

Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education

Report to Diocesan Synod

for the Year Ended 31 December 2025

2025 Highlights... in numbers



105 Church of England Schools in Canterbury Diocese, serving **26,000** pupils and students across all Deaneries



16 Headteachers attended our Headteacher Retreat at Ashburnham Place and enjoyed a sacred time of rest, reflection and fun



12 leaders completed Cohort 5 of the 'Rooted' leadership course for headteachers new to Church of England schools



14 Deputy Headteachers attended a new network for those serving in this role in church schools



900 children were welcomed to Canterbury over three days for our annual Cathedral Schools Days for Year 6 pupils

250 children from 4 Church of England Infant Schools attended our Year 2 Leavers' Service in Canterbury Cathedral



The team ran **36** different training and development sessions (including conferences, networks, leadership development, information and subject/curriculum knowledge seminars) for headteachers, subject leaders and governors

75 subject leaders, headteachers and governors attended our RE conference, looking at a Religion and Worldviews approach



68 subject leaders, headteachers and governors attended our Christian Character conference, exploring creating a culture of justice and responsibility

96 senior leaders gathered for our 'ALL' Leaders' Conference, where we launched the 'Characteristics of an Effective Church School' document



All church schools inspected under the SIAMS Framework received Judgement 1 (the school is living up to its foundation and enabling pupils and adults to flourish)



76% of foundation governor posts are filled

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1. Constitution

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE, “the Board”) is a committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), established under s.3(7) of the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 (the 2021 Measure). The DBE Committee exercises powers and duties conferred on it by or pursuant to the 2021 Measure, delegated by the DBF. For practical purposes, whilst members of the DBE Committee are not charity trustees, they act on the assumption that they have the duties of charity trustees in discharging the DBE's functions on behalf of the DBF.

2. Vision

The DBE maintains a bold commitment to education. It aspires to build a resilient school system and collaborative, family ethos in an often fragmented landscape, striving for excellence in church schools and enabling them to share light with their communities as beacons of Christian values.

The DBE supports diocesan Church of England (CE) schools to live out a theologically-rooted Christian vision which is generous and enriching; that nurtures a culture of deep reflection and compassion for God’s world, encourages spiritual development and provides a rich experience and appreciation of the Christian faith, enabling all children and adults to flourish.

3. Scope of the DBE

The DBE serves 105 CE schools within the diocese, equating to approximately 26,000 pupils. These schools are supported operationally and pastorally; through networks, conferences and training, leadership development programmes and governance advice, school improvement and estates/buildings support, along with materials, policy and guidance on issues relating to Christian character and their Anglican foundation.

3.1 Statutory responsibilities

The DBE is required to provide an annual report to Diocesan Synod on its statutory functions and responsibilities, as defined in the 2021 Measure:

3.1.1 *To promote education within the Diocese of Canterbury, according to the faith and practice of the Church of England*

- i) In October 2025 the DBE launched a new, innovative resource entitled ‘Characteristics of an effective Church of England school’.

One of the joys of ministry with and between our family of diocesan church schools is that we journey together, yet all see educational culture and provision from different contexts, perspectives and encounters. This leads to wonderful diversity and organic change; each individual school’s circumstances and priorities evolve and fluctuate, with leaders and governors continually exploring the correlation between their lived experiences and their school’s theologically-rooted Christian vision.

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'Characteristics of an effective Church of England school' aims to capture this unique essence of a school community, helping to articulate *who they are, all the time*. Intentionally, it is not a measure to be judged by every few years, but a purposeful and ongoing celebration of excellence and an acknowledgment of imperfections. The approach works in harmony with the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Framework, yet with a clear adjustment to language. It changes the narrative, encouraging a culture in which leaders, governors and staff are habitually and steadfastly focused on – and passionate about – the qualities and characteristics of 'being an effective church school'.

Our new resource document affirms the centrality of a school's unique, theologically-rooted Christian vision (its 'blueprint') and the 'cornerstone' provided by its historic Trust Deed. It is moreover a practical toolkit, enabling leaders and governors to engage in reflective dialogue and questioning around ten characteristics or 'flagstones'. This provides a stimulus for habitual, honest and multi-layered discussion, with self-evaluation around the question: How are we being effective as a church school?

- ii) The Board has updated its Strategic Plan for 2025-30. Priorities are focused on equipping leaders, governors and school staff in church schools to live out their Christian vision, developing missional partnerships between church schools and parishes, and engaging with projects and ambitions which help children and young people grow in faith and discipleship.
- iii) The DBE officer team has prioritised visits for those schools most likely to be inspected under SIAMS, providing specialist support and monitoring progress against previous areas for development. From now on, these visits will draw on the *'Characteristics of an effective Church of England school'* resource, offering leaders and diocesan officers a shared language with which to discuss areas of strength or improvement within a supportive conversation.
- iv) The team has continued to provide a flexible and accessible training offer, plus regular email updates, in-person visits and pastoral conversations with leaders and local ministers.

3.1.2 Promote religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese

- i) During the year, officers gathered insights on Religious Education (RE) from school visits and survey data from school RE subject leaders. Challenges highlighted for attention were governor knowledge and confidence regarding their statutory responsibilities, the prioritisation of RE as a subject, plus staff subject knowledge and their design of learning tasks and questions. Alongside, the DBE considered the 2024-5 national SIAMS annual report and agreed officer recommendations for adapting support to schools.

Consequently, during 2025:

- Officers devised a new development programme entitled 'Get on Board: Empowering Governors' to support governors in monitoring and evaluating the impact of their school's Christian vision.
- We created a broader RE training offer, encompassing all the areas in the national SIAMS annual report. The offer has been received positively and courses well attended.

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- A new RE unit entitled ‘Religion and Racism: Can religion help?’ is now used by most schools, enabling Year 6 pupils to engage with ideas and issues relating to racism and religion. It was accompanied by supplementary resources and exemplification to support implementation, ensuring alignment with a ‘worldviews’ approach.
 - Further planning documentation has been provided to schools to support teaching of the ‘Understanding Christianity’ resource, including for units on ‘Salvation’ (Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 1 and Year 2) and ‘Creation’ (Years 2, 4 and 6).
- ii) A structured training pathway for Spirituality has been on offer this year, with 22 colleagues attending the ‘Going Deeper’ session. Bespoke training for schools on spirituality has been our most regularly requested training area, generally delivered via staff meetings.

3.1.3 Watch over the interests of church schools and secure the provision of new schools

- i) The DBE holds an important system leadership role, using its detailed local knowledge to develop and promote a coherent strategy for all church schools. The Board reviewed its ‘Strategy for the Church school system’; a document with a clear theological underpinning outlining different structures and pathways open to schools to promote system resilience and help them to express their Christian vision.
- ii) Officers continue to monitor the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision, for opportunities to extend the availability of a church school education to more children and families. We were delighted that prior to the summer break, the staff and pupils at Teynham Parochial CE Primary School were able to move into a brand-new building. The ‘Grand Opening’ by Bishop Rose takes place in March 2026.

3.1.4 Give advice as to matters affecting church schools and church educational endowments

- i) DBE officers have continued to provide support for church schools, site trustees and Academy Trusts in educational legislation and sites; particularly in relation to governing documents, nursery provision, land registrations and the use or development of sites and buildings.
- ii) A ‘Five-year Schools Condition Allocation Programme 2024-30’ document identifies capital projects which may be required at Voluntary Aided schools in the future. The Board has also planned how it will assist schools where building works are urgent, but the Governing Body may struggle to fund their required contribution.

3.2 Team news, wider engagement and influence

- i) The appointment of Zech Bates as Schools Project Officer has added capacity to the team to respond to enquiries concerning the development and maintenance of school sites and buildings. The role also supports the oversight of capital grant funding and manages other bespoke projects such as promoting decarbonisation initiatives for church schools, organising land registrations and guiding schools in conversion to academy status.

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- ii) The DBE has a statutory duty to promote co-operation between itself and others concerned with education in the diocese. Moreover, it believes in the inherent worth of every child and adult in the system, which inspires a concern for the well-being and support of the wider education community. Church schools and those without a religious foundation have many aims and values in common: prioritising well-being, a heart for the underserved or marginalised, striving for excellence, transformation for individuals and families, and the common good.

Our developing ‘Ubuntu’ Affiliate Scheme is designed to create a space of welcome and belonging for community schools within the network of diocesan schools, with access to high-quality resources, services and training. The offer includes: support and leadership programmes for RE leaders, access to our network of SENCOs to foster collaboration, deepening opportunities for ‘courageous advocacy’ (themes of justice, social action and helping pupils to be agents of change), and assisting in their engagement with the local Anglican church/parish.

- iii) Natalie Ralph was invited to write Early Years and Key Stage 1 plans for *Christianity as a Global World Faith (CGWF)*, an RE resource produced by the National Society for Education. CGWF aims to support schools in engaging with Christianity as a diverse, living, and globally expressed faith and is crucial in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in RE. By integrating the experiences and voices of minoritised and marginalised communities, these resources can create a more inclusive and diverse learning environment that values and respects all pupils and staff.
- iv) Rebecca Swansbury and Natalie Ralph continue as SIAMS inspectors. The inspector role offers excellent professional and skills development, introduces them to schools different from our own and helps bring these experiences and training into their advisory work. Natalie also spoke at the 2025 SIAMS National Conference, guiding inspectors from all dioceses on what to look for in high-quality RE provision.

3.3 Leadership and governance

- i) The Board has reviewed its Admissions Guidance for Church of England schools in Canterbury Diocese, a Rural and Small Schools Statement and Guidance for school leaders in navigating situations in which different perspectives around human sexuality are presented.
- ii) Headteacher induction, nurture and well-being remains a priority area of engagement. We continue to signpost and support senior leaders to access chaplaincy at The Living Well and have established an annual retreat for spiritual space, peace and connection with other leaders.
- iii) Leadership development has been extended: in addition to ‘Rooted’, our programme for headteachers new to church schools, we have established a network for Deputy Headteachers entitled ‘Called to Lead: Called to Serve’. We also continue to provide a network for staff responsible for leading provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This is designed to offer training from leading practitioners, a forum for questions and an environment of support.

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3.4 ‘Flourish’: new worshipping communities

The team continues to support missional locations in Hythe, Walmer and New Romney, as they seek to build partnership between parish and school to establish new worshipping communities. Each fosters engagement and activity with children and families appropriate for their unique context.

3.5 Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ)

- i) In April, two DBE officers attended training led by The National Society for Education to introduce the RE resource ‘Christianity as a Global World Faith’. The DBE has endorsed an approach to implement a gradual ‘roll out’, beginning with a pilot year with RE leaders and practitioners to introduce resources for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Twenty schools are represented in the pilot, which commenced in September 2025.
- ii) The DBE Strategy Day in June focused on Racial Justice, with input from Bishop Rose. It sought to explore dispositions, notions of power, how we might hear a diverse range of voices and begin to raise up a diverse group of leaders and ministers within our sphere of influence.
- iii) In relation to climate justice and caring for the environment, resources and updates for school are emerging, with ‘Let’s Go Zero’ (Net Zero) webinars run in the Autumn. Our Schools Project Officer is also monitoring how church schools ‘in scope’ are meeting the expectation from the Department for Education of having both a Sustainability Lead and a Climate Action Plan by the end of 2025.
- iv) For all capital spending in Voluntary Aided schools, where the DBE holds funds allocated from the Department for Education, our planning identifies projects which would ideally involve decarbonised solutions. Expert surveys and an analysis of challenges such as costs, existing infrastructure and insulation help to identify opportunities and priorities for decarbonisation; recent improvements in schools have included hybrid systems for boilers, LED lighting and replacement of windows.

4. Looking ahead to 2026 – key DBE priorities

- i) Effective Church of England schools: support church schools in a process of continual self-evaluation – what are the qualities and characteristics of being an effective church school?
- ii) Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ)
 - Support schools in embedding EDIJ curriculum resources
 - Develop a plan for diversity and racial justice workstreams
 - Promote representation in school leadership and governance
 - Caring for the environment - carbon reduction

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- iii) Equipping our shepherds
 - Establish clear training pathways for school staff at different career stages and/or with different levels of experience
 - Provide sacred spaces for rest and learning

- iv) Parishes and schools as partners in mission
 - Embed existing FLOURISH projects and identify potential future partnerships and funding streams
 - Raise profile of chaplaincy options in schools and Academy Trusts

- v) Governance: improve database function and tracking of vacancies and appointments, develop communications including information and advice available to governors and governance professionals

- vi) SIAMS: Embed system for updating schools on the SIAMS framework, helping them to identify areas for focus and providing training on themes raised from SIAMS report analysis

- vii) Promoting Religious Education and Collective Worship
 - Use research and inspection data to enhance our training and support offer for Christian character, review the accessibility of resources
 - Ensure easy accessibility of plans, resources and examples of good practice, plus continue to enhance our training offer

Canon Dr Quentin Roper
Director of Children, Young People
and Education

Dr John Moss
Chair, Diocesan Board of Education

February 2026