

Developing a Christian Vision for your school

A SIAMS inspection will seek to answer this one overarching question through seven different strands:



How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by **leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to **flourish**?**

The **seven strands** are:

1. Vision and Leadership
2. Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills
3. Character development: Hope, Aspiration and Courageous Advocacy
4. Community and Living Well Together
5. Dignity and Respect
6. The impact of Collective Worship
7. The effectiveness of Religious Education

Read the schedule here: [SIAMS Revised Evaluation Schedule \(September 2021\).pdf](#)
(Church of England website)

This paper guides you through the process of formulating a vision for your school. As always, the Diocesan education team are available to help and support you with this important piece of work.

What do we mean by a 'distinctive Christian vision?'

Who are we? Why are we here?

Church of England schools need to develop and define for themselves a clear and distinctive Christian vision. The context of your school is important as it is this which determines and shapes the vision. Any vision, appropriate to your context, needs to fit within a **Christian** vision of the flourishing of humankind. Based in the **Christian** narrative, it should sound very different from the vision of a community primary and it needs to engage the whole community, not just the pupils.

For a successful SIAMS inspection, both school leadership and Governors will need to be able to articulate the school vision and the theology behind it. Failure to do so will result in a requires improvement judgement. There is no requirement for children to be able to do this theologically, but the vision does need to be understood by all.

The SEF includes the requirement to explain the vision in no more than 50 words. A vision crib sheet can be created to jog the memory and help leadership articulate and explain the vision with confidence.

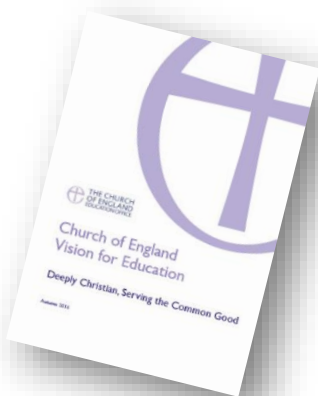
The Christian vision of your school should make a real difference. It will form part of your identity and will go on to help schools make all the important decisions – about staffing, budget, training, after school provision etc and of course the curriculum. Curriculum intent is a key focus in the new Ofsted inspection framework. Middle leaders must be able to articulate the rationale behind the curriculum that is being delivered, so conversations about the school’s vision should ideally take place before curriculum decisions are made.



“Vision is a **picture** of the **future** that produces **passion.**”
Bill Hybels

www.churchofengland.org/education

© THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
FOUNDATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP



One vision for all?

The Church of England holds a profound commitment to ensuring that all people have the opportunity to flourish and realise their God-given potential. As a church school leader, you should already be familiar with their Vision for Education. This vision is built around the promise of Jesus for life in all its fullness (John 10.10) and is a vision of education for all schools, not just church schools. Theologically grounding your vision begins with understanding this document.

The following elements form the vision for education:

Educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills: enabling discipline, confidence and delight in seeking wisdom and knowledge, and developing talents in all areas of life.

Educating for hope and aspiration: enabling healing, repair and renewal, coping wisely when things go wrong, opening horizons and guiding people into ways of fulfilling them.

Educating for community and living well together: a core focus on relationships, participation in communities and the qualities of character that enable people to flourish together.

Educating for dignity and respect: the basic principle of respect for the value and preciousness of each person, treating each person as a unique individual of inherent worth.

All school leaders and foundation governors should be mindful that growing and improving as a church school is not just about a once in a while SIAMS inspection, but an ongoing

commitment to live out a Christian vision of education, which offers dignity, hope, community and wisdom to all children.

- **Read** the Vision for Education here:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/vision-education>
- **Watch** A hand's on vision by Helen Matter, retired Diocesan Schools' Adviser,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTL-0MBdyMU>

Can you give me some examples of school Christian visions?

The following are from a variety of sources – some real, others fictional. Most are succinct summaries in 50 words written for a school's SEF. Please note, these visions will be informed by the school's unique context, details of which are not included here.

- A. A Christian family who encourage and equip each other to soar (Isaiah 40:31). We promote a love of learning with God as our guide in a safe, happy environment. We challenge and support each other to do our best.
- B. Everyone who spends time learning and growing at X, becomes a successful individual with the courage, compassion and creativity to make a difference in the future. We are respectful of God's world, working together to create a loving and caring community.
- C. At X, we aim to develop our pupils so that they are prepared for life's events and challenges along their journey into adulthood. This happens in a caring and loving environment based firmly on Christian values. We aim to use the model of Christ in helping us to create "a little bit of Heaven on Earth for everyone." (Proverbs 22:6)
- D. Through sharing the life-giving message of Jesus Christ, we are committed to developing; a love of learning, a place where all are valued, where we all live together as a Christian family. We help all recognise, develop and appreciate their gifts so that they may let their light shine! Matthew 5:16
- E. 'We are all precious, valued and valuable, gems in the making.' The Bible talks of God seeing humans as his jewels in the making (Malachi 3:6-7) with God working in each of us to create unique gems; there are edges to smooth, surfaces to polish, facets to cut. When an individual sees themselves as a 'gem' in God's hand, the difficulties and challenges of life can be seen as part of the work needed for the final gemstone to appear.
- F. We are a nurturing, inclusive, learning community, that celebrates all possibilities, through a journey of exploration, engagement and enrichment, enabling all to take risks, build resilience and grow together in God's love. X holds the Bible story "Fishers of Men" at the heart of all it does. (Luke 5.1-11)
- G. We care for all God's children, unconditionally. As a rural farming community, the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-35) and Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) resonate with many of our children with all feeling valued and welcomed as individuals. All members of our school family are valued and respected. Each child is individually known, enabling us to ensure that every child achieves their very best.



What about a strapline?

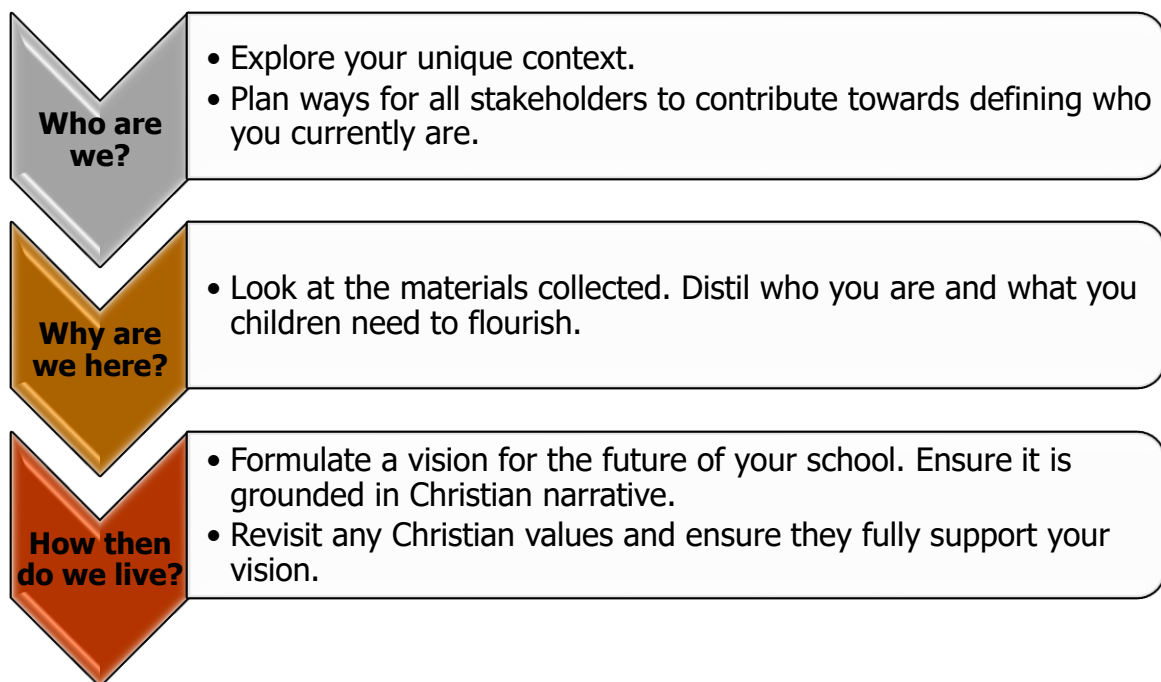
Straplines and Bible quotations are optional. Many schools chose to distil their vision into a simple strapline that can be used in a variety of ways in a school community both verbally and written. In fact, your school may already have one! It is also a good prompt when explaining the school vision to others. Some schools may use a quote from the Bible instead or in addition to their vision. Please note that this is not a requirement from the SIAMS schedule.

I want to develop a distinctive vision but I don't know where to start!

Consider these questions:

Who are you? Why are you here?

This process can sometimes feel daunting. Work carefully through the steps below and gather a team together to help the process along. This might be a working party made up of a range of stakeholders or a pre-existing ethos committee or similar to draw on existing strengths.



1. Start by really thinking about your **unique context**. What is the history of your school? What is your logo? Where are you located? Are you a small rural school or a large urban one? What is special to your town or area that brings people together? What are your children like and what do they need? What is your school particularly good at and where do your challenges lay? Who are your vulnerable?
2. **Distil** who you are. There are various creative ways of doing this. You could ask all staff and governors to articulate what is special about your school and record this in different ways but everyone should have the opportunity to contribute. SIAMS inspectors will be interested to know how a vision was formed, it should not be a top down process. Contributions from other stakeholders and the children themselves

will bring to you conclusions e.g. 'we are predominantly white British. We are comprehensive in terms of ability, we have some vulnerable children and we have families across the income spectrum. Many children get lots of opportunities, but most don't. Staff are local to East Anglia as are governors. Parents want their children to go on to University and are aspirational. We excel at sports and our music is great'. This research then **defines** who you currently are.

3. The next stage is to **think** – so what then does this school – specifically this school - need to give to its children? And how, as Christians, and with God's love, can we deliver that? Maybe it is higher aspirations, or wider opportunities or a sense of belonging. Your research should point the way. That becomes the anchor of your vision for the school. If they need higher aspirations, for instance, then your vision should reflect that. One school found that was the case and as they had links to aviation (individual context) they chose as their underpinning verse 'They shall soar like eagles!' And eagles and flight are reflected throughout the school.

How have some schools done this?

Developing the vision at Walsham-le-Willows CEVCP

The discussion about the uniqueness of Walsham-le-Willows started with the strong visual image of the willow trees in Walsham and the roots of the willows reaching deep to take up water from the stream that runs through Walsham-le-Willows to allow the trees to grow and flourish. The analogy was drawn between this idea and the very inclusive approach towards all of the children at Walsham which enables them to be fully established members of the school community who, as such, can grow and flourish in their learning and as people in the supportive environment of this church school in the Suffolk countryside.

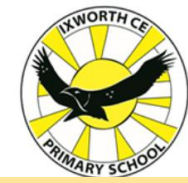
The link was made between this visual concept and Psalm 1 in the Bible: A good man being like a tree standing by the waterside and producing fruit in season. Also, Jesus being the 'water of life' - what the children soak up in their time at the school will serve each and every one of them well in the future.

The school is regarded by many of its families as being the 'community school' so the need to involve families in a meaningful and non-contrived way in the development of the vision was understood. The school's strong leanings towards the arts led to the idea that there would be a whole-school competition where the best visual elements submitted by the children would be developed into a large mosaic which would be permanently displayed on a prominent external wall at the school.



The unveiling of the mosaic and the launch of the school's Christian vision took place when Bishop Martin visited the school at Easter just before he led the 2019 Easter service.

Developing the vision at Ixworth Church of England Primary



Ixworth Church of England Primary School

On a journey together where learning has no limits.

'They will soar on wings like eagles.' Isaiah 40:31

Rev Dr Karen Burton led collective worship and talked about new beginnings and belonging together. She explained that, as a school, they were going to decide together what they wanted the school to be like in the future and that it would be really exciting with a yummy treat at the end to celebrate.

The children wrote to invite their parents/school governors/volunteers/school neighbour/ chairman of the parish council etc. The children would be escorted around the activities by their parents/grandparents; any unaccompanied children would be escorted by staff. Everyone - adults, children and toddlers were to take full part in every activity. Gazebos were put up around the school, with cut out footprints leading the way between them.

Station 1: was about letting go of the past, the way the school was and how we were in it. The gazebo was very peaceful with votive candles, fairy lights etc. The Bible verse was Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew in me a right spirit." Everyone had a white square of paper to write/draw things about the school that they wanted to let go of. The paper corners were folded into the centre and the whole placed in a paddling pool. As the paper unfolded and the pen washed away, they were to know that God had taken those things from them.

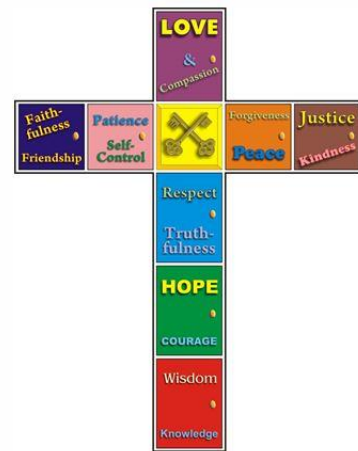
Station 2: was about dreaming big, thinking of what people wanted their school to be like in the future. The gazebo was outside, with a bubble maker going, lots of red balloons (for the Holy Spirit), binoculars, globe, candles, fairy lights, torches. The Bible verse was Jeremiah 29:11 "I have plans for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." People were encouraged to explore the tent and think about what they would like their school to be like, both in practical terms e.g. learning and in character e.g. kind/courageous. Everyone had a piece of paper to write/draw things on and peg on the washing line around the tent. **The data gathered here would inform the new vision for the school.**

Station 3: was about what they would need to be like to make these dreams they had for the school come true. The gazebo was swallowed up in beautiful fabric with small round tables and chairs, covered in fabric with tealights in jam jars, mirrors, fairy lights, etc. The idea was to look in the mirrors and draw a picture of yourself on a paper plate, then write around the rim what we needed to be like e.g. kind/helpful/respectful, then add their plate to the 'gallery'. **The data gathered here would inform the Christian values for the school.**

Station 4: was about commitment to the new vision of the school. God's promise came in the form of a rainbow in the sky, so everyone made a paint handprint on a sheet as their promise to be the best they can be for themselves and for the school. These handprints have been cut out and made into a banner for the school to keep and display. Afterwards they collated the data from the vision and values tent and formulated the new vision.

How do Christian values fit within a distinctive Christian vision?

Christian values answer the question 'how then do we live?' and should be informed by the school's vision. The previous SIAMS schedule focussed on values and so your school probably already subscribes to a set. They may come directly from the Values for Life document. Reformulating a vision is the perfect time to revisit these values and consider if they still fit your context or need renewing. Some schools may find they have long lists of up to 18, whereas no more than 6 values are now recommended. These could form a collective worship plan where one value is explored half termly, or once a term over a two-year plan.



If the formation of Christian values supports how as a community you live, it is then important to involve the whole school community in establishing core Christian values that drive what you do for each school community is unique and therefore there is not a set model for how to do this or which values would be your core values. Imaginor has information on Christian values in schools to support conversations about your core Christian values and their Christian underpinning, though it does not purport to be the definitive list of Christian values. What is key is that your values are the outworking of your vision and distinctively Christian.



<https://www.imaginer.co.uk/christian-values-school-community/>

Example from Barnham Church of England VC Primary School

Working with Rev Dr Karen Burton, the school held a 'Christian values fair,' where the children were given an opportunity to 'sell' their values. Christian values were divided among the classes – two each for KS1 classes and three each for KS2 classes. This approach was used as a way of involving as wide a cross-section of the school's population as possible.

The children had to research their values and 'bring them to life.' They created stalls featuring posters, Biblical stories, activities (e.g. word searches, craft etc.) The stalls were set up in the playground and children, parents, staff and governors were asked to vote for the six values that they felt would be the fruit of their new school vision based on John 15: 5: 'Jesus said 'I am the true vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.'

Each voter received six small stones to vote with: one vote per value, not six votes for one value! A tally was kept and the six values that were most voted for were selected. The top six values were placed in sealed envelopes opened by the children during the next Sharing Assembly where parents were also present.

All six values will be taught throughout the school in collective worship and in the classroom. They will be particularly explored during Circle Time collective worship. There will be an additional rewards system just for living out the values in school and outside of it too. The school vision and its values feature clearly on the school's website and is incorporated onto the school's banner.

Example from St Mary's Church of England Academy, Mildenhall

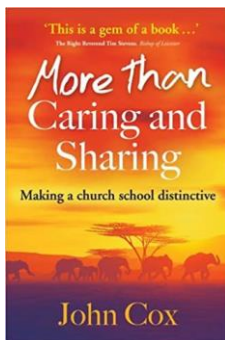
The school organised a whole community vote on which six values the school should adopt to support the living out of their new Christian vision. A survey was organised. All parents were emailed a link to a google form where they could access a list of twelve Christian values. Explanations of all the values were included placing them firmly within a Christian context and parents simply selected three they felt were a best fit. The survey was then extended to staff, governors and other stakeholders before voting was cast in the classroom.

What if I don't know enough about Christian belief to help me write a distinctive vision?

In Church of England Schools we do not expect all the staff to be practising Christians. We appoint Foundation Governors to help maintain the Christian distinctiveness of the school. These governors, and links with local clergy, should be a tool for you to utilise during your vision writing process. Remember this is not a process you should undertake on your own but a collective endeavour. You can also draw on the expertise of the Education team at the Diocese.

But as educators, we know the importance of a lifetime of learning. As leaders of Church of England schools, we should not be afraid to explore and learn about Christian beliefs and ideas to add to our understanding even if we do not subscribe to these beliefs ourselves.

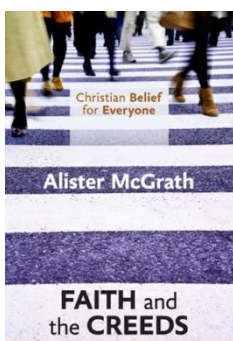
Suggested reading:



More than Caring and Sharing – Making a Church School Distinctive by John Cox

Church schools are different not because they are exclusive but because they are distinctive. But just what constitutes this distinctiveness? It is more than a matter of 'caring and sharing'. This timely book seeks to help all concerned with education in church schools to explore this question. John Cox, a retired Diocesan Director of Education, suggests that even Christian values are not enough" it is the beliefs that underpin these values that makes the real difference: belief about God, about

what it is to be human, about the Church and about the world. This is worked out in terms of the Kingdom values such as justice, forgiveness, gratitude, generosity, truth and love.



Faith and Creeds (Christian Belief for Everyone Series)– by Alister McGrath.

A look at why Christians believe what they do; how we can best understand these ideas, and the difference they make to the way we think about ourselves and our world. The first volume, Faith and the Creeds, concentrates on the nature of faith and the history and relevance of the Creeds, in a thrilling reflection on what we really mean when we say 'I believe' This is excellent preparation for exploring the leading themes of the Creeds in four subsequent volumes: The Living

God, Lord and Saviour - Jesus of Nazareth, Spirit of the Living God and The Christian Life and Hope.

What are some of the common mistakes I should avoid?

- To focus on 'values' not the 'vision.' The overarching question of the SIAMS inspection is very clear it is a judgement on the effectiveness of the vision. Values help drive the vision.
- You do not have to start from scratch. Your school will already have a philosophy and a culture which underpins why you do what you do. Your job is to find it, distil it and be able to articulate it firmly in Christian narrative.
- Do not hurry the journey. Take your time. There is no reason why your vision cannot evolve over time.
- You do not have to have a Biblical scripture to support your vision but it does have to be theologically grounded.
- Misinterpreting Bible passages or taking them out of context. For example: 'We can do all things through God who strengthens us' (Philippians 4:13). This verse is easily interpreted as relating to self-belief – I can do anything!- but this isn't accurate. Here Paul is writing from prison and is giving the early church reassurance that we can do whatever God calls us to do, not whatever we decide to do for ourselves but that God will give us the strength to be content with our life, no matter what our circumstances.

School Websites to explore:

- Barnham CEVCP School
<https://www.barnham.suffolk.sch.uk/visions-and-values>
- Hartest CofE Primary School
<http://www.hartest.suffolk.sch.uk/about-us/ethos/>
- All Saints' CofE Primary School, Newmarket
https://www.allsaints.suffolk.sch.uk/index.php?option=com_rspagebuilder&view=page&id=12

Practical resources

- Christian Values In The School Community
<https://www.imaginer.co.uk/christian-values-school-community/>
- Home School Values, Shalne Vickery and Carolyn Wright
<http://www.imaginer.co.uk/home-school-values/>
- Values in Action, Shane Vickery
<http://www.imaginer.co.uk/values-in-action/>