

Guidance notes for spiritual development policies in church schools

What might you want to include?

- The school's Christian vision;
- How the school acknowledges that we are beings with a spirit;
- How the school understands spiritual development and the opportunities within the school for pupils' spirits to be nurtured;
- How the school community understands spirituality and the ways that the school directs pupils towards opportunities to be aware of, and develop their spirituality;
- How a Christian spirituality is witnessed in the life of the school;
- How the school will recognise that these actions and opportunities are bearing fruit: what is noticed as a result?

The schools' Christian vision

This is likely to indicate or infer the school's aspiration for all pupils to develop holistically, which is more than just academically and physically.

Each person has a spirit

It is generally accepted that each person has a spirit within them. This is part of religious understanding, but also accepted by people who do not follow a faith. People talk about the human spirit as something that can be enlivened or crushed. Yet it is not a passive part of the human identity, as it can drive people to act in particular ways.

How do people in school talk about the spirit?

The Bible makes many references people's spirits: talking about them as being God given: "The Lord... forms the human spirit within a person" Zechariah 12:1. Mary sang of her spirit rejoicing, and there are verses in Proverbs referring to spirits being crushed, or growing weak. On the cross, Jesus commended his spirit to God.

Schools benefit from an agreed understanding of the language

Recognition of the non-material/non-physical Language of choices and commitments

Using language of the spirit?

"What made your spirit sing today?"

"What crushed your spirit?"

"What inspired your spirit today?"

Spiritual development and spirituality

There are many ways that these terms can be understood. It is not the place of the Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) to determine how schools understand and use the terms, as there is wide and healthy divergence about how the terms are used. Schools can articulate and live with different definitions that are justifiable within a church school context. Nevertheless, some are suggested here.

A school acknowledging the importance of spiritual development will be keen to develop and nurture the most distinctive and desirable capacities of the individual. This is a concern which goes beyond what children and young people **know** and **can do**, and relates to **what sort of person they are and are becoming**. As such, any activities organised by the school will have an impact upon who each pupil becomes. This will not be the province of one particular subject or routine. The potential for spiritual development is there in every area of school life; across the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. Staff have a key role in developing relationships and approaches that allow pupils' spirits to flourish. Every school in the land is required to promote the spiritual development of all pupils, and this is not seen to be aligned to one particular religious tradition. In an Anglican church school, this needs to be inclusive, against a backdrop of Christian distinctiveness.

Each relevant policy should indicate awareness potential for pupils' spiritual development eg

<h2>English</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through reading, finding out about the feelings of others in very different circumstances, and reflecting on one's own responses.• Exploration of responses to emotions in writing.• Careful selection of texts introducing characters who inspire.	<h2>Mathematics</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pattern and order in number and shape• Awareness of infinity, and of nothing. Where do I stand in relation to those?• Probability, certainty and likelihood.• Universality and connectedness of mathematical laws• Perseverance with problem solving
<h2>Science</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions about the natural world and why they are the way they are• Discovery about the way that things operate and connect together.• Pupils responses to what they learn• Links to how these things came about: science and religion	<h2>Religious Education</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about the spiritualities of others, and how religious people and others respond to the world• Reflection upon beliefs and actions inspired by faith• Finding out about the importance of the Christian faith to believers• Learning how to behave towards others; learning about how people think about and respond to God• Finding out about commitments and belonging• Dealing with questions that have no clear answers
<h2>History</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing thoughts and opinions about people from different times in history and the events that have taken place.• How do and should they affect the choices that people make today?	<h2>Geography</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing a sense of amazement and curiosity about different environments and how people live• Learning about human effects upon the landscape and human responsibility for changes in the environment• Developing empathy with people who live in different parts of the world and a sense of connectedness
<h2>Creative Arts</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils' responses to human creative expression, art, dance, craft, music and the opportunity to explore their own expressions through these media• Thoughtful selection from different cultures is important here, to allow a wide variety of experience, connection and response.	<h2>Physical education</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding out what the body can do and pushing it a bit further• Being a team member and working together• Being aware of the role of others in gymnastics, swimming and team sports• Taking pride in achievement and dealing with disappointment.

Spirituality



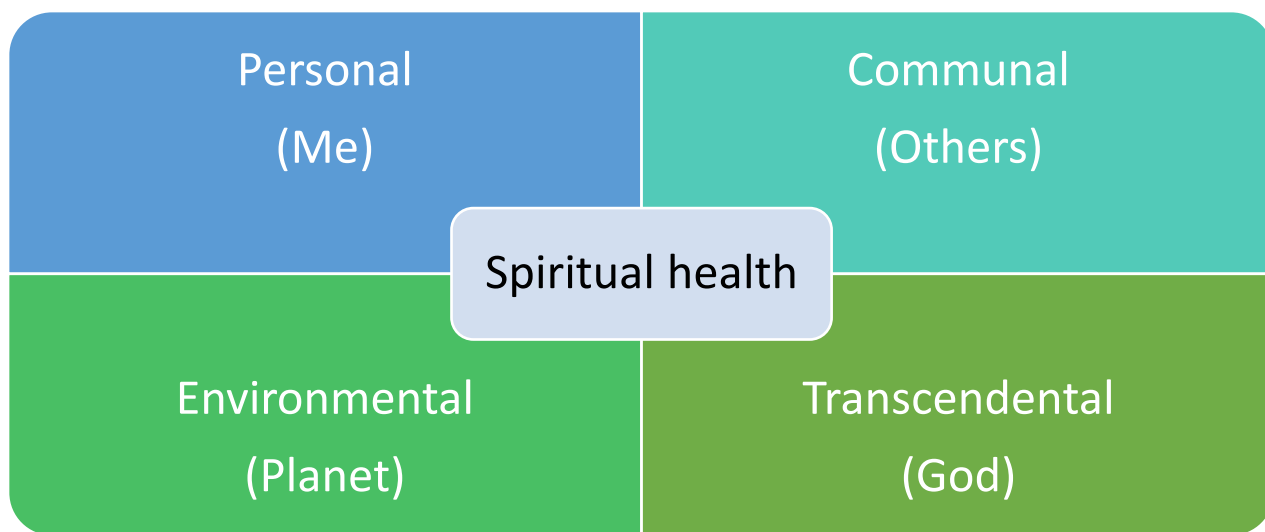
A helpful way to think of spirituality is as ‘practice’ – what people do. This is certainly the case within religious traditions. Christian spirituality can be expressed in many ways, such as praise and worship, and service, and fasting. Buddhist may be observed in meditation, but also in right speech and not harming. Yoga and sacred dance can be part of Hindu spirituality, as can a commitment to non-violence. Sikhs may be seen offering self-less service, but also coming to the aid of the vulnerable, as well as adopting symbols of their commitment (5 Ks). Fasting and prayer are very important aspects of Islamic spirituality,

but so is generosity. Jewish people’s attention to the festivals of the faith, and keeping kosher are signs of their spirituality, but so is practicing loving kindness.

Individual **spirituality** can be viewed in many different ways. Schools may well adopt a definition that works well for them. Several are explored in *Spiritual Development: Interpretations of Spiritual development in the classroom*

A helpful way, which fits well with a Christian view, is to think of spirituality as ‘practice’ or what people **do** that shows or ‘pays attention to’ the life of the spirit. The shape of a person’s spirituality is revealed not only in who and how they worship, but also in how choices are made about spending money, prioritising time, conducting relationships, investing energies, placing trust, responding to the world’s (and personal) hurt.

Following her research with children, Rebecca Nye wrote of this as being aware of our relationship with ourselves, others, the planet and God. Activities planned by the school can be surveyed for their potential to direct pupils’ attention to these areas, so that they become more aware of them and enrich their relationship with each.



How does the school direct pupils’ attention to each of these aspects of spiritual health?

Personal
(Me)

Reflecting on feelings

Reflection on achievement

Spiritual questions as an activity

Questions in diverse curriculum subjects

Questions about choices and commitments/dreams and aspirations

Children’s literature

Quiet spaces in school – including Prayer spaces in school

Forgiveness and reconciliation

Mediation partners and buddies

Cross-class relationships

Serving others in school

Fundraising projects

Courageous advocacy projects- Global neighbours

Curriculum focus on people beyond the school/other countries

Communal
(Others)

Gardening projects – in school or at church

Outdoor projects – Forest school

Curriculum focus on the planet/climate change

School recycling projects




Visits

Outdoor worship

Picture News focus

Collective worship

Church visits to find out about what happens there

Church visits – and Christian visitors

Prayer spaces in classrooms

Prayer spaces in schools

Prayer times in school

Stories from scriptures



The spirituality of the school

The school is more than the collection of individuals. It has its own life and habits. A church school should show signs of Christian spirituality (or practices). Christian spirituality is a response to the command to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength [and] love your neighbour as yourself” ([Mark 12:30](#)). Each of the following activities are ways that Christians show their commitment. Schools can adopt these practices as part of their life, and do it in a way that is invitational and inclusive. Depending on the neighbourhood and community served by the school, some activities are more appropriate than others. Which are part of the life of your school?

Many may be related to collective worship, but not all of them:

<i>Christian practice</i>	<i>In the life of the church school</i>
Attending church	Regular services in the church
Celebration	Taking part in particular events, and enjoying being in each others’ company.
Challenging injustice	When standing up for the rights of the vulnerable and marginalised, either in school or on behalf of people beyond the school (Courageous Advocacy)
Communion	A periodic service of Holy Communion (or Eucharist). Takes place in some VA schools
Creativity	Encouraging pupils and staff to develop their creativity, and use it in a variety of ways, to delight or serve others.
Forgiveness	Encouraging members of the community to offer, ask for and receive forgiveness. Explored in the behaviour policy
Generosity	Giving to each other in many ways, including time, attention, kindness and talents or goods, as well as giving money for particular causes
Hospitality	Welcoming in new people, new members of the community and visitors. Serving food is only one aspect of this
Lament	Making time to be sad together before God – particularly when something bad happens in the life of the nation, of the locality or of the school
Living simply	Using resources carefully and considering the cost to the planet.
Loving your enemies	Seeking the good of those who do not like us.
Prayer	This can be in collective worship, in class times, at various points of the day, individually at prayer stations, during special events such as Prayer Spaces
Reading scripture	Reading the Bible in lessons and during collective worship
Service	Seeking and finding ways to make life better for others, usually through giving time. This can imply a continuous commitment, rather than just a one off act.
Worship	Often, but not solely, Collective Worship, but this can take place in other spaces, including outside, in Forest School, on trips including residential.

Other aspects of Christian spirituality are less likely to be seen in school, but include: Baptism, Evangelism, Fasting, Resting, Testimony, Confession, Healing.

Bearing fruit

The school will want to collect evidence of a variety of ways in which the pupils give attention to their spirits. This may be in collective worship evaluations; action and notes from meetings with school council; eco team; worship/spirituality team; pupils’ reflection journals.

Further reading

Significant documents include:

Church of England Vision for Education

Spiritual Development: Interpretations of Spiritual development in the classroom

Mental Health and Wellbeing: Towards a whole school approach

SIAMS framework 2023

Spirituality policy

School's Christian vision

School's understanding of spiritual development

School's working definition of spirituality

The spirituality of the school

How the school sees evidence of this nurture of the spirit.