

# Curriculum issues

We warmly welcome the work of those engaged in developing methodologies for a distinctively Christian approach to the curriculum and materials for the theory and practice of Christian education. We also welcome the developmental work that has been taking place in a number of schools to give expression to their chosen ethos statements through class work and in so doing to engage in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils ...

*The Way Ahead*, paragraph 4.11

Schools are about the education of children. Therefore, what is learned in schools is of vital importance to those who are charged with the management and governance of schools. This learning comes in two interrelated forms. First, there is the formal curriculum of the school, much of it set in a framework of legal requirements and national or local guidance. Secondly, there is what children and young people learn as a result of being part of the school community, participating in its life, rituals and pattern of relationships for several years. This second area is more often left to chance than the first and is less well defined. This chapter will explore some of the issues that are raised for Church schools by both types of learning. Every Church school must have an ethos statement as part of its Instrument of Government. This statement should sum up in a few words the basis on which the school was founded and on which the whole of the curriculum, in both of the senses used above, will be built. All ethos statements in Anglican schools should make clear that the school's life draws deeply on Anglican tradition and teaching.

## **The formal curriculum**

Since 1988 the main content of the formal curriculum has been enshrined in law. The Education Reform Act of that year introduced two key curriculum concepts, the basic curriculum and the national curriculum.

The basic curriculum is defined as religious education and those subjects that form the national curriculum. Every school in the maintained system must provide at least the basic curriculum for pupils of statutory school age. This is pupils' entitlement, although greater provision for disapplication and variation of the curriculum is currently being introduced post-14.

The national curriculum is defined as a particular set of ten subjects (eleven in Wales), whose content is laid down in syllabuses drawn up for the Government by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (ACCAC in Wales). The syllabuses for all the subjects are created externally to the school, except in some very limited cases. Governors and teachers working on reviews of school curriculum policies must, therefore, ensure that they know what the current syllabuses contain, and seek to ensure that, as far as possible, their own documentation reflects that content.

## **Religious education**

The source of the syllabus for religious education varies according to the category of the school. Community schools and others that do not have a religious character must follow the locally agreed syllabus published by the Local Authority. For voluntary aided schools with a religious character the RE syllabus is a matter for the governing body and is expected to reflect the particular traditions and beliefs of the denomination of the school. In Church of England schools the governing body should follow the advice of the diocese, which may provide a Diocesan Syllabus

or curriculum guidance supplementary to the locally agreed syllabus. In Wales the Church in Wales published a Provincial Syllabus for religious education in 2002. If there is no external guidance, governors in such schools have to take the full responsibility for ensuring that their syllabus for religious education fully reflects the traditions of their faith. In voluntary controlled or foundation schools religious education must be provided, in accordance with the religious character of the school, where individual parents request it for their own children. In such circumstances it can be provided by reserved teachers (see p. 49). For all other children the syllabus is that produced under the auspices of the Local Authority (the agreed syllabus). Every LEA has a current syllabus for religious education, which has been developed or approved by the Local Authority's Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). Support for the Local Authority syllabus is focused through the local Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). In all schools parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education lessons in whole or in part.

At the time of writing there is considerable interest in the possible production of a national framework for religious education. This would be designed as a resource for local Conferences in their work to produce a locally agreed syllabus. The publication of such a framework by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority would supplement the nationally produced Schemes of Work for RE and, like them, would undoubtedly have wide significance for the subject. Such a framework would, for example, greatly assist those responsible for the training of RE teachers. It would not, however, replace the need for active local support for RE in all schools in which the Church of England has a particular role, forming as it does a single committee on the ASC and SACRE, without whose agreement no new syllabus can be approved.

## The national curriculum

In the period since it was first introduced, the national curriculum has engendered great changes in schools and been the engine, not without controversy, for considerable improvements in standards of education. Before 1988 only RE was compulsory and every other aspect of the school curriculum was a matter for the professionals in the school, with the advice of the LEA and, remotely, of the Schools' Council. There were great debates about how far the curriculum should be prescriptive and early mistakes were made. Since those days the curriculum has undergone two major reviews and been subject to a great many detailed changes. It has more recently been supplemented by the literacy and numeracy initiatives that have affected the way in which primary schools in particular approach these aspects of education. Further developments in the national curriculum content have come about with the introduction of citizenship and the concern to provide a more varied and flexible approach to the public examination system so that it better reflects the wide range of talents, interests and needs of pupils between the ages of 14 and 19.

Many of the early controversies around the national curriculum seem long past. Teachers accept the need for the curriculum itself and for rigorous assessment of the progress of their pupils, at least for diagnostic purposes. A contentious issue that remains is the degree to which prescription undermines the professionalism of teachers. But the national curriculum itself does not prescribe the manner in which it is taught. Moreover it is supposed to take only 70 per cent of total teaching time. If this can be achieved there is space to provide the suggested 5 per cent of curriculum time for religious education (though many religious schools manage a higher percentage) and also to have some material that is not in the prescribed curriculum, but which reflects the needs of the pupils.

## **Personal, social and health education (PSHE)**

This is one example of a curriculum topic for which some space needs to be found within the teaching time available in a school. Discussion continues among educationalists about whether this topic is a curriculum subject in its own right or whether it is actually a cross-curricular issue drawing on contributions from most subject areas. It is probable that if, within this umbrella topic, aspects of health education, sex education, careers education, parenting, drugs education, citizenship, safety and relationships are all to find an appropriate slot, then it will need to have a specific allocation of teaching time. Many of the elements within PSHE are of particular significance in a Church school. Governors will wish to ensure that approaches adopted are informed by Christian insights and reflect the ethos statement of the school.

## **Sex and relationships education**

Sex education must appear as part of the curriculum in secondary schools. Governors of primary schools may decide whether the school should make provision for sex education. If they decide that the school should not provide formal teaching on this subject they should provide their staff with clear guidance on how children's questions about it are answered. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all aspects of sex education that are not required by the national curriculum. Education about relationships will be present in every school as part of what is learned from being part of the school community. There will now be some formal teaching in this area as well, either as part of sex and relationships education, PSHE or in other subject areas. Teaching about relationships must include some teaching about marriage. It is a requirement of the law that pupils 'learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children'. The National Society has produced a web resource to help teachers and governors explore how the teaching

of marriage may be integrated within the curriculum as a whole. This resource has been designed as a contribution to curriculum development in all schools. Church schools will need to reflect on how much additional information they will need to include in order to reflect properly the Christian understanding of marriage.

## **The hidden curriculum**

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (SMSC)**

The inspection regime introduced following the 1992 Act established the high importance of schools' responsibility for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils. Teachers have become increasingly confident in handling these four crucial aspects of the underlying curriculum or 'hidden curriculum' as it has sometimes been known. This is a term that is sometimes used to describe those informal aspects of learning that occur simply because pupils are part of a school community. They learn about relationships principally, not by being taught or by discussing, but by experiencing the quality of relationships that exist within the school and within their home. They learn about values in the same way. They learn about the benefits of being good and the problems that are caused when you are bad, through experience and observation within the community. This is powerful learning. It is learning from every adult involved in the school and from each other. It is very important that the adults who are responsible for the governance and management of the school understand the need to develop clear policies in these areas and to take action to ensure that they are followed.

Much could be said about each of these areas. Schools are generally confident in dealing with the moral and social development of pupils. For Anglican schools, spiritual development should be an area of considerable strength and should reflect the Anglican

character of the school (see pp. 3–5). Cultural development has taken on fresh meaning and importance since the events of the summer of 2001. The demand for education to promote community cohesion and social inclusion within multicultural British society should encourage Anglican schools to look afresh at their policies for cultural development. The Government and Parliament have resisted the calls from a few politicians and commentators that would require ‘faith schools’ to have specific quotas of pupils from other faiths or cultures, although the Church has committed itself to Anglican schools’ being inclusive as well as distinctive. But the cultural development of pupils within any school community will be promoted as they grow in understanding of other faiths and cultures. This can be advanced through effective twinning arrangements between schools that reflect different cultures. These should not be patronizing and they should promote sympathetic understanding through a genuine desire to learn from, as well as about, others. There is also an important opportunity for Anglican schools, as part of the worldwide Anglican Communion in which Christianity finds expression in a host of profoundly different cultures, to learn from and about those various cultures. The Web makes this possible now as never before.

The ‘hidden curriculum’ should not be hidden from teachers and governors. The National Society has published a series of booklets on these topics, which deal with issues in great detail. Every Church school should have copies of these booklets available and should have incorporated some of their insights into the school’s policy documents. In 2001 the Society published material for staff development in spiritual education in a booklet entitled *Feeding Minds and Touching Hearts*.

## **School worship**

Every pupil in the school must take part in an act of collective worship every school day unless their parents have exercised their

legal right to withdraw them from worship. This worship may involve the whole school, a year group, a tutor group or class or any other grouping that the school would normally use to bring pupils together. The programme of worship in the school will make a significant contribution to the ethos of the school, the hidden curriculum and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children in the school. The policy on which the programme of worship will be built will be based on the richness and diversity of the Anglican tradition of worship, while paying proper attention to the traditions of the local parish and the age and maturity of the children. Worship in a Church school will receive considerable attention in terms of provision of resources, planning and training opportunities for the staff involved in its management and leadership.

In a voluntary aided school, all teachers can and should be expected to attend and to take an appropriate part in the daily act of collective worship. Nothing should be organized that prevents any teacher or pupil taking part in the daily worship, which is at the very heart of school life. In voluntary controlled and foundation Anglican schools, the expectation of teachers is not the same but the school must provide Anglican daily worship for all pupils. In this the head will inevitably have a leading role. It is worth stating the point that the law on daily worship that applies to schools without a religious character, that it should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' taken over the term as a whole, does not apply to Anglican schools, in which the law expects the daily worship to reflect Anglican beliefs and traditions of worship. Since 1998 it has been possible for the daily requirement to be fulfilled for voluntary controlled and foundation schools, as well as for voluntary aided schools, by an act of worship in church. Increasing numbers of schools, primary as well as secondary, now celebrate the Eucharist sometimes in school or sometimes in church after careful preparation on a regular basis. Some are, once again, with the support of their parents, preparing

children for baptism, for Holy Communion and/or for confirmation. These developments should be welcomed, encouraged and supported by the local church community. School worship, to which parents and the local community are invited and welcomed on a regular basis, is genuinely part of the worshipping life of the local church and should be seen as such. It can provide an excellent introduction to worship for those who might find attendance on Sunday in the parish church at first daunting or unfamiliar.

The National Society has published a wide range of material in support of school worship. Some of this is available in book form and some is available through the Society's web site.

## **Inspection**

In Church schools there are two distinct elements to inspection. A jargon has grown up to distinguish them, which is derived from the sections of the Schools Inspection Act 1996, which defines them. Section 10 inspections are undertaken by teams appointed by OFSTED (ESTYN in Wales). These inspections cover all the aspects of a Church school that would be inspected in a community school but that are not inspected under section 23 inspections. A team led by a registered inspector carries out the section 10 inspections. They follow the pattern for inspection laid out in the relevant phase handbook published by OFSTED or ESTYN. Under section 23 of the Act the school governors appoint an inspector to inspect those aspects of the school that are conducted in accordance with the school's trust deed (for more detail see below). The National Society has created a training scheme for these inspectors and over 90 per cent of all section 23 inspections in Anglican schools are conducted by inspectors who have undergone this training. Both inspections should normally be carried out in the same academic year. In both cases the inspection report, which is a public document, is addressed to the

governing body. The governing body must respond to each report by producing an Action Plan and ensuring that the plan is carried out.

Section 23 inspections apply to all schools that have a religious character, but affect the various categories of school within this group differently. The following table shows how each category of school will normally be affected.

	<b>Voluntary aided</b>	<b>Voluntary controlled</b>	<b>Foundation</b>
<b>Religious education</b>	Section 23	Section 10 (unless denominational religious education is provided, when that provision is inspected under section 23)	Section 10 (unless denominational religious education is provided, when that provision is inspected under section 23)
<b>School worship</b>	Section 23	Section 23	Section 23
<b>Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education</b>	Section 23 and section 10	Section 23 (if the governors ask for it) and section 10	Section 23 (if the governors ask for it) and section 10

*Note:* Section 10 inspectors will report on whether the school is complying with the law on school worship.

Every Anglican school should have a copy of the *Handbook on Inspection under Section 23* published by the National Society, as this provides clear and detailed guidance on what to expect from a section 23 inspection in an Anglican school.

## **Process of inspection**

The inspection process is a very important one in the life of every school and has been responsible for improvements in the education offered in many schools. It is also a time when all the staff of the school feel themselves to be under considerable pressure. Therefore, the process must be well managed, and governors have an important part to play in this.

Parents are significantly involved, both in the pre-inspection meetings with the registered inspector and (in some cases) the section 23 inspector, and in the post-inspection meetings. Indeed, the Annual Parents' Meeting should receive reports on the implementation of the governing body's action plans following every inspection.

Pupils are also involved. They are, of course, part of the classes or groups being inspected. Some may be invited to provide comments to the inspectors or be interviewed by them. All, therefore, will be aware of the events of the inspection and the pressure on the staff; many will feel a pressure to 'perform' well so that their school will get a good report.

Whether schools have a 'short' or 'standard' inspection under section 10, they will all have the same basic pattern of inspection under section 23. The two reports, once they have been formally received, must involve a response from the school that is focused through the governors' Action Plan. The reports themselves are public documents and copies must be sent to all the bodies that nominate members of the governing body. Every parent should receive copies of the summaries of the reports and may have the full report if they request it.

It is important that the school manages the inspection process well, and that the governors maintain a positive view of the potential for the inspection to contribute to the future development of the school. They should also seek to ensure that

the reports are read and understood in a balanced way so that what is good is celebrated and what needs attention is worked on.

## **Parental concerns and complaints**

Sometimes parents become concerned about an aspect of the teaching or the content of the curriculum. In the first instance they should discuss their concerns with the class teacher or head of department. If they are not satisfied with the discussion then they should discuss the issue with the headteacher. Most issues are resolved at this stage. Occasionally the parent wishes to take the matter further. Every school will have a curriculum complaints procedure and the steps laid down in that procedure should then be followed.

## **Teaching methods**

So far in this chapter little has been said about teaching methodology. The emphasis has been on curriculum policy, content and inspections. This is because methodology is almost entirely a matter of professional judgement for the teaching staff of the school. Issues of methodology will arise in the governing body in response to inspection or to requests for significant expenditure on buildings or equipment to enable improved teaching strategies to be adopted. Naturally governors will be interested in how pupils are taught, but they should expect to learn about this area as much through their school visits and their informal discussions with staff as through the business items on the governing body agenda. If pupils are to receive a good education in the school, governors will need to ensure that they give time and energy to discussion of curriculum issues.



The National Society/Church House Publishing has published:

*Spiritual Development in Schools*, Brown, Alan and Furlong, Jean, 1996

*Social Development*, Day, Pauline, 1997

*Moral Education*, Ainsworth, Janina and Brown, Alan, 1995

*Cultural Development*, Bailey, John, 1997

*Feeding Minds and Touching Hearts*, Brown, Alan and Seaman, Alison, 2001

*Worship!* Bailey, John, 1999

*Teaching Christianity at Key Stage 1*, Seaman, Alison and Owen, Graham, 1999

*Teaching Christianity at Key Stage 2*, Weatherley, Lillian and Reader, Trevor, 2001

and on the web site:

*Teaching about Marriage*

*Valuing Cultural Diversity.*

More details of all the issues raised in this chapter can be found on [www.churchschools.co.uk](http://www.churchschools.co.uk).