



**THE BLACKBURN
DIOCESEAN BOARD
OF EDUCATION**

Vision for Schools

“live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that...I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit”

Philippians 1:27

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Introduction

In July 2016 a fresh articulation of the Church of England's vision for education was published. This document - *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* – states the fundamental reasons, rooted in the Bible, which have motivated centuries of Christian involvement in schooling in this country and around the world. The God of all creation is concerned with everything related to education.

The vision embraces the spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development of children and young people. It offers a vision of human flourishing for all, one that embraces excellence and academic rigour, but sets them in a wider framework. This is worked out theologically and educationally through four basic elements which permeate the *Church of England Vision for Education*:

- Wisdom
- Hope
- Community
- Dignity

The vision is for the common good of the whole human community and its environment, whether national, regional or local. It is hospitable to diversity, respects freedom of religion and belief, and encourages others to contribute from the depths of their own traditions and understandings. It invites collaboration, alliances, negotiation of differences, and the forming of new settlements in order to serve the flourishing of a healthily plural society and democracy, together with a healthily plural educational system.

Diocesan Boards of Education have been encouraged to engage with *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* and to interpret and refine it for their own particular contexts and Dioceses. The Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education think it is particularly important to do this for three reasons:

- First, we have a unique church school portfolio, with a large number of Voluntary Aided Schools (149) and currently a small number of Academies (17). Over a third of our 190 schools have less than 120 pupils.
- Second, there is a strong tradition within the Board of Education to ensure effective Christian Leadership within all our schools and academies. This is demonstrated by the fact that 98% of our schools are at least SIAMS Good.
- Third, Blackburn Diocese has adopted *Vision 2026* which seeks to build healthy churches that transform communities, with a priority given to working among children, young people and schools to raise up a new generation for Christ.

Therefore, this document seeks to build on the strong foundations established by the *Church of England Vision for Education*, and also to embrace the tradition and diversity of schools in the Diocese, whilst offering a complementary route to delivering *Vision 2026*. This is done in order to present a distinctly Christian vision for education, that is positive, ambitious and transformative for our schools, our children and young people, and the communities which they serve.

Executive Summary

This document sets out the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education Vision for Schools. It outlines how this vision is rooted in the Bible, and how it builds around Philippians 1:27:

live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that...I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit.

It explores how these words not only help guide our teaching, our school life, and how we prepare our children and young people to be responsible, engaging and generous citizens, they also resonate closely with us as leaders, as governors and as Christians.

This leads to a discussion about the attributes and confidences of our alumni as they leave our schools and make their way in the world. In addition to receiving an outstanding education with academic rigour and high outcomes, we are committed to developing an alumni that:

- know how to pray
- know the Christian belief that they are loved by God
- understand the story of salvation revealed in the Bible and fulfilled in Jesus Christ
- have explored, and know how to explore the Christian faith
- be guided by a spiritual compass based on gospel values and the person of Jesus
- love their neighbour and seek to serve them, to bring justice, and to embrace both sacrifice and service
- understand the life-long transformational effect of God for individuals, communities and nations

This vision then examines the principles and values which develop alumni as described. From this we believe that the communities formed within and around our schools, and the education provided in our schools, should be built around the key values and qualities of love, hope, grace and service.

This vision recognises that schools are part of wider communities, and in particular are part of the Diocesan family. We recognise the importance of *Vision 2026* and outline how it informs this *Vision for Schools*. We believe that schools - in partnership with their local churches - can and should play an active role in making disciples, being witnesses and growing leaders and encourages churches and deaneries to look at how their implementation of *Vision 2026* this may be strengthened through working with our schools.

Finally, we set out how the future may look. We want our church schools to be known as places which raise expectations, nurture and develop ambitions where individuals and communities aspire to achieve those things which are fulfilling, life-affirming, constructive and fruitful. We also want them to be an integral part of the fabric of the spiritual and communal life of the communities in which they serve. This document sets out that vision and gives a few steps and signposts as to how that can happen.

Vision on a Page

Our schools should:

- Be built around the key values and qualities of love, hope, grace and service
- Embody a vision shaped by the personal faith and commitment of their leaders
- Embody a vision rooted in the Bible
- Enable and encourage a praying and worshipping community where distinctly Christian celebrations are integral to the learning experiences of all within the school community
- Ensure Religious Education is at the heart of the curriculum and is a core subject
- Recognize the presence of God in the uniqueness of each individual and in each person's specific talents and gifts
- Develop a broad community open to the world in which we live, which seeks to change it for the better
- Celebrate success and treat failure with compassion
- Support their alumni in finding ways to continue their faith journey, and to provide a pathway or signpost for those alumni looking to re-engage with faith
- Seek to work in collaboration with churches in delivering *Vision 2026*

Our schools should offer all their pupils the opportunity to:

- Reflect on the importance of a system of personal belief
- Recognize the place a Christian faith has in the lives of people
- Develop a sense of wonder, awe, curiosity and mystery
- Be creative, questioning and imaginative within a broad Christian framework that recognizes the importance of experience, personal values and respect for the beliefs of others
- Recognize, respect and celebrate cultural diversity
- Equip their alumni with the attributes and confidences listed above

In order to fulfil this vision, we will need:

- Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers to be practising Christians
- Outward looking schools sharing a gospel for life and connected to:
 - churches
 - charities
 - businesses
 - multi-agencies
 - other schools, both primary and secondary
- To develop and nurture new Christian leadership at every level of our schools
- Healthy and growing churches that understand how to develop and support schools and are engaged and interested in the spiritual life of all the school community
- Churches that know how to best use the skills and opportunities of the schools to form an active and serving Christian community.

Rooted in the Bible

The *Church of England Vision for Education* is built around a core statement of Jesus to give 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). The document reflects on the fact that it is about 'educating the whole person', what the 1988 Education Reform Act (in a programmatic statement that remains in force and is deservedly influential) sees as physical and intellectual development united with spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. We, as the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education, do not disagree with that.

However, in recognising that Jesus is the one who came to give life, and it is Jesus that gives life in all its fullness we want to acknowledge that our deepest inspiration is Jesus Christ. He is the one who motivates - and in partnership with the Holy Spirit –encourages, guides, and teaches us about living life in fullness as an individual, a family and a community. The Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education believe that working from, and actively expressing that motivation is important.

The Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education schools are guided by Christian principles, recognising that it is Jesus who makes those principles Christian. And living out these principles – of love and faith, of forgiveness, of perseverance, of reconciliation, of kindness, of thanksgiving, of peace – form the fundamental building blocks to a fulfilled life as an individual and as a society. These Christian principles are relational and as such create a common bond around which communities can form, be governed and flourish. We want our schools to demonstrate and to promote the values of Christ, so that they become the compass by which our children and young people navigate their lives, and live to create and nurture flourishing communities.

Therefore, we seek to pin our vision on Philippians 1:27

live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that...I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit

These words not only help guide our teaching, our school life, and how we prepare our children and young people to be responsible, engaging and generous citizens, they also resonate closely with us as leaders, as governors and as Christians. Paul wrote these words whilst in prison as words of encouragement. In the post-Christian world of the West, the forces of scepticism and cynicism within our culture are extremely powerful. It is easy to feel intimidated but Paul says we must not be. It is Paul's firm view that the whole business of being a Christian is about living by the belief that Jesus is *already* the true Lord of the world. Therefore, the life of Christians in the public sphere should be beyond reproach and match up to the gospel. So, Christians can be known as loving, honest, reliable, and good neighbours to all.

The verse also reminds us that as Christians we must maintain our solid unity of spirit and intention, working together for the gospel. This unity, this standing firm across our schools, our churches, our Board of Education, functions as a sign that we already belong to the coming King, and that our mission and our purpose is focused and relevant.

Our Schools: Our Alumni

Church schools have a reputation for securing transformational outcomes for children and young people by combining academic rigour with a rounded approach to personal development, rooted in the worship and other shared practices that characterise the life of their community. None do so better than the church schools in the Diocese of Blackburn. It is a given, that all our schools will focus on improving the lives of children and learners, and in particular the disadvantaged and vulnerable. They will all have high ambitions for their children and learners, and will work tirelessly to ensure high academic outcomes and to actively demonstrate a continued commitment to raising standards and improving lives.

The Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education supports a large, diverse and high-performing family of church schools. Over 44,000 children and young people are taught in Church of England schools across our Diocese, with over 33,500 primary school children experiencing daily acts of Christian worship in our schools, led by headteachers with a faith commitment. Our 180 primary schools and 10 secondary schools are wonderful communities of faith, each with the spirit of Christ shaping the learning, teaching and activities of the school, and helping them to be significant and transforming places for children and young people.

Whilst many of the standards, outcomes and qualities we strive for in our Church of England schools are shared with our community school colleagues, we are committed to forming alumni that are different to those of non-Church of England schools. So, in line with the strong church school ethos we promote, pupils are enabled to engage seriously with and develop an understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ., We expect each school to recognize that every child and young person should be given the support, encouragement and opportunities to flourish in their potential as a child of God.

Our alumni will therefore not only have engaged with a high-quality education which has prepared them with the academic, intellectual and social skills to thrive in their next stage of life; they will also have knowledge and tools connected with the Christian faith that give a broader perspective of themselves and the world in which they live.

Therefore, we are committed to ensure that each of our children and young people have the following attributes and confidences as they leave our schools and make their way in the world:

- **know how to pray**
- **know the Christian belief that they are loved by God**
- **understand the story of salvation revealed in the Bible and fulfilled in Jesus Christ**
- **have explored, and know how to explore the Christian faith**
- **be guided by a spiritual compass based on gospel values and the person of Jesus**
- **love their neighbour and seek to serve them, to bring justice, and to embrace both sacrifice and service**
- **understand the life-long transformational effect of God for individuals, communities and nations**

We are equally committed to seeing these attributes and confidences develop in our wider school community

Our Core Values

The *Church of England Vision for Education* identifies four basic elements that implicitly underpin the whole approach to education. It sets out how Wisdom, Hope, Community and Dignity together form an ‘ecology’ of the fullness of life, each in interplay with all the others.

Whilst the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education recognizes the importance of these four elements, the context and the circumstances of our Diocese need to be reflected in our vision for education. In order to develop alumni as described in the previous section, we believe that the communities formed within and around our schools, and the education provided in our schools, should be built around the key values and qualities of:

- Love
- Hope
- Grace
- Service

Crucially, we believe that to be truly effective and transformational, our schools need to be led by Christians with an active faith, who are demonstrating these values and qualities in their professional and personal lives. Our distinctiveness as schools is that we are inclusive communities, serving others, led by Christians whose motivations are based on Jesus Christ. What we do and how we do it, what and how we teach, and how we build relationships and learn together are rooted in the gospel and in gospel values.

Love

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus”. 1 John 4:16-17

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”. John 15:12

As Henri Neuwen wrote, “For Jesus, there are no countries to be conquered, no ideologies to be imposed, no people to be dominated. There are only children, women and men to be loved”¹. Again and again in the Bible it is clear that the Christian community is called upon to model new patterns of human relationship, new standards for how to treat one another. For Christians it’s always a love-game: God’s love for the world calling out an answering love from us, enabling us to discover that God not only happens to love us but that he is love itself.

We are given a clear understanding of what a pattern of behaviour driven by love should look like. In Ephesians 4:32-5.1 Paul writes:

‘be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.’

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen (2005). *“Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community”, Edicoes Loyola*

The command for love asks that we spend our time looking not at ourselves and our needs, our rights, our wrongs-that-need righting, but at everyone else and their needs, pressures, pains and joys. Love is a primary way of growing up as a human being, of establishing and maintaining the richest and deepest relationships.

Our schools should be families where Christian love is manifest in everything. Love for each other, for our world and for our communities.

Grace

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”. Ephesians 2:8

Grace is one of the most important concepts in the Bible and is most clearly expressed in the promises of God revealed in Scripture and embodied in Jesus Christ. It is, in essence, the love of God shown to the unlovely; it is the unmerited favour of God.

In chapter 15 of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus explains what the heart of the Father is like. In three linked stories – prompted by the observation from the Pharisees that *‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’* (Luke 15:2), we learn that God is abundant in grace and goodness and longs for joy and happiness for his children. In each story, something very valuable is lost and something valuable is found. And in each story, there is a celebration with great excitement and a joy. Each story progressively moves toward a deeper understanding of the Father’s great love and grace for his children who are lost.

Grace is so important as it helps us recognize a world beyond ourselves, that no matter what we do God remains faithful, loving, and compassionate and is willing to receive anyone who calls on his name. Grace is most needed and best understood in the midst of sin, suffering, and brokenness. When the world is closing in, grace offers a return to living and a route to experiencing life in all its fullness.

Importantly, grace is fundamental to both receiving forgiveness from God, and then showing forgiveness to others. The gospel of the grace of God is the message everyone needs.

Our schools should be families where grace abounds, places where good things happen to those who do not always deserve it, places of second-chances, places of forgiveness and reconciliation, and places that do not believe in hopelessness.

Hope

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” 1 Peter 1:3

The word hope in ordinary English vocabulary is generally distinguished from certainty. We would say, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I *hope* it happens." Christian hope is the faith-filled belief that God will fulfill his promises and complete what he has begun. Christian hope is a confident expectation in the power of God shown through the resurrection of Jesus.

As Tom Wright comments, "Hope, for the Christian, is not wishful thinking or mere blind optimism. It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen"² It is this sense of optimism, based as it is on a Christian belief and foundation, that gives us an enthusiasm for a future secured and satisfied by God. This prevents us from being excessively anxious resulting in paralyzing fear or in self-managed, greedy control. Without a foundation in Christian hope we can end up thinking about ourselves, our future, our problems and our potential, and that keeps us from loving.

We want our schools to be places of hope; places that understand and engage with their children and families, their communities, churches, charities, and other organisations to bring justice and hope where there seems only to be darkness. We want our schools to teach our children and young people that they can influence the world positively, that they can help to bring about God's new creation through showing and promoting love, peace, justice, mercy and kindness. Our schools can be places that are confident in the fact that darkness and trials can be overcome and that love has already conquered.

Service

"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul". Deuteronomy 10:12

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received". 1 Peter 4:10

Jesus came as the servant king. His is the ultimate model of how we serve. Our schools should then model and encourage service in all its forms. Firstly, in the broadest sense our schools are there to serve their whole communities. We are not church schools for Anglicans, but are church schools to serve all the children and families who live in the communities around our schools – including those of all faiths and none.

Secondly, we want to foster and develop an integral sense of service within our children and young people. Serving others is not one bullet point among many; it becomes the overarching aim of everything else on the list. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith is to know, love and serve God, and one way of doing that is by loving and

² N.T.Wright, 2 edition (2011). *"Surprised by Hope"*, SPCK Publishing

serving others. That's why we were created. That's what we're supposed to do. That's how we find lasting peace and purpose.

Our schools should be places of service, and not just because it is a 'good thing to do', but because it is through service that God's kingdom is built on earth. Service is that outpouring of the self-sacrificial love for others that Christ showed for us.

Our Churches

The whole family within the Diocese of Blackburn is working together to implement *Vision 2026: Healthy Churches Transforming Communities*. The focus of this vision is to make churches healthy, because healthy churches grow. *Vision 2026* is about health, not growth, with a particular emphasis on:

- making disciples of Jesus Christ
- being witnesses to Jesus Christ
- growing leaders for Jesus Christ and
- work among children, young people and schools

Vision 2026 informs the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education's *Vision for Schools*. The Board of Education believes that schools - in partnership with their local churches - can and should play an active role in making disciples, being witnesses and growing leaders.

Making disciples.

Vision 2026 identifies the need to help people become disciples, creating a deeper faith, warming up the spiritual temperature, knowing the scriptures better, praying with greater urgency for the Kingdom of God to come, and offering a more generous stewardship to further the cause of Christ.

All our schools can play an active part in this agenda. Through the outstanding Religious Education syllabuses which the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education produces for each of its 149 Voluntary Aided schools, we seek to explore core Christian concepts, increase biblical and religious literacy, but also create and develop a questioning and opening mind to matters of faith. We encourage engaging and creative prayer and worship in our schools and express a vision that schools and churches work closely together to form and develop active worshipping and praying communities that are anchored to their Anglican identity.

Being witnesses

The church has a glorious message to pass on but has been at times reluctant and slow to share the story of Jesus. It has retreated into ghettos and so the church needs to increase its confidence in sharing the gospel of salvation. A daily witness for Christ must be demonstrated, not only in word, but also in deed, in caring for our neighbour and showing compassion. This is what gives a level of credibility to witness, builds bridges and creates opportunities to show the love of Jesus in really practical ways.

Again, our schools can be at the forefront of this priority. We are perfectly placed to share in community life, to offer a Christian witness, to provide a Christian service to our communities, and to demonstrate the love of Jesus through how we behave and operate. Alongside churches our schools can also be focal points for campaigning for peace, justice and mercy; and for celebrating love, kindness and gentleness.

Growing leaders

The church needs to find, train and secure leaders for the future. We want to encourage children from an early age to boldly communicate the gospel, creatively driving forward the mission of the church. Schools can help do this by working closely with churches and the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education to identify and nurture Christian leaders. We encourage our schools to know their children and families so that together they can identify their gifts and talents, and provide opportunities for them to be leaders of the church today. Schools can give children and young people leadership responsibilities and our Secondary Schools can offer increased responsibilities and leadership training. Through this schools are able to demonstrate that children are able to be leaders in worship, in prayer, and be partners in teaching. Schools can encourage and model for churches how to actively listen to the voice of children and young people and value their opinions.

Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education supports *Vision 2026* and encourages churches and deaneries to look at how their implementation of this may be strengthened and developed through close working with our church schools.

Our Future

As with a large number of Church of England schools, many of our schools date back to the 19th century. Their Trust Deeds often state the desire to serve the 'poor' or 'working classes' and to give them opportunities, aspirations, ambition and expectations. In the 21st century, we want our church schools to be known as places which raise expectations, nurture and develop ambitions, and encourage both individuals and communities to aspire to achieve those things which are fulfilling, life-affirming, constructive and fruitful.

We seek to ensure that there is a high quality, well respected, inclusive and successful Church of England school as an effective and realistic option for all parents in the Diocese. The distinctive Christian foundation for this vision will be seen explicitly in teaching and learning in Religious Education and across the curriculum, and also in the authentic Christian worship and ethos of those schools.

These schools will be led by Christians with an active faith who are demonstrating the Christian values and qualities outlined in this vision document in both their professional and personal lives. All our headteachers and senior managers will be effective leaders with character qualities of love, joy, kindness, gentleness, self-control, goodness and patience. Our schools will be active, compassionate, sensitive and serving Christian communities, being salt and light to all they serve.

Our schools will offer effective Christian chaplaincy to all their children and young people, as well as staff, through a variety of means but to include close working with local clergy and churches. Our schools will champion causes that will see God's new kingdom of love, peace, justice and mercy breaking through into our old world. They will be places of celebration that support and reflect the unity and diversity of the Anglican tradition.

We want our schools to embrace fully their role in the local communities. They should be a focal point not just for outstanding academic achievement, but also as a resource and, working in partnership with churches, as an integral part of the fabric of the spiritual and communal life of the communities in which they serve.

Finally, as all things and all people are intrinsically related to Jesus Christ, we are committed to offering children and young people an encounter with Jesus Christ and with Christian faith and practice in a way which enhances their lives.