

## Guidelines for Spiritual, Moral, Social & Cultural (SMSC)

When coming together to create this guidance, our starting point was the verse from John 13:34, ‘a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.’ Jesus gave his disciples this new rule to follow, and through it asks that we all show the same kindness and love for each other as Jesus shows to us – no matter what. Although loving one another and being kind to each other sounds easy to do, it isn’t and the task we face by trying to live by this rule, is one of the greatest challenges of our faith. We are being asked to love and care for each other, no matter the cost; whether we agree with someone else’s behaviour, their politics, or their values, God asks us to love them unconditionally, just as we are loved.

It is with this message that we ask you to approach the Guidelines for SMSC; we know we will be challenged and influenced in life by what we see, hear and experience from others, but that is the test of faith, the cost of wholeness and the experience of unconditional love.

Maintained schools and academies have obligations under various Education Acts which require them, as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of the children and young people they serve.

The SIAMS framework places SMSC as one of the key areas to make judgements about and hold schools accountable. It is part of our moral obligation to enable pupils and adults to flourish. We must enable this across the curriculum and school day. The DBE must provide guidance and support to schools and trusts to ensure that leaders are informed about how to achieve this in their context.

Successive Ofsted frameworks place SMSC as a central part of the judgement of a school’s effectiveness. Evidence to support this judgement will be gathered from consideration of inclusion, curriculum and teaching, achievement, attendance and behaviour, personal development and wellbeing, early years, post 16 and leadership and management. It is important that it ‘can be seen across the school activities.’<sup>1</sup>

Policy and practice need to reflect this important focus. This is an ideal time to develop the opportunities and quality of our ethos and practice. These guidelines offer support in this process so that schools have opportunity to reflect and evaluate on the impact of current practice and plan for future excellence.

The definitions of Moral, Social and Cultural Development are researched, documented, understood and embedded in practice in our schools. But the same cannot be said for Spiritual Development which is much more open to debate. It is important that the whole school community discusses and debates what it means to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally in order that policy and practice have integrity within a church school setting. The following pages will support further school discussion on SMSC development in order that greater understanding and more extensive and wide-ranging opportunities can be provided for pupils.

Once the whole community work on definition and understanding has been completed a policy review can take place.

## Spiritual Development

Spiritual development relates to the quest for individual identity and the search for meaning and purpose in our existence. It is associated with a dimension of life which is not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted School inspection toolkit 5 November 2025 p44

experienced through the physical senses, but has much to do with feelings and emotions, and attitudes and beliefs. The term 'spiritual' need not be synonymous with 'religious.'

Understanding of self and others is at the heart of spiritual development and is not linked solely to a particular doctrine or faith. Spiritual development is, therefore, accessible to everyone. All areas of the curriculum should contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

Spiritual learners become increasingly aware of the concept of self – the inner person and the way that this shapes an individual's perception of themselves as a unique human being.

Spiritual learners become increasingly aware of the concept of others – a growing empathy, concern and compassion for how to treat others.

Spiritual learners become increasingly aware of the concept of a physical and creative world – a growing relationship with beauty through the ability to respond emotionally to experiences of the wonder of the natural world and the results of human creativity. Spiritual learners explore their understanding of beauty and the effect this has on their perception of and relationship with the world.

Spiritual learners become increasingly aware of the concept of the beyond – a growing relationship with the transcendental and the ability to explore experiences beyond the everyday. Spiritual learners search for meaning in their very existence and their place in the greater scheme of things.

#### *A Christian Perspective*

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* NIV John 10:10

This reflects the wholeness of life, physical, academic, inner, emotionally, behaviour and attitudes for themselves and towards others just as Jesus taught. Spirituality being an integral part of having life in all its fullness.

To Christians, God is Creator and Sustainer. Being made in God's image therefore we are spiritual beings who can ponder on God through creation as one looks in awe and wonder at His handiwork.

In the Bible, spiritual development is symbolised in many ways often spoken of in terms of moving from darkness to light, or as a hard race to be won to gain the prize, or a 'journey' such as the 40 year journey made by the Israelites through the wilderness to the promised land. As church schools we should encourage our pupils to take up these spiritual challenges and support and nurture pupils' natural sense of curiosity.

For Anglicans spirituality is most evident when gathered for worship, through singing hymns and songs, responding through word and sacraments. In our schools the act of collective worship will be a particular life-giving focus to spiritual development. Flowing out from this will be a community which is open and hospitable, a place where all can discuss their beliefs, views and ideas openly in a safe and secure environment, a place where deep joy, forgiveness and reconciliation can be experienced.

#### *Church School Practice*

In a church school it can be reasonably expected that Spiritual Development would be a considerable strength. Therefore, the approach should seek to be at the very least 'deliberate and effective' but ideally 'thoughtful and wide ranging'. In your policy you will want to ensure that your community reflects a place where:

- creative and imaginative teaching lead to progress in learning
- staff encourage questioning with 'why', 'how', 'does it make a difference?' possibly through the use of Philosophy 4 Children approach and other critical enquiry strategies.
- pupils are encouraged to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life

- imagination, inspiration and contemplation are valued
- prayer permeates the life of the school
- there are opportunities for pupils to develop empathy and understanding of others by reflecting on values and beliefs
- staff can identify spiritual development in the planning of the curriculum
- the use of outdoor learning, drama, artwork and reflection times
- opportunities provided for extended learning provided by a variety of after school clubs and extra-curricular activities which enable creativity, enjoyment and opportunity for pupils to learn more about themselves
- Collective Worship documentation and evaluation give evidence that difference and diversity are explored and celebrated, and pupils are affirmed in their faith or non-faith stance

## **Moral Development**

Moral Development is concerned with pupils' ability to make judgements about how they should behave and act and the reasons for such behaviour. It refers to their knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes in relation to what is right or wrong.

Acquiring a knowledge and understanding of what is right and wrong is central to moral development. It is the basis upon which the pupils may develop the ability to make judgements about how to behave and it is the standpoint from which to consider the behaviour of others in school and society in general.

The system of rules and codes of behaviour established in our school is an important early introduction to issues of fairness for all and to the consequences of operating outside the accepted rule system. Pupils are encouraged to understand the need for a common code and to follow it from conviction rather than because of consequences or sanctions. Moral Development, based on Christian principles, should enable pupils to become increasingly responsible for their own actions and behaviour.

### *A Christian Perspective*

*Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." Luke 6:31 NIV*

That being do not treat others badly lest they treat you the same. That is treat others with kindness as you would want.

For Christians morality is about shared values stemming from Christian belief. As stated in Romans 3:23 'all have fallen short of the glory of God.' Finding our way to becoming the people God created us to be is the moral journey for Christians. This is made possible by the grace, mercy and forgiveness offered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians a spirit of repentance and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit give the moral life a transforming and renewing character.

For our church schools Moral Development will be characterised by these Christian values. God acts with love to save God's people; thus love will predominate in our schools reflecting God's salvation history. Christians look to the life and teaching of Jesus to help them understand what self-giving and costly love (from the Greek *agape*) means in practice, that is to follow Jesus' example of showing compassion to the poor, welcoming outcasts, healing the sick and giving his own life as a sacrifice.

Setting a moral perspective in school demands an ethos of forgiveness and not an acceptance of wrong-doing and the consequences. Relationships marked by restoration and reconciliation reveal a community that can make fair and balanced judgements when things go wrong.

### *Church School Practice*

In a church school the importance of truth and integrity should be prominent in policies and practice. You will want to ensure that your community reflects a place where:

- you offer opportunities for genuine praise and thanksgiving to take place
- fairness and justice in your approach to all you do in school
- being able to disagree respectfully
- opportunities for pupils to act justly and mercifully and with a sense of humility through involvement in charity work, pupil buddying schemes and the school council
- opportunities are given for pupils to show forgiveness and repentance
- Moral Development is identified in the planning of the curriculum
- an emphasis on Moral Development changes what and how you teach. There is a clear policy and understanding of the Equalities Act and protected characteristics and a clear anti-bullying policy and action plan.
- review and evaluation reveal that pupils are responding to the opportunities for moral development that you provide
- the curriculum supports Moral Development through PSHE and through RE with opportunity to investigate moral dilemmas and understand the consequences of poor decisions

### **Social Development**

Social Development refers to the development of abilities and qualities that students need to acquire if they are to play a full and active part in society. It also relates to the growth of knowledge and understanding of society in all its aspects.

Development in this area enables pupils to become conscientious participants in the family (in its various forms) and then, progressively, the class, the school and the wider community. Provision for Social Development should balance the positive, satisfying elements of belonging to a group or society with the demands and obligations such membership requires.

The school, in particular the classroom, provides a suitable environment for promoting Social Development within a Christian context. Pupils learn to lead, to use their initiative and to use individual skills and strengths when working together towards a common goal. The ability to be led, to support others and to recognise the different skills of other group members can be developed when children work co-operatively.

#### *A Christian perspective*

*"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" Psalm 133:1 NIV*

Living in unity does not mean we will always agree but have different opinions, views, feelings but as we work together with all our differences as one body following the ways of Jesus, we are united in this/His purpose.

The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in equal relationship united by a bond of love is the perfect model for our schools. Human community reflects the relationship of the Godhead; God as Creator has a relationship with God's people in the Incarnation, his involvement with all that it means to be human, and as Sustainer in all that is life-giving and re-creating.

*The Church is described in relational terms as the Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians St. Paul emphasises the value of each person in the Christian community and their need to work together to bring God's Kingdom to the places where they live and work.*

The attitude of such a community strives for justice and is motivated by an attitude of generosity. In the Old Testament Amos speaks of a God who is 'just and righteous' and in the New Testament Jesus teaching reveals a self-giving and generous love even to those considered enemies.

### *Church School Practice*

In a church school the importance of working together for the good of all should be shown in the values expressed in policies and practice. You will want to ensure that your community reflects a place where:

- the quality of relationships enables all to express themselves openly, honestly and respectfully
- the support of strategies to help pupils deal with disappointment
- all are willing to listen to others with differing opinions and that this can be encouraged through visits and visitors
- there are opportunities to better understand the balance between rights and responsibilities
- social development is identified in the planning of the curriculum
- an emphasis on social development changes what and how you teach with an emphasis on groups working well together and co-operating in class regardless of gender, race or religion. Opportunities given for older pupils to help younger pupils through themed days with the whole school working together
- review and evaluation reveal that pupils are responding to the opportunities for moral development that you provide
- the way your curriculum is organised supports social development

### **Cultural Development**

Cultural Development refers to the development of knowledge and understanding of differing cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions. It is an increasing appreciation of the systems of values and attitudes which form the basis of identity and cohesion within societies and groups.

At the heart of Cultural Development lies the necessity to develop a sense of personal identity, whilst at the same time acquiring awareness, understanding, respect and tolerance regarding the cultural traditions of others.

To make provision for Cultural Development existing knowledge, interests and experiences are strengthened and then built upon further. In this way pupils gain a deeper understanding of their own culture and the factors which influence it and gain a broader understanding of other cultures and cultural influences.

### *A Christian Perspective*

*"...I looked, and there standing before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."* Revelation 7:9 NIV

To understand one's own culture, and identity forms a good foundation from which to begin to understand others from different cultures and other identities. The Biblical example of the Good Samaritan shows how a compassionate approach to others allows us to cross the bounds of culture and identity.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the early church was a place where many cultures and backgrounds were drawn together. David Smith in his book 'Learning from the Stranger' refers to the story of Pentecost as 'a divine act of hospitality.' Each hears the gospel message from a Galilean in his or her own language. The story of Pentecost shows how God reaches out and welcomes all in a celebration of diversity. Christianity is a global faith and links with others across the world are to

be embraced. Theologian Mirosslav Volf uses the image of an embrace to illustrate a positive and accepting attitude towards others from different backgrounds.

*'In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become part of me while at the same time I maintain my own identity. By becoming part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace, none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.'* As quoted by David Smith in Learning from the Stranger (p. 121)

### *Church School Practice*

In a church school the importance of humbly accepting and learning from others from different cultures and identities is paramount. In the NSE's Flourishing Schools we learn about 'UBUNTU' – this word, drawn from the Zulu language is best translated – 'I am because we are'. It says that flourishing is never an individual pursuit, but a collective endeavour, released in relationship and communities that live well together.<sup>2</sup> Such values will be expressed in policies and practice. You will want to ensure that your community reflects a place where:

- opportunities are given to welcome others with openness and respect.
- pupils can develop an understanding of their place within the Christian cultural heritage and an appreciation of other cultures through studying different authors, poets, artists, musicians and sportsmen and women.
- pupils can begin to explore and understand all the intersections of their self-identity which makes them whole in the eyes of God. The self-identity of others can be explored through guest speakers, teachers and parents who can come into school to talk about the multitude of experiences, unique characteristics, affiliations, beliefs, and social roles that make them who they are.
- pupils are encouraged to explore and experience the diversity of the Christian tradition within Britain and across the world. They are also to be encouraged to understand and appreciate the different cultures and religions represented in the school or locality. Visits to or visitors from sacred spaces should be included in the whole school plan.
- cultural development is identified within the planning of the curriculum.
- review and evaluation reveal that pupils are responding to the opportunities for cultural development that you provide.
- the way your curriculum is organised and resourced supports cultural development using visitors e.g. local authors, dance groups, drum workshops, visiting artists and musicians.

To conclude, Jesus said, *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."* Jeremiah 29:11 NLT. What we can learn from this is that our lives are all part of an enormous plan in the eyes of God; a plan that has always been written just for us and a plan that will provide us with exactly what we need to thrive and keep walking with God. Whether we understand the plan or not, it is what we learn about our wholeness in God through exploration of the Spiritual, Moral, Social & Cultural values of Christianity which we will encounter on our journey, that will enable us to find the right people to travel with, reject the harm that we can come across and know that by trusting in God and living the values of Christianity, we are changed and we are whole.

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<sup>2</sup> Our Hope for a Flourishing School System: Deeply Christian Serving the Common Good 2024