

A good church–school relationship

The Church, as an all-age community of grace, has a long history of making a difference within local communities. This resource serves as a starter guide for what a good church–school relationship could look like. It is important to remember that it's not a case of 'one size fits all', as relationships and support will vary depending upon your community, church capacity and the school's needs.



Common misunderstandings – and the reality

Schools fear that it is dangerous to let the church in as all they want to do is preach at the children

Churches have a heart for serving and loving their community in a way that meets their needs and makes a difference. It may take time to build trust and a good relationship if a school has had a bad experience in engaging with their church in the past.

A relationship with the church means a relationship between just the vicar and headteacher

This is not healthy or sustainable, especially if one of these people leaves their post. No one person can be everything to everyone, nor should they try to be. True relationships that have wider impact and lasting effect involve many members of the church and school community working together. The Church of England's mission includes pastoral care, social engagement and service in the local community. 'Honour one another and seek the common good' is a phrase used regularly in worship services.

Vicars have to be a school governor, regardless of their skills, and take regular school assemblies/acts of worship

Church leaders do not have to become a governor, or lead school assemblies. It is important for the church and school to consider the needs of the school in relation to the skillset/passions of the minister and their team, to ensure that the best is obtained from the relationship.

Schools don't want church volunteers as they don't have suitable skills

As with all organisations across the country, resources and funding are being reduced and there is the expectation to produce more with less. All schools really value volunteer support, both at special events and during the working week. Working intergenerationally with positive older role models has incredible benefits for children, as volunteers draw upon their skills, experiences, wisdom and time. It could be as simple as offering 30 minutes a week to mentor a vulnerable pupil, listening to and encouraging struggling readers, running a parent group, supporting a breakfast or after-school club. All of these will have a lasting impact on the school community which cannot be measured.

Vicars are the best people to teach RE in schools

Possessing good theological knowledge does not mean that you are the best person to teach young children. Schools and churches need to work together to find out how to make the most of the relationship.

Why is working with schools important?

Both churches and schools are passionate about inspiring and helping young people to develop good morals, values and character, which will stand them in good stead for the future. It makes sense, therefore, to work together with the same focus, sharing skills and experiences. Young people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development equips them to be thoughtful, caring, active citizens in school and in wider society. It is important that they learn that through their actions they can make a positive difference to others.

Work with churches can also raise pupil aspiration, develop greater empathy, deepen spirituality, help connect them with their community and create opportunities for pupils to develop good qualities such as compassion, hope, forgiveness, etc.

Building a deeper relationship with the school supports families and the wider community in more meaningful engagement. Research shows that pupils gain a lot from the positive influences of an adult other than their parents. Quite often volunteers in a school setting

consider their school visit the highlight of their week. The relationship should be supportive and mutually beneficial. Where church–school relationships are good, the connection is widely valued and acknowledged by all members of the community.

Beginning conversations

Use these questions in discussions between church and school leaders to decide where the church and school could work together:

- What are the school community’s needs and priorities?
- What capacity to help and skills does the church community have?
- What actions are going to bless and make the most difference to the school and wider community?

Remember to keep these questions at the forefront of your mind. It is important to start conversations within your own church community too. Can you build a team of two or three volunteers who are passionate about serving, using their gifts and sharing God’s love in schools? They could help you get things off the ground and inspire others. ‘Each one should use whatever gift they have received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.’ 1 Peter 4:10.

Where to start?

Below are just some of many ways that you could start to build and develop a relationship, sharing God’s love with your school community. During conversations with your school, it is important to keep in mind the school

community’s needs and priorities, alongside the capacity and skillset of the church community, and then discern together what is going to bless and make the most difference to the school and wider community.

Ways churches can bless schools

<p>Reflective spaces Prayer space Prayer garden Retreats Pilgrimage</p>	<p>Spirituality Chaplaincy Contemplative Toolkit</p>	<p>Worship Pupil-led Music group Open the Book</p>
<p>Joint projects Community projects Archbishop of York Award</p>	<p>Small group Mentoring Paired reading Story sharing Positive role model</p>	<p>Extra-curricular After-school clubs Messy Church Breakfast/holiday club</p>
<p>Church space Creative use of space Joint services/concerts/fêtes</p>	<p>Communication Shared newsletter items Community prayer group Parenting support Noticeboards</p>	<p>Leadership support Pastoral support for staff Governance Interview panel/PCC invites</p>

For further ideas or help please contact: angela.curran-smith@oxford.anglican.org