

Distinctiveness and partnership

- 4.1** We have argued in Chapter 1 that with the state being a willing provider of education, the justification for the Church's presence in education must be to offer an approach to education that is distinctively Christian.
- 4.2** There will be different interpretations of distinctiveness by governing bodies reflecting the role of the school in its community, its statutory category, the composition of the community, and the traditions of the local church. For example, if its statutory category is that of a Voluntary Controlled school its admissions policy will be determined by the local education authority in consultation with the governing body rather than by the governing body alone, and if it is the only school in a village its essential service will be to the local community. By contrast a Voluntary Aided secondary school in a city where there are many schools may be more concerned with serving the Christian community. There will be many variants of these two illustrations. A recent survey of Voluntary Aided schools showed that rather more than three quarters of them had a religious affiliation in their admissions criteria, but only a third of them had a religious category as the first criterion. In at least half of schools there was no need to put their oversubscription criteria into practice.
- 4.3** Although for a range of reasons there will be variations between one Church school and another, there will be certain core principles and values that should unite all Church schools within the Christian mission. These will be the gospel values of loving God and one's neighbour, as well as the practical outworking of these values in how pupils are taught to conduct themselves and to relate to one another and to God's world.
- 4.4** The distinctive identity of a Church school is enhanced by its relationship with a parish church (or churches where it serves a wide area), and for many secondary schools by access to a chaplaincy serving the school. We have found that the relationships with the incumbent of a parish church vary considerably. We comment in Chapter 7 on the role of the clergy and the relationship of Church schools to the parish generally, for it seems to us that the whole Church needs to develop a much clearer understanding of the role of Church schools within Christian ministry and their importance as centres of Christian community, where the Church offers service to all. In saying this, we acknowledge and welcome the strong links many parishes also have with Community and Foundation schools. It suffices to say here that a partnership between a Church school and a parish church has much to offer both the school and the parish within which it is situated. The relationship is at its best when the incumbent and other members of the church are a welcome and familiar presence, respecting and supporting the teachers, while the school seeks to involve itself in worship in the church from time to time, for example at the great festivals and at the end of the

school year, and to welcome a new headteacher. Parishioners have an important duty to pray for their school on a regular basis, and indeed for all schools and the work of all teachers in them.

- 4.5** The issue of distinctiveness is posed most directly for Voluntary Controlled schools serving an isolated village community where except on special occasions the practice of church attendance is for a small minority. Today's Church has inherited many hundreds of such primary schools from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. **We recommend that these Voluntary Controlled primary schools serving village communities should remain primarily to serve those communities, but that in so doing they should always be and be seen to be distinctively Christian institutions.**
- 4.6** We recommend for consideration that where they have not already done so governing bodies in all Church schools should adopt the ethos statement or one akin to it set out in paragraph 3.24 above and as a minimum:
- ensure that the school is led by a headteacher who is committed, with the help of staff, to establish and maintain the Christian character of the school in its day to day activities and in the curriculum;
 - engage meaningfully in a real act of Christian worship every day;
 - offer a school life that incorporates the values of the Christian faith as illustrated in paragraphs 3.28 and 4.8;
 - ensure that religious education is given at least 5 per cent of school time and that the character and quality of religious education are a particular concern of the headteacher and the governing body;
 - observe the major Christian festivals and in schools in which other faiths are present ensure that those faiths are able *and encouraged* to mark their major festivals with integrity;
 - maintain and develop an active and affirming relationship with a parish church;
 - proclaim that it is a Church of England school on its external signboard and on its stationery and make appropriate use of Christian symbols inside and outside the school.
- 4.7** This is a minimum list, and we presume to offer it because we have found that from time to time and place to place the distinctiveness has been attenuated. In rare cases we find that the Church foundation of the school has been forgotten.

One diocese commented in its evidence that on occasion it was approached by schools that were unsure why they were Church schools and reported that a further group would be difficult to distinguish from Community schools. Another diocese similarly recorded that some of its schools were hardly recognizable as Church schools, and asked for some strategic guidance on 'rechristianizing' them. A third said that 'at least one Church school has only been persuaded of its Church status in the last couple of years'.

We recognize that these cases are a small minority, and that Section 23 Inspections under the 1996 School Inspections Act (formerly introduced in Section 13 of the 1992 Education (Schools) Act) have brought the distinctiveness of Church schools into focus and challenged Church schools to reflect on and develop their distinctiveness as Christian institutions. Much has been achieved since 1992 to affirm the Christian foundation of Church schools. Nevertheless, these comments by dioceses point to the need to make clear – as above – the minimum practices of a Church school.

- 4.8** Whilst there are certain fundamental values that typify Church schools, they should also provide a foundation of experience of the Christian life and a body of knowledge of the Christian faith that can sustain their pupils throughout their lives. This range of experience for a child able to attend a Church school through both primary and secondary schooling should include an explicit commitment to honesty and openness; a celebration of the identity and nature of culturally and ethnically diverse groups; a readiness to seek and offer forgiveness, all founded in a sense of the presence of God and of the numinous. It should include a knowledge of how to pray and of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist/Holy Communion; and an awareness of the challenge of the spiritual life within everyday experience.
- 4.9** The experience of these things will be adapted to the child's own development. There should be respect for those of other faiths who cannot in conscience engage in the full liturgy of Christian worship. The Church school should strive to avoid a sense of exclusion by finding as much common ground between the faiths represented in the school as possible and by involving the leaders of other faiths as appropriate.

The curriculum

- 4.10** Church schools will follow the National Curriculum in the same way as Community schools. But the nationally prescribed curriculum allows scope for the individual school and the individual teacher to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the curriculum through schemes of work that reflect the specialist knowledge of the teacher and the Christian character of the school. There will therefore be opportunities for teachers in Church schools to illustrate their teaching with examples that reflect the highest aspirations of humanity and to bring out the moral and ethical issues that face us. In doing so, teachers have occasion to show the relevance of the teaching of Christian and other faiths to the whole of human experience. They have an opportunity to demonstrate that educational 'effectiveness' is concerned with the development of the whole person as a child of God. It is part of the task of the national Church and the Church colleges of higher education to foster the development of programmes of work that will help Church schools to make that contribution to education.
- 4.11** 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 required by Section 351 of the Education Act 1996. We are conscious that teachers need help in their initial training and in career development to bring this dimension of education meaningfully into everyday teaching of the curriculum.

The importance of religious education

- 4.12** An important element in the distinctiveness of Church schools will lie in the emphasis on the quality of religious education in the curriculum, which whilst covering other faiths will give particular weight to the Christian faith as held by the Church of England. The headteacher will see religious education and worship as a personal and professional care, and part of that care will be to ensure along with the (foundation) governors that the school has clear, coherent and professionally competent policies for both. The school will be concerned to offer teaching in religious education that is better than the satisfactory level required by inspectors. We note that Section 23 inspection has shown that virtually every Voluntary Aided primary and secondary school has a policy for religious education. Diocesan teams report generally that the quality of the teaching of RE and the quality of ethos and collective worship have improved since the new system of inspection procedures was introduced in the early 1990s. This is welcome. **We recommend to dioceses that they should agree objectives with schools to raise the standards of teaching, learning and achievement in RE. We further suggest that *all* Church schools whether inspected by Section 10 or Section 23 inspectors should be aspiring to at least a ‘Good’ rating for the teaching of RE.** The National Society inspection handbook provides clear guidelines on what are to be regarded as acceptable levels of teaching and of learning and achievement for Church of England schools.
- 4.13** With good quality religious education and the emphasis given to it in Church schools, **we recommend that all Church secondary schools should expect that pupils should take at least the short course GCSE and preferably the full GCSE in religious studies.** It is encouraging to note that throughout the schools system there has been a major response to the GCSE short course, with 40 per cent of pupils in England as a whole taking a qualification in religious studies at GCSE in 2000. It may be that we are in the middle of a historic change, one that will not only prompt pupils but give extra weight to RE in the thinking of the Teacher Training Agency and the DfEE on Initial Teacher Training. Although we have heard the argument that the absence of a terminal examination gives freedom to teachers and pupils to explore issues that excite their interest, the short course in religious studies should not place burdensome demands on pupils who have been educated in a school which takes the subject seriously, providing it is adequately resourced and over the years has challenged pupils to think critically about religion. The full GCSE should be within the compass of the majority. This should be especially so of Church schools. **We also suggest that Church secondary schools with sixth forms should offer A and AS Level courses in RE, and encourage students to take these courses.**

- 4.14** It has been put to us that Church schools should see religious education as a particular specialism, and that they should give the same emphasis to their Christian foundation and Church status as to any other specialist status (e.g. a technology college) that they may acquire. This comment relates to Church secondary schools, but all Church schools should seek to celebrate and enhance their distinctiveness as Christian institutions. To a Church school, religious education and collective worship should be seen as part of an integrated experience, with collective worship acting as an expression of what is taught in many RE lessons. Pupils gain a religious education in its fullest sense in a Church school through good, well-planned and well-organized collective worship, through the example of Christian teachers, and through the quality of RE teaching.
- 4.15** What we have said in the preceding paragraphs has implications for the status of RE and RE teachers in all Church schools. We would expect all diocesan boards of education, which have a role in promoting RE and religious worship in all schools, to use their influence through Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education to improve the provision and standard of RE in all schools. **We suggest, as is already the practice in at least some dioceses, that dioceses should seek to offer help to Community schools, on a cost recovery basis, in providing good Religious Education.**
- 4.16** The Government has given assurances that the introduction of citizenship into the school curriculum will not result in a reduction in the 5 per cent allocation of time for religious education. We welcome that assurance together with the Government's intention that citizenship should be incorporated into subject syllabuses right across the curriculum. There will certainly be opportunities to relate aspects of Christian teaching to the concept of good citizenship, not least Christ's commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. Respecting and valuing cultural diversity should be a characteristic of all Church schools.

Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled

- 4.17** We set out in Appendix 1 a summary of the characteristics of Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools. All have their valued place in the Church's provision, but we concentrate here on the first two. At the present time there are nearly 600 more Controlled schools than Aided schools.
- 4.18** **Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools should rank equally in the care of the Church, and the Church should respond to schools in each category according to their needs.**
- 4.19** Voluntary Controlled schools make up a warmly valued part of the community of Church schools, and in many cases may well be indistinguishable from Voluntary Aided schools in their Christian commitment. In rural parts of the country in particular, Voluntary Controlled schools often predominate. As one rural diocese put it in evidence to us, 'most VC schools have strong and active links with their local parishes and, more and more, with the Diocese'. Such schools provide an excellent opportunity for the Church to work in partnership by serving the whole community from the standpoint of Christian service. The value of such schools is immense.

- 4.20** The structural benefits of Aided status are outlined in Appendix 1. In brief, this gives a security to the long term Christian character of the school through the structures of the governing body and the role of the governors in shaping the admissions policy. The governing body of an Aided school may also seek evidence of Christian commitment from applications for teaching posts. We recognize the financial implications of any changes to Aided category, but since September 2000 it has been possible for Controlled schools to change their category without reimbursing local authorities for past expenditure. There will of course be future costs arising from a change of category, but in these new circumstances we are glad to note that dioceses have invited governing bodies of Controlled schools to consider whether they want to make a change. From time to time we envisage that dioceses will prompt further reviews.
- 4.21** When new Church schools are under consideration, the choice of category will involve close consultation with the local authority. It will be important to proceed by agreement. Financial considerations will be an important factor. **For the reasons outlined above we recommend, however, that the normal preference should be for a Voluntary Aided school, if financial circumstances allow.**

Partnership with Local Education Authorities

- 4.22** A strong and developing partnership between the Church and LEAs is at the heart of our proposals for an increase in the provision of Church schools. The Church and the LEAs have had a long and productive relationship characterized by a spirit of cooperation and genuine debate on the nature and purpose of denominational provision. We wish to emphasize that any development of the Church's provision *is through seeking to proceed in partnership* with the LEAs and with the consent of the local community in response to local needs and opportunities.
- 4.23** One Chief Education Officer from an LEA where there has recently been an increase in provision has commented that its aim, and the aim of the diocese, was 'to increase diversity of provision, not to introduce selection by the back door', an issue raised by two of the three teachers' unions who responded to our consultation. In proposing additional Church schools or places in them, that is our aim also. We believe that an expansion of Church schools will contribute to increasing choice and diversity within the overall provision of education, as well as seeking greater parity of provision between Church primary and secondary schools. In particular, the Church has a particular role to play in contributing to the lives and education of children in disadvantaged areas. Discussions on the possibility of increasing provision should therefore be characterized by a spirit of openness and genuine debate on what Church schools can offer to the local community.
- 4.24** These discussions should emphasize that Church schools provide a distinctive education based on the Christian notion of community. In this we see the Church working in close partnership with the LEAs, which are also seeking to develop communities. As we have said elsewhere, whilst Church school pupils will experience the Christian ethos and teachings, there should be no intention to proselytize them.

4.25 The evidence we have received from dioceses and from LEAs shows that the relations between the Church and the local authorities have grown in strength in recent years. This strength is evident across a whole spectrum of activities, for example:

- in cooperation on the Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education (SACREs) and the development of Agreed Syllabuses;
- in active involvement in the School Organization Committee (evidence shows that a Church representative acts as the Chair in several authorities);
- in the appointment of LEA representatives to some diocesan boards of education or other committees;
- in regular meetings and consultations on matters as diverse as building issues and school inspection and improvement;
- in cooperation on the provision of governor services, training and support;
- in working together on the appointment of headteachers of Church schools;
- in the sharing of technical expertise on a range of issues.

4.26 We have been impressed by the range of good practice that dioceses and many LEAs have reported in their working relationships, as illustrated below:

Examples of good practice provided by LEAs

- joint termly meetings between the Chief Education Officer and the diocesan director of education to discuss policy issues and to ensure a consistent approach;
- termly meetings between the Senior Inspector (or equivalent) responsible for monitoring school performance and diocesan officers to discuss individual Aided and Controlled schools;
- close partnership in addressing the issues surrounding Church schools in serious weaknesses;
- close cooperation on buildings issues to consolidate funding arrangements for improving and/or replacing schools.

Examples of good practice provided by dioceses

- the development of ‘partnership agreements’ or protocols setting out how the relations between the diocese and LEA are to be conducted;
- the provision of advice to the LEA on matters relating to small schools, where the Church has a particular depth of experience, especially in rural areas;
- ‘Affiliation Schemes’ for Community schools, which provide opportunities for in-service training in RE, collective worship and spiritual and moral development;
- the buying-in by LEAs of expertise in RE;
- in one diocese, the two RE advisers are jointly employed by the diocese and LEA. This arrangement provides for a considerable cross-fertilization of ideas, and ensures that a high level of service is available to all schools in the area.

- 4.27** Where the Diocese and LEA cover much the same area, the relations between the two are particularly strong. In those areas where a diocese spans several LEAs, the relations are often no less positive, although the relatively sparse resources available to DBEs mean that adequate representation of the Church’s interests can demand a large input of time by diocesan directors of education and other officers. By way of illustration, one diocese spans 18 LEAs and appoints over 200 people to various committees.
- 4.28** Nevertheless, dioceses have stressed the importance of the Church being adequately represented on local education committees so that the Church’s voice is heard in local matters. We believe this is to everyone’s benefit because the Church has a concern for the well-being of *all* schools, and because Church schools are a strategically important part of the overall provision within an area and not a separate constituency.
- 4.29** We have noted that the strength of the partnership between the Church and LEAs is shown in the willingness of some LEAs to contribute part (or even all) of the Church’s capital contribution to a new Aided school, where the case for a new Church school has been accepted as increasing the diversity of educational provision in an area.
- 4.30** In a very small number of cases, we have, however, noted that dioceses have reported problems in working with an LEA. This is sometimes the result of different aspirations, or different understandings of the nature of Church schools, or issues surrounding the effects of denominational provision on the ‘make-up’ of the local community. Such difficulties, if they occur, seem to arise at the Member policy level rather than in the day to day working relations between officers, which we are pleased to say are generally excellent. One diocese has quoted OFSTED’s identification of the ‘excellent working relationship’ between the diocese and LEA. We have also seen that LEAs are often providing a range of practical support to DBEs in inconspicuous ways. In those few cases where it has been difficult to establish good relationships we encourage dioceses to continue to seek to find a basis for understanding and cooperation.

The views of Chief Education Officers

- 4.31** A number of Chief Education Officers and other LEA officers have responded to our interim report issued in July 2000 and to our Consultation Report. In general, their responses have shown a commitment to working in partnership with the Church alongside a willingness to engage in discussions on the provision of Church schools. Their concerns are that potential new Church schools should not upset the local balance of interests; that additional provision should be seen within the context of the local school organization plan; and that new Church schools should be inclusive of the local community.
- 4.32** In general, there is support for the Review Group's emphasis on developing the Church's provision in areas of social and economic need (one CEO suggests a particular role for Church schools in helping those with special needs), and for local 'task forces' with LEA involvement, where new schools are being considered.
- 4.33** When there have been expressions of concern by the Chief Education Officers they have centred upon the issue of admissions policies. Some have said that the Code of Practice for Admissions (which requires admission policies to be clear and objective) is being contravened by some schools, with a degree of subjectivity being applied to selection, especially where interviews have been used to test religious affiliation. Another said that difficulties sometimes arise when the admission policy appears to discriminate against those for whom there is no realistic alternative, or appears to be used as a means of covert selection. Perhaps it would be a fair comment for us to add that such concerns could apply to all types of school when oversubscription occurs.
- 4.34** As we state below, we would expect admissions policies to be clear and objective. We agree that the Church should be responsive to those with special needs.

Admissions Policies

- 4.35** Where the demand for places in a school exceeds the school's capacity, the school's admissions policy becomes an issue of great moment for parents, requiring carefully considered decisions by its governing body. This is true of Community as well as Church schools, but for Church schools a decision on admissions policy uniquely challenges a governing body to decide how it should balance its wish to serve the community in general and its wish to nurture children from Christian homes in their faith.
- 4.36** The outcome of the deliberations of the governing body will properly reflect the particular circumstances of the school, and can validly lead to a range of outcomes. We illustrate various scenarios below.
- 4.37** For Voluntary Controlled schools, the decisions fall to the local education authority in consultation with the governing body, and we would expect, for example, that for a village school service to the community would predominate in the admissions policy. In our Consultation Report, we suggested, however, that Voluntary Controlled schools should seek agreement that Christian background is among the admissions criteria. We argued that this would allow the school to benefit from the participation of children

from Christian homes in the school's defined catchment area, where some degree of choice was required by the level of parental demand, and so help the development and substance of a Christian ethos. Whilst we suggested a quota might be appropriate for such children, we noted that there could be no general rule that fitted all circumstances.

- 4.38** Responses to our suggestion have been varied. Some dioceses and LEAs thought that to introduce Christian background or affiliation as an admission criterion for Voluntary Controlled schools would be divisive, potentially excluding local children from the school and restricting parental preference whilst admitting others from a distance. Some commented on the potential funding implications of this in terms of denominational transport, or in terms of the cost to excluded local families who would need to travel farther afield to find a school. It was suggested that seeking Aided status might be a better way of enhancing the Christian distinctiveness of Controlled schools, where such a change of category is supported.
- 4.39** On the other hand, a number of dioceses pointed out that denominational preference is already included within the admissions criteria for some or all of their Controlled schools. Practice varies. One diocese has reported that all its Controlled schools include Christian background in their admissions criteria, where 'priority may be given to children whose parents are actual members of the Church of England or Methodist Church'. One diocese has reported looser arrangements representing what parents understand in choosing a Church school. Another diocese suggested it would be legitimate to argue for Church membership as one of the criteria for a new Voluntary Controlled secondary school, if it were the only Church school in a large area, thus reserving some places for children outside the immediate catchment area whose parents specifically request a Church of England school.
- 4.40** The range of views expressed and the differences in current practice tell against a recommendation for a uniform national practice of seeking Christian background as one of the admissions criteria in all existing Voluntary Controlled schools. **We recommend, however, that Voluntary Controlled schools should, from time to time, review their distinctiveness as Christian institutions and consider whether their local circumstances allow a legitimate case to be made to the LEA for the inclusion of Christian background within the admissions criteria, providing this does not compromise their tradition and responsibility as a neighbourhood school.**
- 4.41** Responses to our consultation have also pointed out that in many rural areas in particular (though not exclusively) Voluntary Aided Church primary schools have historically been the neighbourhood school serving the local community. Such schools may not necessarily fill all the available places through the numbers of children resident in the parish and will therefore attract children from outside for a variety of reasons. In framing their admissions policy, the governors will need to consider the historic foundation of the school and the nature of the local community it serves. Where oversubscription occurs, and this is unlikely to be temporary, the governors should consider whether an enlargement of the school is possible. If this is not possible, or the oversubscription is a temporary occurrence, then the governors will need to consider the priorities for admission, taking into account the potential effects on the ethos of the school and its local

tradition. Clear and unambiguous admissions criteria should be set out as required by law, giving an order of priority, and taking into consideration the school's purposes as set out in its original Trust Deed. This may mean giving precedence to the local children irrespective of religious affiliation.

- 4.42** To illustrate a different situation in a more urban area, there may occasionally be circumstances in which a more focused admissions policy in favour of Christian background can provide a greater degree of social inclusiveness in a school, especially where the school's catchment area is a generally well-off area. In such circumstances, the admission of a quota of Christian children from a wider area can act as a counterbalance to the selection of children from exclusively affluent backgrounds, especially if the wider community has areas of social and economic deprivation. This comment relates to both Voluntary Aided and Controlled schools.
- 4.43** Another situation is that of a Voluntary Aided secondary school in a city, where the demand for places far exceeds the number available because it is the only Church school in a large area. Here, the governing body may justifiably conclude that its task is to nurture Anglican or other Christian children in their faith and to allocate all its resources accordingly. There are other schools in the city to which children can go, and the Church school, as we know from our consultations, may still leave many practising Anglicans unable to find a place.
- 4.44** These same consultations have also taught us that even in Church circles such a policy of total commitment to Christian families in the secondary school's wide catchment area may lead to some misgivings on the grounds that the school is not associating with its local community, and not giving an opportunity for non-Christians to experience what it is to learn in a Christian environment. These misgivings are the greater if the local children who do not get in are from disadvantaged sectors of the community whereas the pupils admitted from further away are from the better off districts. The misgivings can be especially strong if there is a racial dimension to this split. There is, therefore, both a community and an ethical reason, linked to the Church's position on poverty and inclusion as set out in paragraph 5.20, for offering a proportion of places for local children. We believe this can be an important factor in winning the hearts and minds of our prospective partners in discussing proposals for additional or expanded Church schools, as well as furthering the mission of the Church. In addition, it may further be argued that the life of the school would be enriched by the admission of some children from other faiths. **We would therefore suggest that some places should be reserved for children of other faiths and of no faith.** This could be achieved either through catchment or quota as appropriate to local circumstances.
- 4.45** Where a Church school comes into being as part of a reorganization scheme, or as a 'Fresh Start', it will rightly assume responsibility for an established body of pupils and relate to a particular community. Its future admissions policy will properly be settled by the governors through the normal process which involves circulating draft proposals to other admission authorities who have a chance to object to the adjudicator. We would expect the outcome of the settlement to include Church background amongst the admissions criteria – to an extent that will reflect local

circumstances and the category of the school – so that over time its Christian character is developed.

4.46 Commentators on our Consultation Report have noted that the nature of admissions policies brings into focus the balance between the ‘service’ and ‘nurture’ purposes of the Church in education. How that balance is determined will reflect the category of the school, its ethos, history and tradition, and local circumstances. In general, **we recommend that new Voluntary Aided Church schools should aim to allocate ‘open’ and ‘foundation’ places,** the ratio between the two reflecting the school’s particular circumstances, whilst ensuring strong distinctiveness and diversity. A degree of flexibility may be required in the allocation.

4.47 Whatever the particular circumstances, we would recommend that:

- Voluntary Aided schools must comply with the Code of Practice on School Admissions, ensuring that admission criteria are clear, objective and fair.
- The governing body should set out the geographical area from which admissions will be given priority.
- Voluntary Aided schools should aim to offer a number of places as a high priority to children with special educational or medical needs, as representing the Church’s commitment to those most in need.
- All Church schools should consider how they are responding to the changing needs of the local community.
- In any new primary and secondary schools it should be the policy to establish within measurable time – if it is not possible from the outset – at least a substantial minority of pupils with a Christian background.
- In particular, the aim over time in new Voluntary Aided schools should be to achieve an appropriate balance of ‘open’ and ‘foundation’ places, sufficient to ensure that the school is a distinctively Christian institution whilst remaining grounded in the local community in all its diversity.
- All dioceses should adopt the policy already employed by many dioceses of offering guidance to schools on their admissions policy.

The place of an ecumenical approach to education

4.48 Happily, the keen interdenominational rivalry that was so evident in the creation of Church schools in the nineteenth century is no longer an issue, although the different Christian Churches have usually promoted schools serving one denomination. There are, however, already good examples of collaborative working between denominations in existing schools, and in the development of new schools.

4.49 In extending provision as we propose at both primary and secondary levels, and especially in areas of deprivation where an existing school might be finding a new future as a Church school, the challenges may be very great. The purposes of the Churches may well be best served both in responding to the needs of the community and in giving a strongly based Christian dimension to the life of the school by creative solutions involving an

ecumenical approach drawing on the resources and commitment of two or more Churches or denominations. This is as relevant to primary as to secondary provision.

- 4.50** In particular, in considering the development of new Church schools, the aim should be to avoid destabilizing any existing denominational provision, by recognizing the presence and interests of the existing school. There may well be circumstances where, in the light of the current provision, it would be in the interests of the Churches to work together, in order to ensure the long-term continuity of a strong Christian presence.
- 4.51** When opportunities for a new Voluntary school arise, events may move quickly and unless there has been preparatory dialogue about joint schools beforehand the pressure of events may rule out a joint proposal.
- 4.52** We recommend that in appropriate circumstances the Church should welcome an ecumenical approach to new schools, actively fostering a will for the denominations to work together, and that dioceses should through continuing contact with other denominations be continually alert to opportunities.

Independent Anglican schools

- 4.53** There are around 500 independent schools which claim explicitly to be Anglican foundations, with over a hundred more which are Anglican by association, either from historical circumstance or through the maintenance of an Anglican chaplaincy. Of these, at least 250 are secondary schools. These schools are an important element in the community of schools that have a Christian foundation. (The distribution of independent secondary schools that have an Anglican foundation is shown in Appendix 2.)
- 4.54** Where the link to the Church is strong, these schools are more secure in their distinctive Anglican identity. The cathedral and collegiate foundations and the independent schools belonging to or associated with the Woodard Corporation are amongst these. Many other independent schools have worked hard to maintain their identity as Anglican foundations, giving emphasis to worship and chaplaincy and to their Christian ethos.
- 4.55** The evidence we have received, however, suggests that in many independent schools the Anglican foundation has been attenuated, either as a result of the weakening of links between the school and the diocese, or through commercial and external pressures. In many of these schools, the selection of pupils and staff is being made increasingly without reference to the Anglican nature of the school. The Church itself has sometimes been ambivalent in its attitude towards independent education. The current Review therefore offers the opportunity to reappraise the place of Anglican independent schools within the Church's ministry.
- 4.56** If we believe that Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation, then this belief must embrace the Anglican independent schools as well. There is a real need for the Church to re-engage with these schools, fostering a sense of belonging, and working with them towards a more explicit recognition of both ordained and lay ministry in these schools, through chaplaincy, governance and the education they offer. For their part,

these independent schools should be encouraged to re-evaluate their own identities, to make them explicit in their signage, to develop links with dioceses and maintained Church schools, and to strengthen their distinctiveness.

4.57 To that end we make the following recommendations:

- The bishops should foster a sense of shared community between the Anglican independent schools and the maintained Church schools in their dioceses by holding, for example, an annual meeting with heads to discuss issues of shared concern and to foster the development of bilateral relationships between independent and maintained schools. This would be with a view to identifying opportunities to enhance the work of each other, for example, in sharing scarce teaching resources, broadening the experience of staff, developing approaches to religious education, worship and chaplaincy, short pupil exchanges, and shared cultural activities – music, art and drama.
- The independent schools in a diocese should be invited to propose a member for the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE), and reciprocally bishops should canvass the possibility of a DBE representative or other nominee of the bishop being invited to become a member of the governing body of independent secondary schools.
- The Church should always be mindful of the independent Anglican schools in its stewardship at national and diocesan level, and in its activities, e.g. in annual services of dedication for Christian teachers and invitations to educational events. The Church should consciously pursue a policy of inclusiveness.
- The Anglican independent schools should be encouraged to engage with the resources available from the National Society on the Character of Anglican Schools in the Independent Sector, as a supplement to material provided by the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

4.58 To sum up, as part of our advocacy of one cohering Church community in which each part seeks to work with and for the others, we advocate a proactive policy of partnership between the maintained and independent schools. The purpose of this partnership is to nourish the Christian identity and the quality of education and school life the schools offer. The independent schools have much to offer, not least in their sense of community. We remember well hearing from staff and pupils at one we visited, ‘This is a friendly place: we care for one another.’ We concurred with that statement. This development of the capacity for caring and community is an important element in education, which a school with boarding students in particular has an opportunity to understand and live. In a different way, through the wide spectrum of social backgrounds in many maintained schools there is the opportunity to learn the meaning of community in another distinctive way. In both, the basis of community is the shared aspiration of the Christian commandment to love one another.

Conclusion

- 4.59** The guidelines we offer for consideration in this and the preceding chapter, which need to be considered as a whole, represent a confirmation that the Church should seek to serve children of all faiths and none.
- 4.60** In all circumstances we would recommend that Church schools must be **distinctively places where the Christian faith is alive and practised**. Church schools will seek to offer excellence in education, and in so doing they will above all be concerned to develop the whole human being through the practice of the Christian faith.
- 4.61** To facilitate responsiveness in admissions to the criteria discussed earlier in this chapter, and to facilitate the engagement of a substantial core of Christian teachers who together will give the school its Christian character, we see **advantage, where that is possible and affordable, for additional schools to be in the Voluntary Aided category**.
- 4.62** We warmly endorse the practice of partnership between the Church and Government at national level and have been glad to see the way in which partnership between the Church and local government has been developing in recent years. We see partnerships in which the Church offers its distinctive contribution to communities as a valuable and continuing element in the Church's practice in education.