

Prayers of Love and Faith, Living in Love and Faith
Schools guidance
January 2024

Executive summary

The purpose of this paper is to encourage and support highly valued church and school partnerships, specifically addressing any tensions in the context of the Church of England's Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) and Living in Love and Faith (LLF). The paper will outline the importance of strong relationships and how these can be fostered within the context of national legislation as well as theology and conscience.

This is an iterative document resulting from considered and respectful dialogue. It offers some initial practical examples and, whilst further national guidance is anticipated, it is also to encourage constructive conversations at local and diocesan level.

The 2016 Church of England Vision for Education is reinforced by the 2023 document 'Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System.' These documents affirm that through Church of England Schools and Academies the educational offer is 'deeply Christian, for the common good', enabling all to flourish (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools, 2023).

For people of faith matters of conscience are core to Christian identity and therefore of huge importance. The relationship between a school a local church is a key opportunity for churches to connect to the wider community and live out the Five Marks of Mission. All schools will have their own values, policies and guidelines which will comply with legislative requirements. All who go into the school as guests must work within those values and guidelines if the relationship is to flourish and grow. Where a School, Academy or Trust has members of the church on its governing body, those Christians will play a key part in forming guidance and ethos for the individual setting or wider Trust.

This paper offers a detailed exploration and some guidance around the matter of holding to conscience in places where we are guests. Where a Christian leader feels their conscience is compromised by inhabiting that space, alternative Christian partnership and pastoral care can be offered to the school. How that is done will be fundamental to preserving a relationship of trust and love between church and school, between the congregation and members of the school community. Whilst there may be tensions and differences between theological views, personal conscience and legislation there are also ways to navigate this. Worked examples constructive, practical steps and suggestions are set out below.

How this guidance document is set out:

1. Introduction, setting the context.
2. The parameters, particularly pertaining to PLF and LLF.
3. Key actions to consider. Practical suggestions.
4. Some worked examples.
5. Further actions and next steps.

1. Introduction and context

Church Schools, and places of education where there is a Christian foundation, should be vibrant and flourishing communities. These communities will be grounded in, and living out, Christian vision and values through service and worship. In ‘living and telling the story of God’s love for us’, these settings will serve and reflect their communities in ways which are warmly open, invitational and inclusive. A strong link to a local church, or churches, is key to this flourishing. Strong links enable a rich connection that nourishes the setting’s Christian roots and enriches the missional opportunities of the church, opening pathways for individuals and groups to explore and grow in Christian faith. Chaplaincy offers many examples of where distinctive Christian presence and building personal relationships can be extremely positive within the policies and expectations of settings outside churches.

Church Schools and many other education settings with a CE foundation are not ‘faith’ schools and must adhere to current legislation around education, equality and human rights. The SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) Framework 2023 repeatedly references the flourishing of all members of the community. Missional opportunities may be developed through pathways and connections that go beyond the curriculum and the school day. These may include out of school hours clubs, messy church or chaplaincy; new worshiping community groups, pupil led spiritual leadership groups, the Archbishops’ Young Leaders Awards. There are clear parameters about what is and is not appropriate to share in education settings during school time. As key partners, yet as guests in education settings, clergy and other staff or volunteers from the local church must give due regard to policies that apply this legislation. These policies will have been determined collegiately by the appropriate Governing or Trust Boards, meeting their statutory duties and civic responsibilities. It is the responsibility of all visitors to be generous and respectful guests.

Policies will take into consideration national legislation, faith sensitivity and the context of the setting including its age range, community and church foundation. In some settings there will have been opportunity for local churches to help shape these policies through representation on Governing Boards or in response to consultations, such as with Sex and Relationships Education or Behaviour policies. Foundation representation from Church of England Governors or Trustees will play a strong part in this, especially where there is a majority, 50-75% foundation representation in Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools or Trust Boards where Trusts include former VA schools. 25% for Voluntary Controlled (VC) or former VC Schools. In Multi Academy Trusts the scheme of delegation to local governing boards for policy making does vary however, local boards remain accountable to the Trust Board. Governance decisions are collective and whilst differing views may be

expressed, indeed welcomed, when determining a policy, once such a policy is agreed and signed off this must be respected and upheld by all parties.

Clergy may choose to engage with schools in ex-officio (maintained CE schools) or local governance board (academised CE schools or maintained community schools) roles. Clergy may connect with schools in more pastoral ways as foundation governance roles can be delegated through the wider church community. Representation on governing boards and trust boards is key to ethos and policy setting.

2. The parameters, in particular pertaining to LLF and PLF matters

- A. It is within the gift of the Headteacher and Governing Board to determine who may and who may not have access to an education setting. Guests may be asked to sign that the setting's policies have been read and will be adhered to. Such requests will have been approved by Governing Boards for all guests coming into the setting and everyone attending the site is treated in the same way.
- B. Collective Worship, wherever it takes place must be invitational, inclusive and inspirational, must always be suitable for a broad audience and follow school policies.
- C. The teaching of RE should always be based on facts only and appropriate to the age range of the setting. Many school settings will follow the 'locally agreed syllabus' determined by the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) of a Local Authority using appropriate resources to support this, such as Understanding Christianity. Voluntary Aided Schools or Academies may set their own RE curriculum.
- D. Whilst the doctrine of the Church of England on marriage remains unchanged it should be acknowledged that theological positions and perspectives derived from the same doctrine differ. There is a range of interpretation regarding some matters of this doctrine and therefore strongly rooted theological standpoints, deeply held personal conscience and teaching will reflect this. The fact that the Church of England has capacity to enable debate and questions is regarded by some as a strength, as the CE Vision for Education states, it is possible 'To negotiate divisive issues to enable flourishing yet mindful of conscience, living with long term disagreements.'
- E. Pastoral support and chaplaincy should always be faith sensitive, fully respectful of, and acting within, relevant education setting policies such as any equality and inclusion policies.
- F. The Equalities Act does make provision for personal views to be shared in appropriate contexts and manner providing they are not discriminating or causing harm. This may be in a more open, or direct, question and answer environment. Expressing personal views in an appropriate context, 'I believe, my interpretation of this is... or the position supported by the incumbent and PCC at St Disciple's Church is...' may be acceptable in certain contexts and should already be transparent through church websites. In response to questions, it would be inappropriate and indefensible to say categorically that another view is wrong. It

may, in such circumstances, be most appropriate to acknowledge that there are a range of views regarding relationships and the doctrine of marriage, that there is disagreement and to state that 'My interpretation of this doctrine is / the position of St S's Church / my strongly held belief is'

- G. Relationships, at organisational and personal levels, are key and it is advised that church and education colleagues agree clear parameters. Such agreements should support all parties and safeguard individuals, including in an ability to maintain a true conscience within the legal context of secular education settings and in partnership working, for example when using the church for special services. Having clear agreements may also reassure communities and individuals that they, regardless of their personal views or conscience, will be able to live well together promoting dignity and respect for all without fear of prejudice.

- H. Where an education setting feels that the views held by a church, church leader or representative such as a chaplain are incompatible with its own character and policies then the Pastoral Principles may form a basis for bridge building. In some situations, external mediation may be required 'To negotiate divisive issues to enable flourishing yet mindful of conscience, living with long term disagreements.' There may sometimes be scenarios where alternative arrangements are worked out to ensure the setting has access to Christian support. The Diocesan Board of Education would be a first contact in circumstances where mediation is required and there are other skilled colleagues across the diocese who would be able to help.

3. Key actions to consider

Engaging with policy making

Strong Foundation Governance: Shaping faith sensitive policy through good foundation representation is important. Making every effort to ensure that foundation governor roles are filled is essential. Ideally this may be Category 1 Foundation Governors, (current active members of a CE church) from local church membership, from other CE churches, a deanery or a broader ecumenical approach inviting Category 2 (members of other Christian denominations). Foundation Governance does not have to be Clergy and would be a positive way to model shared local ministry as church members may be gifted to serve in this way. Anyone joining an education setting or multi academy trust governing board must understand the extent of the responsibilities held by that board and be prepared to act collegiately, in the best interests of the school across a wide range of issues.

Knowing the parameters

Policies, once set, should be adhered to and it is important to know what the policies are and why they are in place. If undertaking teaching check out the syllabus plan (this will usually be the SACRE agreed syllabus for RE), the planning for the teaching units and the content of resources being used to ensure consistency and continuity for the pupils. If leading collective worship, agree themes in advance and ensure that planned content is always invitational, inclusive and inspiring, reflecting the school's vision and values.

Building confidence across the community

Sharing a clear understanding of parameters, agreeing and publishing future themes in advance (especially any are that are likely to be controversial), will all give confidence to the wider community, ensuring that everyone will be treated with dignity and respect, building trust and ensuring that when acting in partnership with the school protected characteristics, religious and personal, within the Equalities Act are upheld.

Maintaining strong relationships with school leaders and parent body

Relationships are key to strong links between churches, schools and households. Strong relationships are built upon trust. Human trust is built through growing confidence in the credibility, consistency and capability of another. A commitment to consistently uphold faith sensitive policies and approaches, whilst maintaining personal conscience, demonstrates the value placed on a relationship and the importance that all should feel respected and safe.

4. Some worked examples

For the sake of simplicity, and recognising the nuances being missed, these scenarios use 'conservative' and 'liberal' as short hand for the theological position. For the sake of brevity, the scenarios are restricted to views on same sex relationships, although similar principles would apply to other issues within the scope of LLF.

a. **Head teacher bans vicar from Collective Worship**

The vicar of St Alphege's holds a conservative view on marriage and following a series of sermons on marriage, sexuality and singleness, has stated that in line with his teaching, he will not be using PLF. However carefully he states his position, the headline view is 'the vicar is against same-sex couples'. The vicar's view is known to the church community, and because the worshipping community is embedded into the local community, the vicar's view has filtered out to the local community.

The head teacher of St Alphege's church school holds a liberal view on the issue and in order to forestall disquiet among both parents and staff has told the vicar that he is no longer welcome to take Collective Worship at the school.

Response (see Parameters A, B and F)

- While it is in the Headteacher's gift to determine who may and may not visit, policy must be set by the governing body.
- There is a right for clergy to hold views in a church context.
- Collective Worship must be invitational, inclusive and inspiring – although note that in this scenario there is no suggestion that the vicar's Collective Worship crosses this boundary or even touches on human sexuality.
- Working together to understand perspective and the wider context (Anglican and Diocesan), to agree themes and expectations for school visits and collective worship, to agree and establish clear communication with the community may all have helped to maintain a working relationship.

b. Vicar's Pride Assembly; parents complain

The vicar of St Barnabas' Church takes Collective Worship (CW) at the local church school explaining the significance of Pride month for reversing the previous oppression of minorities including members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Several parents, who attend a different church, object to the school because of their conservative convictions, and ask for the vicar to be barred from conducting Collective Worship, or they will remove their children from Collective Worship at this Church school.

Response (see Parameters A, B, G and H)

- Parents have right to withdraw children from CW, after informing the school. The school is obliged to make alternative arrangements where it is possible to do so.
- Parents do not have a right to determine who attends school to lead CW.
- Significant events on the school calendar may need pre work with families and clarity about why certain themes are included. How messages are shared and when these will take place. The school will also need to determine if these themes are suitable for CW – invitational, inclusive and inspiring; or are they more suited to the taught curriculum which will have greater prescription and contextual application.
- CW should be regularly monitored by School Leaders as well as pupils, especially external speakers, with clear parameters set and feedback given.
- Themes/content for CW can be published in advance.

c. Curate's Q&A; conservative view is 'the church's teaching'; parent complains

The curate of St Cyrus' church is invited to a general Q & A with a class at St Cyrus's church school. She is asked about the church's teaching on sex and marriage and replies that God's design is for sex to be kept to within marriage and that marriage is between one man and one woman. She is careful to acknowledge that households take different shapes for many reasons, but she states that for those who want to live as Christians, this is what the church teaches.

A parent hears about the session from their child. This parent is in a same-sex marriage and has recently taken part in a service where PLF were said for them. The nature of the complaint is that the curate was wrong to state that what she said is the church's teaching.

Response (see Parameters C, D and F)

- The curate has the right under the Equality Act to state her personal view (Boundary F)
- She has correctly acknowledged the variety of households and contexts
- She has articulated the Church of England's unchanged doctrine of marriage

To have pre-empted the impact of the session, the hurt and subsequent complaint that is specifically related to a parent's own experience of PLF:

- She may be wise to have shared that the issue is contested (Parameters C and D) and while she can state that this is the CE doctrine of marriage and the view taken at St Cyrus', she cannot speak for everyone about ways in which different parts of the Church of England, let alone the whole Christian church, inhabit the church's teaching.

d. Curate's Q&A; Inclusive Church sign-up required for access to school

Also following from the curate's Q&A session, the head teacher of St Cyrus's now asks all church visitors, whether they are leading Collective Worship, Open the Book, or taking part in events such as the Q&A, to sign an Inclusive Church charter as a condition of entry.

Response (see Parameters C, D and F)

- Policy is made by the governors not the Headteacher (A)
- Encourage dialogue (Parameters G and H)

e. Governor asked to step down

Mr Davis is Churchwarden at St Alphege's church and supports the vicar's conservative stance on PLF etc. Mr Davis is a school governor at St Alphege's church school and has been asked by the Chair of Governors to step down because Mr Davis' support of the vicar and of the vicar's position is at odds with the school's requirement to serve every member of the community and that must include members of the LGBT community.

The school community will include people of all views and it is good for a Governing Board to reflect this. Governing Board decisions are corporate and therefore may hear varied views before reaching decisions which must then be upheld by all.

If the Chair has concerns regarding Mr Davis' behaviour according to the board's agreed code of conduct or more widely the Nolan Principles etc, then there is a governance procedure to follow rather than simply asking a Governor to step down.

f. Threat of safeguarding action for views held on PLF.

Mr Davis is told that if he does not resign as a governor, a safeguarding concern will be raised against him as the chair of governors considers Mr Davis' conservative views to be against the best interests of children and harmful to their well-being.

This context would not offer grounds for a safeguarding concern unless there were very specific disclosures or threats, including any remedial/intrusive approaches regarding gender or sexuality.

g. Teenager's views not respected.

During a discussion which touches on same sex relationships, a secondary school pupil expresses a personal view informed by the Christian beliefs their parents and local church hold. While these views align with what that church teaches, they do not align with the class teacher's own convictions and the pupil is rebuked in class for the views expressed. The teacher also fails to moderate the other pupils' responses to what has been said.

Equality Act 3:32 would apply here as would legislation and school policies that prevent bullying for personal beliefs.

There would be grounds for complaint against the teacher, not least for professional standards, and this should follow the school's process, including seeking restorative measures in support of the teenager involved.

Chaplaincy

There are great examples of chaplaincy through chaplains who are members of conservative evangelical churches and those who are members of more liberal churches, who hold distinctive views on sexuality and identity and who are excellent chaplains. They don't go into settings to impose their views; they are there to be a distinctive presence and enable others to discover who they are and what they believe. They focus on the person of Jesus, and the Father and the Spirit, rather than issues of same sex marriage and human sexuality. We are seeing people coming to faith and growing in faith through this model of mission.

5. Further actions and next steps

Greater training support for clergy working with children, young people and education settings during initial theological training and also during IME.

A clear policy, perhaps based on the text above, from the diocese that sets out guidance to secure best and safe practice when engaging with education settings and the subsequent support of the diocese when such policy is followed yet challenges arise.

Ongoing diocesan acknowledgement that differing theological standpoints and grappling with matters of personal conscience can bring an emotional cost and support is needed that acknowledges this.

Due regard needs to be taken of:

*General Synod, November 2023.

*Part 2 of Pastoral Guidance.

*A paper, by the Church of England Education Office for review by the House of Bishops.

October 2023: Prepare outline guidance to share with schools, with trusts, with clergy and churches, that focuses on the importance and expectation of positive, supportive relationships between schools and churches enabling schools to embrace a radical and equal commitment to live as communities of vibrant Christian distinctiveness and worship.

A conversation, using a similar model approach, regarding Vocations and Training.

November 2023: Raise drafting of this at Heads and Chairs briefing in November also at Bishops Staff and Bishops Council for information and feedback. Bring to DBE meeting in November for shaping and to seek wider feedback from across our diocese.

January - Mar 2024: Guidance developed with feedback ready for sign off with DBE and share to all groups.

April 2024: Guidance relating to education settings signed off by DBE and shared.

Guidance developed and shared linked to vocations and training.