



This paper will guide you through formulating a theologically rooted Christian vision for your school.

As always, the Diocesan Education Team are available to help and support you with this.

# Developing a Christian Vision for Your School

The SIAMS framework asks this overarching question:

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

Your school's theologically rooted Christian vision is the driving force behind all that you do. After a SIAMS inspection, there are two possible judgements:

**J1:** The inspection findings indicate that the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school, and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish or

**J2:** The inspection findings indicate that the school has strengths, but that there are also issues that leaders need to address as a matter of priority.

The 2023 SIAMS framework asks Inspection Questions (IQs) about impact, allowing leaders to explain the school's context and the reasons for decisions and actions. These IQs provide the structure to which inspectors work and are as follows:

**IQ1:** How does the school's theologically rooted Christian vision enable pupils and adults to flourish?

**IQ2:** How does the curriculum reflect the school's theologically rooted Christian vision?

**IQ3:** How is collective worship enabling pupils and adults to flourish spiritually?

**IQ4:** How does the theologically rooted Christian vision create a culture in which pupils and adults are treated well?

**IQ5:** How does the theologically rooted Christian vision create an active culture of justice and responsibility?

**IQ6:** Is the religious education curriculum effective (with reference to the expectations set out in the Church of England's Statement of Entitlement for Religious Education)?

\* **IQ7:** What is the quality of religious education?

**Note: IQs 1-6 apply to all church schools. IQ7 applies to Voluntary Aided and former Voluntary Aided church schools only.**

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

**Who are we? Why are we here? How, then, shall we live and learn together?**

Church schools need to develop and define for themselves a clear and distinctive Christian vision. The context of your school is important to determine and shape this vision. Any vision 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. The community will need to be able to articulate the school vision and the theology behind it. There is no requirement for children to be able to do this theologically or word-for-word, but the vision does need to be understood by all.

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.

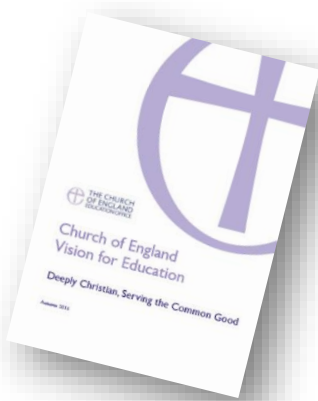


“Vision is a **picture** of the **future** that produces **passion.**”  
Bill Hybels

### 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. The Church of England's vision for education 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, found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/vision-education>



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.

- **Watch** this video about 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. 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. 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)
- C. 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).
- D. '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.

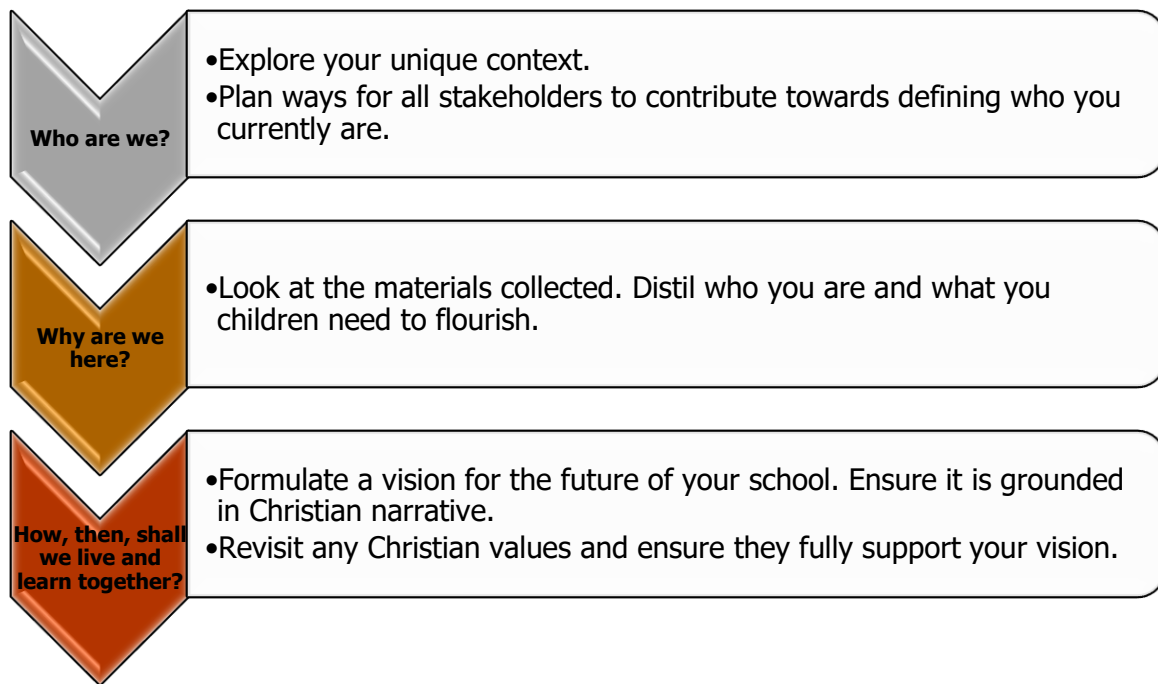
## What about a strapline?

Straplines and Bible quotations are optional. Many schools chose to distil their vision into a simple strapline. Your school may already have one! It can be a good prompt when explaining the school vision to others.



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

This process can sometimes feel daunting. Work carefully through the following steps and gather a team of stakeholders together to help the process along.



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 small or large? 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?
2. **Distil who you are**. You could ask stakeholders to articulate what is special about your school and record this in different ways. SIAMS inspectors will be interested to know how a vision was formed, it should not be a top down process. This research then defines who you currently are.
3. The next stage is to **think** – what then does this school – specifically this school - need to give to its children? And how, as Christians 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!' (Isaiah 40:31) with eagles and flight being 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 and the roots of the willows reaching deep to take up water from the stream, allowing the trees to grow and flourish. The analogy was drawn between this 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 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 just before he led an Easter service.



## How do Christian values fit within a distinctive Christian vision?

Christian values answer the question 'How, then, shall we live and learn together?' and should be informed by the school's vision. Your school may already subscribe to a set of values, for example 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.

It is important to involve the whole school community in establishing core Christian values that drive what you do. There is not a set model for how to do this or which values would be your core values. What is key is that your values are the outworking of your vision and distinctively Christian.



### Example from Barnham Church of England VC Primary School

Working with Rev 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 and the children had to research their values and 'bring them to life.' They created stalls featuring posters, Biblical stories, activities. 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.

All six values are taught throughout the school in collective worship and in the classroom. 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 school's banner.

## 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. You can also draw on the expertise of the Diocesan Education Team.

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

## Hints and Advice

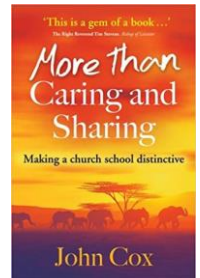
- The 2023 SIAMS inspection framework bases the judgement on the effectiveness of the vision. Values help to drive the vision.
- You do not have to start from scratch. Your school will already have a philosophy and a culture which underpins why you do what you do. Your job is to find it, distil it and 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 or quote to support your vision but it does have to be theologically grounded.
- You do not have to have a strapline or catch phrase although some schools find this is a good way to ensure that the vision is memorable.
- Misinterpreting Bible passages or taking them out of context can be a common pitfall. 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, and the strength to be content whatever circumstances we are in, not whatever we decide to do for ourselves.
- **Don't feel you need to over complicate it:** Inspections that have taken place under the 2023 framework so far have indicated that it is best to **keep it simple**. Just be very clear on the theology that underpins your vision and how it relates to the context of your school.

The only way that Inspectors will be able to come to an accurate judgement is by seeing it for themselves. No amount of anecdotal information will give them what they need in the same way that spending time in school, conversing with people and seeing the vision in action will. With this in mind, it is safe to say that the need to spend hours writing a detailed SIAMS Self-Evaluation is significantly reduced. However, as a Diocese, we still strongly recommend that you produce a SEF for the following reasons:

- It helps greatly as a reminder of the impact of the actions you take as a church school, driven by the school's Christian vision.
- It serves as a tool to inform priorities and future actions and to assist you in writing a clear and simple action plan, should you wish to do so.
- It is important when you are notified that a SIAMS inspection of your school is about to take place as it gives the Inspector valuable information about your church school and a firm basis for the inspection.

## Practical resources

- 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.
- Living Our Vision and Values by Shahne Vickery: Updated to support the latest SIAMS framework. <https://imaginor.co.uk/publications/living-our-vision-and-values/>
- Home School Values, Shahne Vickery <https://imaginor.co.uk/product/home-school-values/>
- Faith and Creeds (Christian Belief for Everyone Series)– by Alister McGrath.



**The Diocesan Education Team  
are available to help and  
support you with this – please  
do contact us if we can be of  
any help.**

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