

## History of Church Schools

The Church of England has always been concerned with education in many forms and the history of Church schools began when the National Society for the Promotion of Education was founded in 1811.

“A community school with a distinctive Christian character.”

Long before the government became involved in providing education for everyone in our country, the Church of England had a vision that it wanted every parish to have a school for the education of poor children. By 1900, there were 5,700 state-funded schools and 14,000 schools funded by the Church of England. Today, approximately a quarter of all primary schools have a Church of England foundation, through which they strive to provide the highest standard of education possible, in partnership with the state.

From the earliest days, the purpose of Church schools was to enable children to flourish by providing a basic education and by developing their moral character. It was always intended that Church schools should be open to all of the children of the parish. **The schools are not ‘faith schools’** in the sense of presuming that children are practising Christians or attempting to make converts of them. **However, the ethos of the schools is based on distinctively Christian values** and they will offer children an experience of faith through collective worship and links with the parish church. Religious Education in Church schools will always include teaching about other faiths and they will usually follow the same syllabus for RE as non-Church schools. Since 2010, some Church schools have been converted into academies. However, this process entails a new way of managing the school apart from the Local Authority and makes no difference to the way in which the foundation ethos of the school is lived out on a day-to-day basis.

What is added by being a Church of England school?

**Church schools have Christian beliefs and values at their heart. This means that every child and adult associated with the school is not just important because they are members of the school but also because they are seen as unique individuals within God’s creation.** A church school might have a motto such as “No one left behind!” and the reason would be that everyone is seen as so valuable in God’s eyes that everyone must be supported and encouraged to be the very best they can be. Church schools recognise that as well as academic and emotional intelligence human beings also have **spiritual intelligence**. The spiritual aspects of life will be recognised, and nurtured alongside the academic and emotional needs of all. Church of England schools are places where questioning of belief and non-belief is encouraged as we all try to make sense of the world, the gift of life and the purpose of our own personal lives. Although we live in an increasingly secular society, **the values of our country have their roots in the Christian faith**. Church schools continue to celebrate this as an aspect of the heritage which enables them to be successful places of learning for children of all faiths and none.

What differences should you notice?

As a pupil, parent, visitor or member of staff you should find your Church school is as good as any other good school but you should feel that the way in which the school works is different and distinctive. **That distinctive difference will be rooted in Christian values that affect the way everyone behaves and in the way everyone is respected.** Around the school, there will be signs and symbols which reflect the Christian heritage on which the school is built. There may also be **areas for reflection which contain school prayers and prayers that the children have created themselves**. Additionally, there will be a much **greater emphasis on links with the local parish church** than would usually be the case in a non-Church school. However, none of the above should be taken as indicators that Christian beliefs are being enforced. They are ways in which **Church schools encourage an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promote Christian values through the experience that they offer all pupils**.