

Church Schools in the Diocese of St Albans

live God's love by being

Distinctively Christian

What does it mean to be **distinctively Christian**?

Being a distinctive Christian school impacts on every area of school life. In the Diocese of St Albans this is often worked out through an explicit set of lived Christian values and virtues that are adopted and accepted by the whole school community.

Church Schools strive for academic excellence and high standards but are not defined by this alone. Through an enriched curriculum church schools offer an education for all, characterised not only by academic excellence but also by enabling all pupils to flourish as individuals and as members of the wider community.

How can we be *distinctively Christian*?

- Develop the use of Christian Values and Virtues programmes to support Christian distinctiveness
- Enable whole school communities to connect with God through scripture, prayer and stillness
- Ensure sufficient, well-equipped school leaders are available to lead church schools
- Train school leaders/governors in what it means to lead a distinctively Christian school
- Pastorally and spiritually support school leaders/governors in their role/ministry
- Promote and develop links among schools, parishes, deaneries and the wider diocese
- Support and develop the work of parish priests in the life of church schools
- Ensure the SIAMS inspection process effectively supports Christian distinctiveness
- Celebrate the distinctive contribution of schools, school leaders and individual pupils

What is the impact of being *distinctively Christian*?

Greenfield Lower School began its Christian values programme in 2001... the school set out to be a church school underpinned by gospel values and linked to Christian teaching. Not only has the school led the way nationally in this area, it now regards itself as a 'Values Academy'. Christian values such as respect, forgiveness, responsibility and humility underpin every aspect of the school and all pupils know and understand the importance of living these values. All pupils are valued as being unique in the sight of God and the school works hard to support those pupils with difficulties or special needs. Pupils are eager to talk about the varied displays on Christian values around the school and discuss the individual values and biblical quotations; for example, the values tree in the hall where pupils pin leaves showing how their individual actions show perseverance, courage, respect, cooperation and responsibility. Pupils reflect the school's values in their exemplary behaviour. They are polite, considerate and thoughtful. The older pupils take care of the younger pupils in the playground and around the school. When bullying occurs pupils say they feel safe because it is dealt with quickly. Pupils are able to articulate Christian values and use them to express their feelings and wishes. The values, beautifully written on the front of the new building, are constant reminders of the importance of these values in their lives. The statement, 'We grow when we live these values', is understood by all.

Greenfield and Pulloxhill Academy (June 2015)

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Community-Focussed

What does it mean to be *community-focussed*?

Church schools are communities based on Christian values and orientated towards the person of Jesus Christ. Church schools aim to be inclusive communities where all are valued and respected. Community-focussed church schools are outward-looking and actively seek to support those who are disadvantaged, whether through their admissions policy, community service or practical support. They value being part of the Church of England family of schools and work in partnership with their local parish and deanery.

Church schools in the Diocese of St Albans serve the community 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 community. Each school, like the community they serve, is unique, and as a result we celebrate the joyful diversity of schools across the diocese.

How can we be *community-focussed*?

- Create learning communities based on Christian values and virtues
- Actively and courageously tackle issues related to disadvantage and injustice
- Support the creative use of church school buildings for community use
- Commission new schools in new housing developments, ensuring schools are located in the heart of local communities
- Promote new communities of learning through collaboration and partnership
- Offer practical advice on admissions, collaboration and partnership
- Advertise and promote ways for church schools to engage with their local community
- Draw together the church school family for joint acts of celebration and worship
- Celebrate and promote the impact of individual schools on community life
- Recognise the diverse context of schools across the diocese

What is the impact of being *community-focussed*?

'Relationships are excellent and parents are eager to praise the school's Christian family atmosphere, explaining how it is not only the pupils who feel safe and supported. Parents quoted times when they were in need and were greatly supported by the head teacher and the staff. Pupils' personal development is a priority. Each pupil is valued as being unique and those with special educational needs or vulnerable pupils have clear interventions in place, are well cared for and their needs met. The chair of governors commented, 'Children have come into this school with significant needs. The school puts interventions in place which are in the best interest of each individual child. Within a short time these children settle and participate fully in the life of the school.'

St Ippolyts CE Primary School (February 2015)

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Serving the Common Good

What does it mean to serve the common good?

The majority of church schools were established in the 1800s to educate the poor in each parish, to serve the common good. Today our church schools remain committed to providing a distinctively Christian, community-focussed education. This distinctive educational approach is offered to the community as a gift and as a result church schools in the Diocese of St Albans educate pupils of all faiths or none.

In serving the common good church schools aim to be places of hospitality, grace and love, welcoming and serving all. They actively participate in local, regional and national initiatives, sharing good practice, expertise and pastoral and practical support for schools in difficulties. As part of the Church of England family, church schools take part in local community-focussed initiatives that live God's love in practical ways.

How can we serve the common good?

- Live with Christian distinctiveness and generous service
- Promote inclusive admissions
- Offer an outstanding 'education for all'
- Host pre-schools, playgroups and Sunday schools in school buildings
- Work in partnership with the local parish and deanery
- Share good practice with schools
- Commission new schools in new housing estates
- Support the teaching of RE in church and community schools
- Advise and support SACREs in the diocese
- Work in partnership with local authorities
- Promote a rigorous approach to safeguarding that ensures church school pupils are celebrated as children of God

What is the impact of serving the common good?

'The school makes a huge investment in the wellbeing and safety of pupils. This is deeply embedded because of stable Christian leadership and the imagination and perseverance of the pastoral team on a daily basis. Consequently, pupils flourish. They progress from very low starting points to reach national averages and disadvantaged pupils are rapidly making up the gap in achievement. Their aspirations are raised through high quality activities such as climbing mountains in Snowdonia and making films for anti-bullying week. Attendance has continued to rise over several years, matching and now exceeding the national average. The level of exclusions is low and behaviour is good.'

Countess Anne Church of England Academy (February 2015)

'The leadership of this school is outstanding. It is led by an inspirational headteacher, who understands the importance of faith and belief to people from diverse religions, whilst respecting those who have no faith. She has a profound influence on the school community.'

St Paul's CE Primary, Chipperfield (June 2014)