCH SCHOOL

What is the purpose of Church schools?

- *'To nourish Christians in their faith, encourage those of other faiths, and challenge those of no faith'*. Lord Runcie
- *'Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'*. General Synod resolution, 1998
- *'No Church school can be considered as part of the Church's mission unless it is distinctively Christian'* their *'purpose is to offer a spiritual dimension to the lives of young people, within the traditions of the Church of England, in an increasingly secular world'*. 'The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the new millennium'

Ethos statement of the Church of England for all its schools

- *Recognising its historic foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church of England and in partnership with the Church at parish and diocesan level.*
- *The school aims to serve its community by providing an 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 to all its pupils.'*

But what makes a Church school distinctive and different?

- Every school is distinctive and different in some ways
- 'An important element in the distinctiveness of Church Schools will lie in the emphasis on the quality of religious education in the curriculum, which whilst covering other faiths will give particular weight to the Christian faith as held by the Church of England'.

Excellence and distinctiveness

- Church schools should be distinctive in their Collective Worship and RE, their ethos, and the ways in which their Christian values are outworked in the daily life of the school.

Reflection

- *Discussion in 2s/3s about what makes church schools distinctively different from community schools.*
- *Try to agree a list of 4 features.*

(5 minutes)

Distinctiveness (1)

- A place of distinctive excellence where all are valued as individuals and as God's children;
- A safe place where there is no ideological pressure and yet Christian values are built into the ethos and the teaching;
- Understanding of and sensitivity towards those of other faiths and those of no faith;
- Effective links with the local church, diocese and local community;
- A deliberate attempt to link the concerns of Christ's Gospel with the life of the school;
- Visible signs and symbols of its Christian foundation around the school;

Distinctiveness (2)

- Enduring values and relationships in which selfless care and Christian love are apparent to all;
- A place where learning and the acquiring of skills are seen as a part of the revelation of God and His continuous involvement in His creation;
- Collective worship that develops a true sense of awe and wonder and the spiritual dimension, follows the liturgical year, and celebrates with the parish significant Christian festivals and feast days;
- Religious education that is seen as an important part of the curriculum;

Distinctiveness (3)

- A commitment to developing the spiritual dimension both in the formal and the hidden curriculum;
- A place that takes the views of all the members of its community seriously and where the voice of the weakest is heard.
- Church schools have a particular role to play in the promotion of community cohesion both within the school and also in working with the parish to reach out to the wider community that it serves.

Reflective and evaluative

- A good school is also both reflective and evaluative, willing to challenge itself with the help of critical friends such as governors.
- *An effective church school extends these processes to include the development of the spiritual dimension.*

The outstanding church school

‘The key characteristic of an outstanding church school is that it is a place where the Kingdom of God can be seen outworking in practical reality. A place where there is welcome and hospitality, encouragement and comfort, trust and understanding, good things happen and everyone enjoys being there; healing and wholeness are present and there is a sense of the ‘shalom’ of heaven. In other words, a place that feels very much alive. Schools like this can do their community good!’

Derek Holbird (Guildford Diocesan Director of Education)

The National Society's self-evaluation toolkit for church schools

This breaks down the foundation aspects of the work of church schools into four areas:

- Ethos
- Collective Worship
- Religious Education
- Leadership and management

Each area is presented as a question of the ***effectiveness*** of the school, ***as a church school***. Each section is further broken down into a small number of subsidiary questions that help the school to explore its effectiveness and come up with a view about ***what is working*** and ***what needs to be improved***.

What does a good one look like?

- The NS guidance for inspectors of Church schools includes a very helpful set of descriptors.
- Against each of the four key questions it describes what would be an outstanding, good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory outcome/finding.
- *Evaluation findings from using the NS self-evaluation toolkit may then be used to inform the school's development plan and the relevant sections of the Ofsted SEF.*

Effective church schools successfully support and promote:

- the development and nurture of the Christian ethos and the spiritual life of the school;
- the high status and quality of Religious Education and Collective Worship;
- positive links between the school, Parish Church and the Diocesan Board of Education;
- the promotion of Christian values through school policies and the way in which the school conducts its business;
- a clear view of what it means for the school to have a Christian foundation and put this into practice.