



Help, There's A School in My Parish

Community School Version



A guide for clergy in the Diocese of Guildford

Introduction

Having a school in the parish is both a privilege and a joy. For many clergy involvement with the local school is a rewarding and satisfying part of their ministry. The incumbent, through their involvement in the school community will meet and minister to many parishioners. The school, through the expertise and guidance of the incumbent will deepen the spiritual life of pupils, staff and families.

It is worth being aware that the provision for spiritual development is required in all schools, usually referred to as SMSC Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development. SMSC is part of the Ofsted Framework for inspection.

Incumbents are encouraged to be involved in local schools in three areas of school life.



- Pastoral care for the school community
- Spiritual development activity in partnership with the school such as assemblies and school services
- Subject knowledge expertise and support for the Religious Education (RE) curriculum

These three areas may not be mutually exclusive as shown by the Venn diagram. Sometimes two or three areas intersect. For example, a prayer space may provide an opportunity to encounter God and support for mental health and wellbeing.

The question for clergy to consider is **where will I be most effective?** Every parish, and every school are different and what is required may change over time. To make this decision, incumbents will need to take account of the context of the school, and the church, the skills and experiences of the incumbent and other members of the church team. For example, if the church employs a children and families worker they may share the spiritual development work. A pastoral assistant may provide some pastoral support to the school community. What the previous incumbent did may not be where you will be most effective.



Prayer - Prayer for the school is important and is usually valued by the school community, both for the regular day-to-day life of the school and when there are special events or crises. This will include your personal prayers for the school and prayers in services and small groups.



The way in – Making the first contact with a school is often easier if you already know someone in the school; staff member, parent, governor or volunteer. They will be able to help you contact the right person and you will be able to start a relationship with the school. While it is important that the headteacher and incumbent have trusting relationship someone else may be the person who will set up joint activities and visits.



Relationship with the Headteacher-

The relationship between the clergy and the headteacher is central to the opportunities for working together. The headteacher and clergy are both leaders within the parish. Even if much of the practical organisation is done by another members of staff such as the RE Subject leader they must know what the church is doing with the school community.

It is ideal if the Incumbent and Headteacher meet to discuss the school and church as soon as possible after the incumbent is licensed or the headteacher starts in post.



Support in Times of Crisis

When the school community experiences a bereavement or traumatic event, they often welcome support from the local clergy. It is usually helpful to be quick to offer support and provide some concrete suggestions of what you might do such as “shall we open the church for people to light a candle and remember the person”, “can we help you to put together a special assembly?”. Pastoral support, being present, for staff and pupils may be welcome. The Headteacher will be carrying a heavy load at such times and support for them may be welcome.



Clergy Governors

The role of governor in a school that is an academy is different to being a governor in a maintained school. The local governor role varies between the different Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in the diocese due to the different delegations that are put in place between the Trust Board and the local governance tier. Therefore, the diocese cannot give generalised guidance about the clergy governor role in MATs.

If a school in your parish is part of a multi academy trust you should ensure that you understand what the governance role looks like in your context.

The diocese recognize that the role of school governors is demanding and time consuming. To help incumbents to navigate the clergy governor role the diocese have written guidance which you can read [here](#).



Ofsted Inspections

All maintained (state funded) schools are inspected by Ofsted.

These inspections and the preparation for them are usually highly stressful for the school staff, especially the school leaders. Clergy are likely to have two roles when the school is undergoing an Ofsted Inspection.

In all schools there is a pastoral role. This is usually practical, such as organising food for staff who find themselves staying unexpectedly late in school preparing for the inspection. After the inspection the senior staff may welcome some pastoral support, as they process the outcome.

Clergy may be a school governor in which case they may be interviewed by the inspector, usually alongside other governors. Governors are usually invited to attend the feedback at the end of the inspection.



The Partnership between the Church and the School

When the partnership is effective the church school and the parish can work together for the spiritual flourishing of both the children and the adults associated with the school community. The activities that this partnership involves will be different in each context, however there are a few common themes for effective partnership.

A good relationship between the Headteacher and the Incumbent is vital. Even if much of the day-to-day interaction is done by others there does need to be regular conversation. Both serve a shared community and will bring different knowledge of the parish to the conversation.

When either the headteacher or incumbent is new to the parish there will need to be an investment of time to establish the relationship and maximise the opportunities from the incumbent's time in school.

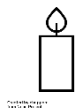
If people are in their first headship or first incumbency, they need to be sensitive to one another's very steep learning curve as they begin their roles.

The new person in either role may not have previous experience of school and church partnership. If they previously worked in a church school or had a church school in the parish the relationship is different, so a recalibrating of expectations of one another will be required.

Where either the headteacher or incumbent is new they should take care not to make assumptions that the new person will operate in the same way that their predecessor did. This offers an opportunity to do things in a different way, making use of the strengths of the new partnership.

This partnership works best when the choice of activities is planned jointly by the church and school for the academic year, with a focus spiritual flourishing underpinning decisions about what the church will offer. The [Diocesan School and Church Partnership Audit Tool](#) may be helpful with this, it makes clear what is recommended for community schools.

The incumbent does not have to be the person who does everything in the school. Consider the use of laity.



Collective Worship / Assemblies

In community schools' collective worship is usually called assembly.

The law states that collective worship in all local authority maintained schools must be:

- daily for all registered pupils on the school premises.
- 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', (which suggests that some do not need to be);
- non-denominational (i.e. it should not reflect any particular Christian denomination).

Community schools often look to the local church to provide the Christian content of assemblies. We recommend that you use Bible content or stories of people who have been inspired by their Christian faith; that is why you will have been invited into the school. Assemblies should be inclusive, invitational and inspiring, so you will need to invite pupils to reflect or pray. Avoid using phrases such as 'we believe' in a way that implies that they share your faith.

Surrey SACRE have produced guidance '[Time to Reflect](#)' which you may find helpful.

The Diocese provide collective worship materials for church schools which with some minor adaptation can be used in community schools. We also offer training for churches *Top Tips for Leading a Primary School Assembly*.



Religious Education

All schools are required to teach Religious Education (RE),

Christianity must make up 50% of the subject content. Community schools in Surrey use the Surrey Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education which you find [here](#). The unit plans suggest where schools should invite in a visitor from the local church or visit the local church. The RE Subject Leader is usually pleased to have an offer of help with these visits. It is helpful if the children meet lay people as well as clergy in their RE lessons.

Schools in Hampshire use the Hampshire Syllabus Living Difference IV which you can find [here](#).

The Diocese offer training for churches on how to support their local schools with RE.

Diocesan Support for Your Work with Schools

The diocese provides resources and training to

- Support the school and church partnership on [this page on the Diocese of Guildford website](#).
- Support assemblies / collective worship [this page on the Diocese of Guildford website](#).
- The Surrey Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education used by VA schools and VC schools in Surrey is on [this page on the website](#).

The Diocesan Director of Education (DDE) Alex Tear

The Education Team [You can find contact details of the team members here](#).

Community Schools – Help There's a School in My Parish Guide for Clergy 2026

Diocese of Guildford, Church House, Stag Hill Guildford, Surrey GU2 7UP

T: 01483 484905 E: Jane.whittington@cofeguildford.org.uk www.cofeguildford.org.uk



Our Top Ten Resources to Support Your School and Church Partnerships

[Collective Worship materials and archive](#) from the diocese

[Flame Creative Kids BlogSpot](#) - Ideas for crafts, prayer stations and talks to go with a wide variety of Bible stories. Lots here for the youngest children

[Free Bible Images](#) – Pictures to use in Collective worship and services

[Growing Faith Foundation](#) - Growing Faith is the movement that exists to put children, young people and families instinctively at the heart of all the mission and ministry of the Church by changing the culture of the Church of England. This website has lots of useful podcasts videos and papers.

[Jumping Fish Publications](#) – The Experience Journey Packs give you all you need for schools trails around the church at various festivals.

[Learn to Listen](#) – Lots of ideas and techniques to use to gather the views of children and young people about church, school or wider issues.

[Muddy Church](#) Ideas for activities linked to Bible stories to be done outside. These could work well if the school already has a forest school area.

[Pray for Schools](#) – Materials to help local Christians to set up and run a group that prays for their local school.

[Prayer Spaces in Schools](#) – over 200 reflective prayer activities for inside and outside

[Unlocking RE Videos](#) – These videos explain the theological concepts underpinning the Surrey Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education used in all church schools and most community schools and academies in the diocese. (Hampshire schools may be using a different syllabus)

And a bonus resource.....

[Our Growing Faith Research project](#) – What makes for an effective church/school partnership in the role of supporting the spiritual development of children? There is a section exploring partnerships with community schools. [Summary document here](#)