

Introduction

Church of England schools in the Diocese of St Albans aim to live God's love by being distinctively Christian, community focussed and by serving the common good. In doing so, they enable all pupils to flourish as individuals and as members of a loving, inclusive community centred on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Transforming Communities

The Board of Education continues to support initiatives that promote transformation in and across communities within the Diocese, nationally and overseas. As a result, the Board is pleased to receive and share reports from church schools active in organising or promoting interfaith events, raising awareness of international crises and fundraising for charitable causes at home and away. Following the relocation of Silsoe VC Lower School to its new site, a Luton-based charity working in Sierra Leone and whose vision is of a nation free of slum living, was permitted to send a great many useful items from the old school premises to Freetown. The equipment, which would not be available in the country, is to be used in a modern school built for a new community, providing ground-breaking education for the area. Aston St Mary's Primary School is representative of a number of church schools in the Diocese. It has a long-established Friendship Link with another St Mary's School in Darjeeling, India. Run by the Congregatio Jesu Sisters, it provides education to 480 pupils. Most are sons and daughters of Indian and Nepalese tea workers and exist on very little income. Teachers from Aston visit India and regular fundraising events support the school's work, allowing resources that our communities are fortunate to enjoy without question to be made available to the children there.

Going Deeper into God

Training staff in the dissemination and use of the National Society's commissioned resource *Understanding Christianity* continued in 2017. By the end of the year, it had reached over 1050 staff and 17 clergy, representing over 130 diocesan church schools along with a number of community schools in both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Training for church schools was enabled by discretionary grant funding available to the Board of Education, and the Board was pleased to note the impact that the release of funding achieved. The training also led to many schools delivering activities linked to the core concepts explored in the resource, an example of which are the 'Go Gospel' days held at St Nicholas' VA Primary School, Elstree.

The Board of Education welcomed the contribution of Welwyn St Mary's VA Primary School to the report on 'Leadership of Character Education' published by the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership. The school provided one of the case studies in the report and presented their innovative Peer Mediator Programme to the National Character Education Conference on 20th September 2017.

Making New Disciples

Church schools in the Diocese of St Albans serve the communities in which they are located, nurturing those from the Christian tradition and serving others. They provide pupils and staff with an understanding of what it means to be part of a living, caring Christian community. The Spirituality Day held at Christopher Reeves VA Primary School in Podington provided a wonderful opportunity for all to pause during the busy autumn term and reflect, meditate and pray. The school's pupil worship group 'Team Trinity' and their ministry team, Revd Peter Turnbull and Revd Jacqueline Curtis, helped to plan the day. Children came together in house groups to spend unhurried time on activities such as creating a mosaic and meditation stones for their class reflection areas, and exploring a rope labyrinth as a very special way to represent

their journey to the centre of God's love. A highlight of the day was the visit from the Rt Revd Richard Atkinson, Bishop of Bedford, who talked about life as a bishop, answered some most challenging questions and ended with a beautiful reflective act of worship and a blessing of the land as the school looks forward to a significant new build to grow into a full primary provision.

Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust

The Trust, established in October 2016 to support Church of England schools within the Diocese, currently consists of 5 academies; Churchfield CE Academy, Thomas Whitehead CE Academy, Manshead CE Academy, Caldecote CE Academy and Kensworth CE Academy. All were admitted in quick succession during 2017. This means the Trust is now responsible for over 2000 pupils and 350 staff, and has a turnover of approximately £9.5 million per annum. Affiliated school Totternhoe Community Lower is due to convert to academy status and join the Trust as a community academy in February 2018. Following a positive consultation, it has decided to adopt a religious designation as a Church of England academy shortly thereafter. Two further church schools are likely to join the Trust by January 2019. December 2017 saw the Trust succeed in one of its main priorities for its first year of operation. An unqualified set of accounts were approved by the Trust's Directors and Members at their respective meetings on 14th December 2017 and these were subsequently submitted to the Education Skills and Funding Agency.

School Inspections

91% of church supported by the Board of Education are currently graded 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, with 92.8% of primary schools judged as 'good' or better. The Board continues to offer excellent service to schools in preparation for both Ofsted and church school inspections (SIAMS). 47.8% of our schools are graded 'outstanding' at being effective church schools. This is due to high-quality training and support combined with the continuation of mid-cycle SIAMS health checks which enable schools to review progress and to reflect revisions to the inspection framework in their current provision.

Training and Development

The Schools Team runs courses for headteachers, teachers, governors, clergy and readers on a variety of topics on an annual cycle. In 2017, 814 people were trained through the delivery of 49 courses. The 2017 programme continued training on Understanding Christianity as well as delivering new courses focussing on well-being for school staff, leadership teams and pupils, offering innovative events with an added pastoral dimension. Alongside the regular courses, 2017 also included very popular briefings on vision for education, federation, and collective worship as well as training delivered by officers and consultants to a number of governing bodies exploring the Distinctive Christian Character of their schools. 92% of the Diocese's 136 church schools have joined the Board of Education's Service Level Agreement, the highest ever recorded membership.

Financial Management

Rigorous monitoring of management accounts and investments, ably supported by members of the Board's Finance Advisory Group, has led to the Board being able to effectively manage its budget for 2017. Most costs continue to be met from the restricted Consolidated Fund for Statutory Education, a small subvention being provided by the Board of Finance, with the Board planning to deliver a small deficit budget across the period 2017-2020 to meet its increasing responsibilities. The Board remains grateful to the Hockerill Educational Foundation for its contributions to staffing costs and other discretionary grants to support the development of Christian ethos and Religious Education across the Diocese's schools.

Future Plans

- Continuing the establishment of a vibrant network of church schools across the Diocese that Live God's Love
- Implementing the reconstitution and re-organisation of the Board of Education in readiness for the new triennium in January 2019

- The ongoing management of major changes in the organisation of schools, including three-tier to two-tier conversions and the creation of federations and Multi-Academy Trusts in response to legislation and declining school budgets
- Continuing the establishment of close working relationships with the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust; ensuring working practices are based on shared Christian ethos and values.