

# Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System:

Deeply Christian,  
Serving the  
Common Good





# Foreword

The Church of England's Vision for Education, 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good', published in 2016, sets out the core principles that underpin our commitment to education. This vision has anchored and underpinned all of our collective work since then. It will do so for years to come as we continue to play our role in serving the children, young people, families and communities of this nation through our schools.

The outworking of this vision is grounded in the desire to lead education for 'life in all its fullness' (John 10.10). This means the flourishing of all children and adults in institutions that themselves work together in a vibrant ecology focused on the flourishing of all. One of the four central pillars of this vision is Educating for Hope and Aspiration. The hope that we now seek to articulate in this document for a flourishing schools system is both an encouragement to church schools to continue to deepen this focus, and a call to the wider sector, to practically embody this hope together in partnership, dialogue, debate and mutual encouragement.

In our 2016 Vision for Education, we suggested that: "Good schools open up horizons of hope and aspiration, and guide pupils into ways of fulfilling them. They also cope wisely with things and people going wrong." Christian hope is not merely wishful thinking, an optimistic outlook, or a positive attitude towards the future. It is a deeper, broader, richer concept that is rooted in God's love and compassion for all people and for the whole of creation. It has been sustained over generations, centuries and indeed millennia.

The story of the people of God in the Old Testament is one of sustaining hope through all seasons. There are times of revelation, dedication and celebration. There are also long periods of confusion, suffering, and patience. There are people who experience elation and success, and others who never get to see the future towards which they were leading. Throughout this long period of history, the collective roots of hope in God sustained the vision. In one of the most challenging seasons the people ever faced, the prophet Jeremiah said: "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29.11).

In analysing the role of such prophets, the theologian Walter Brueggemann outlines two complementary aspects of their work - to **criticise** and to **energise**.

To criticise is to evaluate deeply one's current situation, to think critically, and to work together to deepen wisdom to understand changes that may be needed to go forwards. To energise is to offer a vision of a future that may not yet seem possible, to prayerfully and humbly trust God, and then to empower one another to move towards that future together. This hope-filled future is not focused simply on short-term changes of policy or procedure, but on long-term shifts in thinking and practice. As this document seeks to unpack the further outworking of our 2016 vision, through creating and sustaining a flourishing schools system together, it does so in the same spirit - exploring and evaluating some of the great challenges we face together, whilst offering the invitation to a shared journey of hope.

For Christians, this hope finds its complete fulfillment in Jesus, his life, ministry, teaching, and ultimately in his death, resurrection, ascension and future return. Through offering a vision of 'life in all its fullness', Jesus is found in this prophetic posture. He is critically evaluating both his own current situation and that of humanity as a whole. At times Jesus calls out great injustices; he also offers deep hope for the future for all people, through all time. This hope is then released through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, where people from many backgrounds, traditions and nations gathered together birthing the early church, in which,

2000 years later, we still seek to embody the same Christian hope for the communities we serve. It is a vision of the kingdom or reign of God, life lived God's way - a vision of love and justice.

Having outlined this hope for our flourishing together, marked out by wisdom, community and dignity, this document then calls on various parts of the system to action through a series of recommendations. There are suggestions for school leaders, school trust leaders, diocesan leaders and government leaders. However, we also recognise the National Society and Church of England's own need to change, adapt and respond ever more effectively to the society we seek to serve. We look forward to this happening through ongoing and deepening partnerships, both within the Church of England, with fellow Christians, other faith traditions, and across the wider education sector.

As our 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good' vision continues to anchor and underpin all of our collective work, may we view the current challenges we face with a deepening hope for all that can be released in our nation through schools focused on the flourishing of all.

**The Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham**

Lead Bishop for Education  
and Chair of The National Society





# Introduction and Context

## Looking Back, Looking Forward

Since its publication in 2016, the Church of England Vision for Education – Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good – has provided the underpinning rationale for the unique role and purpose of the Church of England in the wider education system. Through bringing together theology, pedagogy and leadership thinking, it sought to offer the sector a clear understanding of the ‘why’ of education, not simply the ‘what’.

Our 2016 Vision for Education has been worked out in a number of key practical ways at a national level including:

- the underpinning of the SIAMS Section 48 inspection framework and the national integration of our inspection processes for all schools
- the development of the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership, and its wide range of programmes, networks, research, resources and events
- the voice of key policy development work with local, regional and national stakeholders (including work on small schools, Further Education, Higher Education, Religious Education, Collective Worship, Belonging & Inclusion, Racial Justice and Environment)
- the creation of the Growing Faith Foundation seeking to build strategic partnerships between church, school and household
- the prioritisation of young people at heart of the Church of England’s mission through the integration of the Archbishops’ Young Leaders Award and National Younger Leadership Groups.

‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’ has shaped and defined the Church of England Education Office’s three core aims – Developing Leaders, Shaping Policy, Growing Faith – and has had a sustained impact on the vision and strategy of Diocesan Boards of Education across the country.

The Church of England has been providing free education to the children of our nation for generations and especially since the formation of The National Society in 1811. This visionary early nineteenth century movement of educational leadership was centred on social justice, access for all, and a deep investment in the flourishing of children, adults and communities through the transformational power of education, free at the point of access. Church of England schools now educate just over one million children, around 20% of the country’s education provision, and we will continue to play this central role in the sector for generations to come.

Following the withdrawal of the 2022 Schools Bill, the government has nevertheless continued to articulate a desire to shape the school system for the future. As different ideas for that system will now be debated and discussed in the lead up to a general election, we are re-affirming our vision for the next season of the education sector’s journey, which with its mixed economy of school types and partnerships risks being inherently fragmented. Our hope for a flourishing school system is centred on a renewed commitment to the four core principles of that vision: Educating for Wisdom, Knowledge & Skills; Educating for Hope & Aspiration; Educating for Community & Living Well Together; and Educating for Dignity & Respect. This is a vision for education, not just for Church schools, and so we continue to embrace vibrant partnerships with all major education institutions and sector bodies, and are grateful for continued strategic conversations and co-construction of the landscape with others.

We hope that this document will be read widely in Church of England schools, school trusts<sup>1</sup>, federations and other collaborative partnerships; but equally we offer this hope for a flourishing schools system to the sector at large, and look forward to further deepening dialogue across the sector as we seek to shape the future of the system together.

## Defining Flourishing

The word ‘flourishing’ is used extensively in this document. There are of course many ways to define the concept and many domains from which to draw – for example, theology, virtue ethics, psychology and sociology – but in this case we continue to take our core biblical text as the promise that Jesus gives in John 10.10 – “I have come that you may have life in all its fullness”.

The Greek word that we translate as ‘life’ is the word ‘**ZOE**’ – one of a range of words that could be translated as ‘life’ in English. Through the word ZOE, Jesus offers us a broader, deeper, social, moral, cultural, relational, spiritual life that is far beyond whether we are simply alive or not. ZOE life is the full, abundant, broad, deep, rich sense of living together through all the ups and downs, twists and turns, joy, pain, elation, depression, dancing, weeping, singing and mourning. ‘Life in all its fullness’ is far less about what is written on our walls or websites than that which characterises children and adults’ daily experiences of our school communities – the very expectation of life, or life expectancy that we seek to offer the children and adults across our schools system.

In addition, we draw on a second key word from another language – ‘**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. In an era where division and polarised culture wars seem to have become politically normative, this vision of flourishing together, not alone, is crucial for a flourishing schools system. Indeed, our hope is for an ecology of flourishing (both within and between the ‘levels’ of the sector that we outline in this document). This means children flourishing with other children, adults with other adults, schools with other schools – and also between each level where the interaction between children-adults, adults-schools, school trusts-dioceses etc. is fundamental to the flourishing of the system as a whole.

This is a rich field of thinking and practice, and to support further reflection and engagement in the core concept of flourishing, we offer a range of literature and research evidence in our ‘For further reading’ section at the end of this document.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, we are using the term ‘School Trusts’ to refer to both multi-academy trusts and single academy trusts. This term does not directly refer to site trusts at all.

Furthermore, our flourishing thinking draws on the *Flourishing Schools Cultural Model* (ACSI 2019) which is fully unpacked in *‘Flourishing Together: A Christian Vision for Children, Educators and Schools’* (Swaner & Wolfe, 2021). In this model, flourishing is considered in terms of five equally valuable and interacting domains:

## Purpose

A clear understanding of our shared purpose—**why** we are together at school—sets us on the path to flourishing. A common purpose helps us to be unified around clear goals and to work toward a ‘greater good’ to which we aspire together.

## Relationships

Our flourishing is dependent upon **who** we are with—together in community. As relational beings, the degree to which we value, honour, and care for each other—students, teachers, leaders, and families alike—impacts our mutual flourishing. School communities that are characterised by a sense of belonging are places where we can flourish together.

## Learning

Undoubtedly, learning is **what** students are supposed to do at school, and the quality of that learning is supremely important. At the same time, student learning is intricately linked to the learning of educators and the school itself as an organisation. When we all learn together in a community of practice, as a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly, we grow together.

## Resources

Schools are real places occupied by real people - **where** we meet together matters. Our buildings are shaped by our access to physical, technological, and human resources, which in turn shape our experiences at school—students, educators, and families alike. However, simply ‘having’ enough is not really ‘enough.’ Instead, practising good stewardship and generosity when it comes to our resources contributes to flourishing, whereas competition and scarcity-mindedness inhibits it.

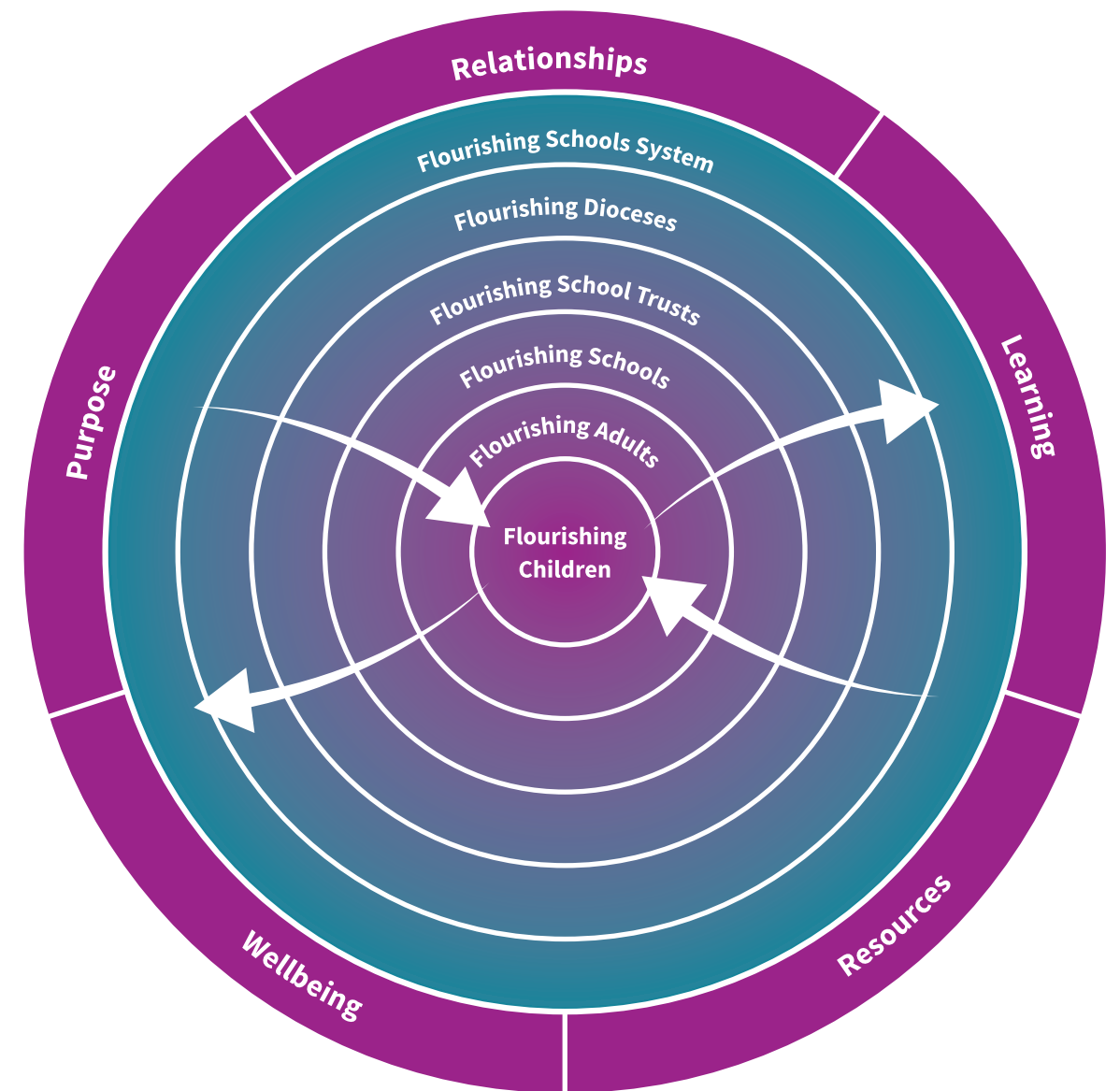
## Wellbeing

The physical and emotional health of students, characterised by healthy habits and developing resilience, is critical to whether—and **how**—students flourish. The same holds true of teachers and leaders. Those in helping professions like education can only help others out of a place of abundance; otherwise, educator burnout and poorly educated students will result. For this reason, flourishing schools prioritise the wellbeing of their community.

## The Flourishing Schools System Model

The concentric circles of this model are intended to show that our schools system should choose to place children at the heart of all decision-making and resourcing. As we move outwards the model shows that flourishing adults in flourishing schools are crucial to this instinctive prioritisation of young people. Moving further outwards, we recognise that school to school partnerships will come in a variety of forms according to governance arrangements in local schools and the strategies of Diocesan Boards of Education. However, we also shine a particular light on the crucial role that flourishing school trusts have to play in the system going forward.

School trusts can only flourish in strong strategic partnerships with flourishing dioceses, which are themselves committed to placing education at the heart of their wider diocesan vision. In striving for clarity, any such models will require local and regional nuance, and of course in reality, structural decisions are subject to many more complex factors, including the relative strength and capacity of local authority provision. However, in re-affirming the Church of England Vision for Education for the next season of our development, we hope to offer a broad and expansive hope for the purposes and processes of education.







The document sets out our hope for each of the five central sections of the model in turn, including a range of discussion questions for leaders in each section to help bring this alive. The language is aspirational. In some cases this will show great enthusiasm for all that is possible, in other parts, it will articulate strong challenge for many of the deep inequalities that currently define the education system.

Each section could be read in isolation, and indeed may be helpful for leaders to do so when giving particular attention to elements of the system (asking for example, what kind of school do we want to become? What kind of adults might we need to realise these hopes together? etc.). Indeed within each section, the opportunity to reflect on student-student, trust-trust relationships, will be valuable as we learn to flourish together not alone. Equally, the model calls us to consider the relationship between the sections and their healthy interactions at each level. This will involve considering for example how the flourishing of adults relates to the flourishing of children, or further out in the model, how the flourishing of dioceses relates to the flourishing of school trusts and other school-to-school partnerships.

We then conclude each section by offering a range of recommendations for various parts of the education sector. These recommendations, like the document itself, are inherently for a wide-ranging audience – involving both stakeholders within the Church of England and those in partnership with us – including government, other faith-based providers, community schools and school trusts, and key educational sector bodies. In so doing, we re-affirm the 2016 ‘Deeply

Christian, Serving the Common Good’ vision and its continued application for the next part of our system development, and indeed offer the sector a broader, deeper, more expansive hope of what our school system could become, should we as a nation be bold enough to take that journey together.

The outworking of our 2016 Vision for Education has been supported by a range of documents and resources, including for example ‘Ethos Enhancing Outcomes’ (2018), ‘Called, Connected, Committed’ (2020) and now this publication ‘Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System’ (2023). As we continue to live out our vision, we will publish further resources to deepen our shared understanding of flourishing, and to strengthen our collective voice. This will include further theological underpinning resources, and a range of leadership development tools and activities through our programmes, networks and research of both the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership and the Growing Faith Foundation, to further extend the impact of leaders committed to a flourishing schools system.

In offering this renewed hope to the nation, we invite questions, debate, dialogue, collaboration, and the development of flourishing partnerships both within the Church of England and across the entire sector as we seek to humbly play our part in the next part of the schools system’s journey together.

**Revd Canon Nigel Genders CBE**  
Chief Education Officer

## Flourishing Children

A flourishing education system places children instinctively at the heart of decision making and leadership thinking at all levels. As a result, all agendas, structures, budgets and systems are deliberately designed around the flourishing of children. Although measurable academic excellence is central to flourishing, it is not the full story – the moral, spiritual, cultural and relational development of pupils offers a broader, more expansive vision of what education is for.

Whilst learning involves acquiring knowledge and refining skills, it is the deepening of **wisdom** that truly demonstrates flourishing, through ethical thinking, character development and spiritual formation. Flourishing children are equipped, resourced and empowered to see the future through eyes full of hope, developing the potential to transform a world that their teachers cannot yet imagine. Such hope is propelled forward by flourishing in **community** – learners who live out the ‘Ubuntu’ (‘I am because we are’) good life in each classroom and corridor. Flourishing can only happen when each and every child is treated with **dignity** – for they are of unique and inherent worth, each created in the image of God, and for whom Jesus gave his life. Therefore they are to be loved unconditionally, enabled ambitiously, supported compassionately and championed relentlessly.

A flourishing schools system offers each and every child the opportunity to thrive, and prioritises the needs of the marginalised through resourcing decisions that enact social justice for the most vulnerable. A vision for education centred on dignity and respect enables flourishing children to learn from and grow alongside others who are different from themselves in good schools which celebrate equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion and justice at every opportunity.

Flourishing children enjoy education; they learn and grow in a wide variety of well-designed curriculum experiences, across a broad range of subject disciplines, not simply those that are publicly assessed. Children flourish at different times and speeds. All children deserve to love their childhood, finding space for play, exploration, imagination and creativity. They are empowered to think wisely and act purposefully about transformational care for the environment. They are surrounded by loving

relationships, structures and systems which release and enable ‘life in all its fullness’ – the deeper vision of spiritual, moral, social, relational flourishing that Jesus offers. They are consistently well taught and are empowered to pursue academic excellence, recognising and embracing learning opportunities that are meaningful and worthwhile. Such learning does lead to strong performance in external assessments. However, they do not emerge from school simply with a list of qualifications, but rather move on from school with an expansive vision, passionate character and unconditional love for their neighbour. Education for flourishing is centred on the formation of children for the transformation of the world.

Children are more likely to flourish if their voices are regularly heard, truly valued and acted upon, not as employees of the future but as leaders in the present. They are given agency – and as a result develop the capacity to shape, design, envision and lead their



organisations, enhancing leadership teams and governance structures by their necessary presence, persuasive voice, and unfettered thinking.

Every flourishing child knows there is at least one adult who is 100% for them, championing their cause, accelerating their journey, and ensuring they have everything available to them to fulfil their God-given potential. They flourish in communities that live well together through the highs and lows, twists and turns, joy, pain, elation, dancing and mourning that are all a normal part of the human journey. They are surrounded by loving friendships, and when things and people go wrong, flourishing children choose forgiveness and restoration over bitterness and division.

Children’s mental health and wellbeing is prioritised and resourced generously by a society that invests in the long-term future of its nation by placing children first in funding and political direction. The fulfilling of a child’s potential should never be hindered, blocked or prevented by the system in which they find themselves.

Flourishing children learn that no-one really flourishes unless we flourish together. They thrive in school cultures in which collaboration, support and celebration of the other is prioritised over competition and comparison. Flourishing children need a system in which their schools are well supported by a wide

range of high-capacity integrated professional services to attend to complex individual needs. They require a system that takes a long-term view of their development, and invests proactively, particularly in the earliest years of childhood, with special attention given to the support, prioritisation and celebration of the family. Without significant and urgent reform to the funding and implementation of support systems, a generation of children will continue to move through the education system hindered by barriers to their potential.

Flourishing children develop in their character, growing the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control – through well-planned curriculum and leadership development pathways. They have opportunities to grow in their journey of faith, through partnerships between schools, families and with vibrant churches that place children and young people instinctively at the heart of their mission.

Children’s time together in school establishes deep roots that resource them to flourish into a future that has yet to be defined. They become agile thinkers, wise decision-makers, loving friends, good neighbours, generous citizens and are launched into adult life through an educational journey that fills them with courage, compassion and commitment.

## Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent does your organisation place the voice of children and young people at the centre of decision-making? What steps could you take to improve this further?
2. What kind of future does your vision for education, curriculum and learning experiences prepare your children for?
3. How could we improve together the capacity and impact of professional support services to empower school leaders and ensure that the needs of the vulnerable are prioritised at every level?
4. What would it mean for your organisation to prioritise equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion and justice for children from all backgrounds in all aspects of school life?

## Flourishing Children: Recommendations for a Flourishing Schools System

For School Leaders...	For School Trust Leaders...	For Government Leaders...
1.1 To embed transformational programmes for <b>developing young leaders</b> at all Key Stages which instinctively place the voice of children and young people at the centre of school leadership.	1.3 To embed a vision for the trust that <b>prioritises formation of character and spiritual/moral/social/cultural development</b> , all of which enhances its focused pursuit of the best academic outcomes for every child.	1.5 To prioritise the individual needs of the most vulnerable through <b>a once-in-a-generation re-imagining of SEND</b> funding, provision, training and development.
1.2 To implement <b>curriculum models which blend the academic, technical and vocational</b> , ensuring children have the opportunity to flourish in a wide range of learning contexts (not simply those that are externally measured), enabling them to have a transformational impact on the world as adults.	1.4 To lead and resource learning experiences for all children which relentlessly and intentionally <b>celebrate equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion and justice</b> at every opportunity.	1.6 To enable local, regional and national services for <b>mental health support for children</b> in education to flourish through secure long-term funding, incisive research, and effective service co-ordination and collaboration.



# Flourishing Adults

The education system stands or falls on the extent to which it is led by adults who are themselves, flourishing. Where there are few flourishing adults, there will be few flourishing children. While children need to be educated by highly proficient evidence-informed professionals in every classroom and corridor, they need to be empowered to think, create, analyse, debate and challenge by adults who are themselves well rested, valued, supported, paid and championed by society.

Flourishing adults are equipped to apply the best professional knowledge to their roles, but are also given space and time to develop wisdom, through which their core moral purpose shapes their collective decision making. Effective education professionals see every child and class with hope, removing barriers and meeting needs through well-resourced and just systems which prioritise the most vulnerable. Adults flourish together not alone and need a deep sense of connection in a community that is defined by the collective outcomes of all – they themselves are treated with dignity, knowing their intrinsic value and worth, and experiencing this through a daily sense of being known, loved, trusted, released and empowered to play their unique part in the school's vision for the flourishing of all.

The adults in our system cannot work much harder, or give many more hours to their jobs, and unless education reclaims its status as a career in which an adult can expect to flourish, there will continue to be deep challenges of recruitment and retention of staff. Our hope for the flourishing of adults includes all colleagues right across staff teams, in all roles, and those volunteers responsible for governance at all levels.

Flourishing adults have a clear sense of vocation, with a clear vision for education and shared moral purpose for the transformation of the communities that they serve. They understand why they are together at school, and create cultures of mutuality, service and support with clear shared vision which is lived out by the whole team. They are given professional autonomy, dignity and respect and are highly valued members of society – their personal sense of meaning provides a deep calling and vocation that sustains them through the most challenging seasons together. Flourishing adults

are regularly shown appreciation and gratitude within and between institutions and they know from stakeholder feedback that they are making a difference. Parents want excellent education for their children, but this can only be delivered by adults who are themselves flourishing.

Flourishing adults are individually effective, but collectively transformative. They thrive in teams with a shared vocation. They find themselves in strong professional relationships and networks focused on mutual encouragement and improvement of practice. They are given time and space to think creatively, develop strategically, plan wisely, reflect deeply and improve consistently, and flourish in cultures where individual professional development is well-resourced, designed and implemented. They thrive in schools where leaders and governors alleviate pressures on adults to complete work that they do not perceive to be of maximum impact on pupil outcomes.

Flourishing adults give each other courage and energy for what is to come, building collective hope for the

future, through relationships which are life-giving, dependable, supportive and encouraging. As a result, flourishing adults make brave decisions, and are well supported by governors with long-term vision. Our individual futures can feel uncertain in the midst of short-term changes of policies and procedure – whereas facing challenges and opportunities together allows the deep roots of hope to grow. Living well together means adults make space and time to relate, not simply to produce, and flourishing adults are given professional space to breathe, create and implement together. They have clearly articulated and resource development pathways where their individual gifts are honed, their expertise sharpened, and effectiveness improved. As a result, their professional autonomy becomes the engine-room of transformation for their organisations.

While flourishing adults daily bring energy and passion to their mission to transform the life chances of children, their flourishing is grounded first in the long-term development of wisdom. Wisdom gives perspective on problems, it often slows the pace of change, it makes space for unheard voices, it remembers the bigger picture and calls teams back to their sense of shared purpose and vision. In the rush to acquire, retain and recall knowledge under pressure, wisdom offers a slower, deeper lens through which to see our situations – it calls us to integrity

(not simply competitive success), it holds its doors open to possibilities as yet unexplored, it permits failure (always offering a way back when things go wrong), and chooses hope over fear. While there may be wise individual adults in our teams, wisdom itself is always a collective pursuit that we shape together.

Flourishing adults are given the resources they need to do a good job. This involves their time, but also includes the appropriate financial and physical resources required. The collective wellbeing of staff is a central concern of all leaders and governors. Stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues will continue to arise in an education system that seeks to continually do more with less – but nonetheless flourishing adults are defined by relationships that support and encourage in seasons of darkness and fear. Flourishing adults are championed, supported, protected and cherished. Their wellbeing is secure, and when they face the challenges that will inevitably come, they know that their wellbeing is neither contingent on their circumstances nor equivalent to their happiness or success. Rather, flourishing adults know that from their greatest challenges comes the greatest growth, and learn this from organisations that recognise the adults in their teams as their most precious resource.





## Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent do you think the adults in your organisation are flourishing? What changes would it take to re-imagine education as a profession in which all adults could flourish?
2. What practices, activities and habits could allow the ‘roots of hope to grow’ in your team?
3. What is the difference between individual purpose and collective vocation? To what extent is your organisation’s purpose or ‘why’ shared by all of your colleagues?
4. How does your organisation recognise adults as your most precious resource, and provide care, support and calm in the most challenging seasons?

## Flourishing Adults: Recommendations for a Flourishing Schools System

For School Leaders...	For Diocesan Leaders...	For Government Leaders...
2.1 To embed professional learning programmes and networks which effectively <b>combine instructional and transformational approaches</b> to teacher/leadership/governance development.	2.3 To offer transformative <b>pastoral and wellbeing support, coaching, mentoring</b> to leaders across the diocesan school family.	2.5 To <b>reduce anxiety in the system by empowering school leaders</b> through creating structures and processes which release genuine professional autonomy, trust, agency and support.
2.2 To seek every opportunity through effective governance to simplify workflow, reduce bureaucracy and <b>alleviate negative pressures on work-life balance for all staff.</b>	2.4 To sustain a culture of continuous and sustainable improvement across school leadership development with particular regard to <b>RE, collective worship and support for SIAMS inspections.</b>	2.6 To make the courageous systemic changes required to workload, pay, conditions and accountability to ensure that teaching is again regarded as a <b>vocation in which adults can truly flourish and to which they choose to commit for the long-term.</b>

# Flourishing Schools

Flourishing schools offer society the long-term opportunity to enact any kind of social change or community transformation: the raising of aspirations, the celebrating of the family, the dismantling of oppression, the pursuit of diversity, the balancing of inequality and the rescuing of the environment. In order to deliver the broad outcomes with which they are tasked, schools must be abundantly resourced, and led by leaders granted the professional autonomy to make effective long-term decisions over against unpredictable short-term changes of accountability demands.

Flourishing schools ensure a careful balance of wisdom, knowledge and skills in their curriculum planning, enabling their students not only to excel in examinations, but releasing wise young leaders and courageous advocates, inspired and equipped to shape their future society. They are beacons of hope for the communities they serve, frequently standing as the most significant institution in a local area. Flourishing schools are the inclusive meeting point of diverse community and provide transformational learning experiences for pupils, helping them deal with difference, celebrate diversity and prioritise equity and inclusion at every opportunity. They are places of dignity and sanctuary, where the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable are relentlessly championed and resourced, seeing every child through the eyes of God.

Schools rightly come in all shapes and sizes and serve a wide variety of communities. Flourishing schools are equipped and resourced to undertake this service effectively, from the largest urban secondary school to the smallest rural primary. This requires long-term funding models that actively demonstrate the importance and value of schools at the heart of a flourishing society. An effective ecology of education can be provided across this diversity of provision, so long as there is shared commitment to children across the whole community. No singular model of school will be right for every context: there needs to be diversity in the system.

Smaller schools can continue to flourish within our system, but need well co-ordinated collective planning for their ongoing sustainability within flourishing families of schools. This kind of flourishing can only be released by effective long-term planning involving all stakeholders which best serves the educational needs of

children using all the resources available. The flourishing of schools (whatever their size or geographical context) will not be helped by a fragmented school system, with such geographically varied local authority capacity and support. Therefore, our vision for a flourishing system is one in which all schools are able to flourish as part of a family of schools.

Schools are of course best placed to consider their own context, and will decide on whether to join a school trust, federation, or other strategic collaboration. Yet this is something they must do in a way that truly secures high quality provision for the future. We believe that school to school partnerships are vital for both pupils and staff, enabling good practice to be shared and providing opportunities to work together. Without this long-term strategic vision and planning, individual schools will continue to be caught in the tension of responding to short-term improvement priorities, without the funding or





structural security to enact systemic change that can only be achieved over the medium/long term.

Regardless of the family of schools in which the school may find itself, its flourishing is enhanced by membership of a variety of key networks and partnerships. For Church of England schools, there is of course a particular depth of flourishing that can only be released by partnership with their dioceses, and the support of their well-resourced diocesan education teams. Equally, our vision for partnerships extends to all kinds of schools: flourishing schools (whether they are church or community schools) need to feel part of a bigger story, a shared calling or system vocation, enabling them to become the ‘anchor institutions’ (Townsend et al., Confederation of School Trusts 2023) their communities deserve.

This has implications for the kinds of leaders that are needed for flourishing schools. Flourishing schools need both the instructional, evidence-informed expertise of leaders who apply domain-specific knowledge into their roles, but also require the transformational, vision-based approaches that draw teams together, set longer-term paths and deepen impact in the communities the school serves.

Flourishing schools take courageous decisions to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable through ambitious and expansive visions for SEND and alternative provision. Repeated systemic cuts to a wide range of public services have often left schools acting as the backstop of society, supporting the provision of the most basic needs (frequently now including food for the hungry), and the attempted replacement of social work, counselling, educational psychology and a range of other key requirements of a flourishing system. Schools desperately need to be

appropriately supported by those services, because disproportionate leadership resources are being spent on addressing those needs and drawing leaders away from the core business of academic excellence and school improvement.

Children and adults flourish from a deep sense of belonging in their schools. Flourishing schools hold their doors open to pupils and families from all backgrounds and contexts, with admissions policies that actively serve the common good. They are ambitious for calling out and dismantling the systemic racism and discrimination that permeates society, and relentlessly prioritise equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion and justice at every opportunity. They ask whose voice is not (yet) at the table, and as a result, their curriculum models, recruitment, governance, policies, budgets, agendas, staffing and admissions propel the school towards the necessary long-term systemic change for the inclusion and equity of all.

Flourishing schools are energising, rewarding and exciting places to work. Such schools provide the professional environment and cultural conditions where adults and children enjoy being together, and where long-term commitment is a joy. They find the appropriate balance between the systemic competition between institutions that is baked into assessment systems, and the deep sense of collaboration that prioritises the success of other schools equally to their own. They are dynamic places, catalysts of change, institutions that move and adapt to meet the needs of all the children they serve – not in a way that exhausts or frustrates staff – rather with organisational management that provides the systems, policies and processes to enable the flourishing of all.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What is your organisation currently doing to improve the proportion of under-represented groups progressing into senior leadership and headship positions? How could you accelerate this journey?
2. What would the long-term flourishing of small schools look like in your area and what could you contribute to this work?
3. What would you like to see happen in the specific community your school serves as a result of your leadership over the next 10 years?
4. How could you support other schools’ improvement journey collaboratively, and value other schools’ success equally to your own?

## Flourishing Schools: Recommendations for a Flourishing Schools System

For School Leaders...	For School Trust Leaders...	For Government Leaders...
3.1 To significantly <b>increase the proportion of all under-represented groups</b> (having regard for all protected characteristics) taking up school leadership positions at all levels.	3.3 To develop and sustain a unique vision for each individual school in the trust to <b>meet the very specific contextual needs of the particular community</b> it serves.	3.5 To work collaboratively with school leaders to develop intelligent and <b>compassionate accountability</b> through the wise re-imagination of inspection processes and comparative school performance measures.
3.2 For Church of England schools not academies to <b>engage proactively with their diocesan vision for collaboration</b> and sustainability (including, but not limited to, academisation).	3.4 To proactively address the greatest challenges of school improvement by embracing <b>schools in need of the greatest support</b> .	3.6 To develop broader curriculum models that balance <b>academic, technical and vocational pathways</b> to enable children to develop as global citizens, who understand the vital role that religious literacy plays in the world.

# Flourishing School Trusts

Our hope for a flourishing schools system will be released by a vibrant ecology of school trusts, federations and other structural collaborations, deeply rooted in and defined by the vision, strategy and governance of their dioceses, in which each school can find its home. While school to school partnerships will be envisioned and implemented in different ways in each part of the country, the long-term flourishing of individual schools can be enhanced and sustained through the further growth, development and consolidation of outward-facing, community-serving, standards-raising school trusts.

Flourishing trusts grow from governance that is full of **wisdom** sustained and nourished by the roots of a deeply Christian vision for education, implemented for the long-term according to the vision, strategy and governance of each Diocesan Board of Education. These school trusts embody **hope** in the communities they serve through a transformational and tenacious vision for school improvement and pursuit of excellence for every child.

Central to the flourishing of any school trust is its love for each individual school's local **community**; a love which catalyses change that lasts - enabling adults and children to flourish together. Flourishing trusts become known for removing barriers, challenging injustice and celebrating diversity, leveraging economies of scale and expertise to improve education in every community they serve. A flourishing trust treats each of its schools with **dignity**, ensuring that each local vision is lived out and celebrated, creating shared cultures, collaborative systems and collective strategies through which the disadvantaged and marginalised are more likely to flourish.

Flourishing school trusts will be known for high quality and inclusive education, transformational school improvement, committed leadership, effective governance and secure financial and operational capacity. Moreover, they will be driven by a relentless pursuit of 'life in all its fullness' for every child and adult, with deep concern for social justice and spiritual leadership at the heart of the Church of England's mission to the nation, through a deeply Christian vision for education that serves the common good.

This ecology of flourishing within and between school trusts, federations and other structural

collaborations, will not simply be determined by operational efficiencies, but through a rich and sustained commitment to collaboration with one another. Flourishing trusts are organisations of interdependence, service, generosity and mutuality, and through the formation of ambitious partnerships, secure the flourishing of all, countering the pervasive meta-narratives of comparison and competition. They look outwards and seek to make a positive impact on those around them. They are organisations that take risks to improve life chances of children in schools at the biggest risk of failure, taking on the greatest challenges of school improvement. They prioritise the flourishing of



their adults, developing and resourcing vibrant and resilient workforces who are equipped with the very best evidence-informed training and professional development. As a result, adults choose to commit for the long-term and develop their knowledge, skills, character and faith, with exciting and inspiring career progression opportunities and relationships that sustain them through the greatest challenges.

School trusts can only flourish if their governance is set up wisely. While there is no singular approach for every context, the mixed ecology of school trust composition across the country is a strength not a weakness. There are trusts with just Church of England schools, others which are a partnership between church and community schools – both are to be welcomed, so long as their board-level governance is securely focused on the flourishing of each individual school. This can be achieved through well informed local contextual thinking and development which protects, enhances and implements the school's vision. There is a particular role for dioceses to play to ensure that trust governance is constructed, resourced, trained and developed to secure the long-term Church of England vision for education of every one of its schools. As such a major provider of education across the country, the Church of England has a particular responsibility both to safeguard the distinctive vision of its schools and also to be proactive in serving the common good through its partnerships with community schools. This vision can only be achieved through effective governance at all levels, and flourishing trusts attract, train, resource and retain visionary governors who live out their personal vocation through this crucial role of strategy and accountability.

This is particularly true for small schools, who need to find partnerships in which they can flourish. Development of effective school to school partnerships requires clearly co-ordinated strategic and flexible approaches, with appropriate levels of resourcing to support conversion where required and enable coherent partnership between a range of local and regional stakeholders. Regardless of the nature of the structural partnership (school trust, federation, other collaboration arrangement), the ongoing flourishing and sustainability of small and rural schools for the next generation is contingent on every single one finding the right place within a flourishing family of schools in which it can thrive. All school trusts therefore need to play an active, unique and interdependent part in the ecology to create hospitable and well-resourced spaces for such schools, working closely with its local collaborative partners to find sustainable solutions for all schools.

Despite the need for appropriate levels of accountability, great care must be taken not to simply re-create school-level competition at a trust level. This will be mitigated through the establishment of deeply respectful partnership relationships between school trusts. These trusts celebrate one another's successes and share one another's challenges. As a result, they flourish together, not alone. Deep collaboration and mutuality in each local context through a range of partnership arrangements can ensure that no school is left behind. This ecology of collaboration calls for a growing collective responsibility between institutions, through networks, partnerships, peer reviews and support, all glued together by a diocesan vision that places schools at its heart and sees its school trust leaders as deeply influential system leaders in the present and the future.



## Questions for Discussion

1. What could a ‘vibrant ecology of school trusts’ achieve together in your area? What steps could be taken together to deepen the commitment to interdependence and mutual flourishing?
2. How could your school trust invest collectively in the professional development of support staff to create dynamic career pathways and long-term improvements in recruitment and retention?
3. What does your vision for wise governance look like and what is your strategy for recruitment, training and empowerment of governors at all levels for the coming years?
4. How can school trusts, operating at scale over a wide area, practically ‘embody hope’ in the unique communities that each school serves?

## Flourishing School Trusts: Recommendations for a Flourishing Schools System

For School Trust Leaders...	For Diocesan Leaders...	For Government Leaders...
4.1 To embed school trust leadership teams in vibrant professional networks, peer review activities and <b>systemic and deep collaboration between school trusts</b> , that bring benefit to the region and the system beyond.	4.3 To design and implement an ambitious and pragmatic approach to <b>sustainability of Church of England schools through structural collaboration arrangements</b> (including, but not limited to, academisation).	4.5 To extend the golden thread of professional development from ITT/ECF/NPQ to include <b>evidence-informed funded pathways for support staff</b> .
4.2 To work closely with other school trusts and dioceses, to co-construct <b>a coherent vision and strategy for the sustainable flourishing of small schools</b> .	4.4 To <b>attract, recruit, train and retain governance leaders</b> at local and board level to ensure the long-term sustenance of a Deeply Christian vision for education.	4.6 To invest proactively in the development of system leaders for the next generation of school trusts through <b>effective MAT CEO (and senior trust team) development programmes and professional networks</b> .

# Flourishing Dioceses

A flourishing diocese has an expansive and well-resourced vision for education, which stands at the heart of its wider mission. It ensures that children and young people are instinctively prioritised in all its resource allocation and decision-making. It recognises both the inherent importance of the quality of education of its schools, and the unique opportunity these schools offer the wider diocese for meaningful connection with and transformation of the communities it serves.

As a result, diocesan education staff are embedded in diocesan strategic leadership structures and strategies, with integrated planning and implementation focused on mission and ministry with children, young people and families. By creating and embedding strategic partnerships between churches and schools across the diocese, children, young people and their families can have the opportunity to grow in faith. Flourishing dioceses lead vibrant worshipping communities which offer children and young people spiritual encounter with Jesus, rhythms of prayer, courageous social action and intentional pathways to discipleship and leadership.

The changing nature and scale of impact of the wider Church of England in the 21st Century means that educational planning requires deep wisdom and insight to ensure that its schools continue to be proactively prioritised and generously supported to flourish for generations to come. Schools provide a flourishing diocese with living hope as its most capacious engagement with children, young people and families. Its schools are vibrant, life-giving, energising, abundant spaces in which ‘life in all its fullness’ is an attractive and compelling reality. The big story of the Church of England’s role in the education system is deeply rooted in serving community and the deep concern for the disadvantaged and marginalised. A flourishing diocese lives out its generous vision for education with dignity, ensuring that every child from every background has access the highest quality of education through which their flourishing is released.

While diocesan staff teams will come in a variety of shapes, capacities and configurations, education is a central pillar of a flourishing diocese’s vision as demonstrated by the leadership, commitment and resourcing of its bishops and senior team. This vision enables all schools to become part of a vibrant ecology of life-giving partnerships in school trusts, federations and other structural collaborations. It has a locally-informed, well-supported and pragmatic view

about securing resilient schools which collaborate in all different forms. The diocese provides abundant resources to support this journey through appropriate financial planning, proactive leadership development and strategic partnership, including working collaboratively beyond its own borders. A flourishing diocese proactively connects the work of education with its wider mission, through the collaborative development of vocations, ministerial training, and



through shared strategic for effective ministry with children and young people, including pre-school engagement and post-school destinations.

Dioceses should provide an ambitious and expansive vision for the vital and ongoing role the Church of England has to play in the education landscape. The diocesan education team’s deep connections with school leaders ensure that the diocese is seen as a well-resourced, respected and highly credible partner in the system. A flourishing Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) embeds high quality relationships with and between its school trusts, which are underpinned by a deeply Christian vision for education. It pursues the very best outcomes for all children, and is comfortable in both challenge and support roles with those school trusts. It has a vibrant and dynamic relationship with other dioceses and the national education team, with a clear mutual understanding and outworking of what is best delivered regionally or nationally, and what can and should only be enacted locally. It has strong relationships with leaders outside its own schools, building effective partnerships with community schools, through a vision for education for all children. It provides ambitious career pathways for its own staff, and ensures that they are well supported and encouraged, leading to them flourishing in their roles.

A flourishing DBE is known for the transformational raising of educational standards, through embedding a culture of excellence in teaching and leadership in all its schools. It provides wise and reflective leadership to its schools, and transformative pastoral care to school leaders, investing heavily in their personal development, wellbeing and resilience. As a result, school leaders continue to turn to the diocese as a key driver of

school improvement, structural reform, community service and spiritual flourishing. A flourishing DBE also provides exemplary specialist support to school leaders in developing practice in RE, collective worship and spirituality, and leads effective evidence-informed professional development pathways that support schools to implement a culture of continuous improvement in relation to SIAMS Section 48 inspections.

Courageous structural shifts in thinking and practice involving education, will contribute to the Church’s vision to double the number of children and young people who are active Christian disciples by 2030. A flourishing diocese will enable well-designed and resourced leadership paradigm shifts to ensure the church’s engagement with children, young people and families grows through its own work and across its vibrant ecology of school partnerships.

Therefore, the call to place ministry with children and young people instinctively at the heart of the mission of Church of England is a clarion call to which dioceses must respond. This means placing the ‘Growing Faith’ partnership development between schools, churches and households at the heart of thinking, practice and resourcing in a flourishing diocese. This will have particular implications for the synergy of professional development between school staff and lay/ordained ministerial development, and the creation of new models of church in schools, which provide opportunities for children and adults to develop their journey of faith, through well planned pathways to discipleship. In addition, a flourishing diocese is one where clergy are regularly trained and encouraged in their system-level engagement with schools, and as a result build long-term strategic partnerships between church and school.

## Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent does education stand at the heart of your diocese’s wider vision? What key steps could be taken together to explore this further and what structures or resources might be needed to further deepen this commitment?
2. What kind of partnerships exist between churches and schools and how could these be further grown by leaders to enable faith development for children, young people and families?
3. How effective is governance working at each level and what is your strategy for recruitment, training and empowerment of governors for the coming years?
4. How does the DBE promote the flourishing of children and adults by fulfilling its role as a system leader, connecting major stakeholders at local and regional levels?

## Flourishing Schools: Recommendations for a Flourishing Schools System

For Diocesan Leaders...	For Government Leaders...
5.1 To ensure that <b>education is central to the mission of the wider diocese</b> through strategic leadership decision-making, resourcing and strategies for growing younger and more diverse.	5.3 To co-develop wise, pragmatic and well-funded partnership solutions with DBEs which enable the <b>long-term flourishing of small schools within appropriate structural collaborations.</b>
5.2 To place <b>children and young people instinctively at the heart</b> of the diocesan vision and strategy, providing real influence through leadership development programmes and structural engagement with the Growing Faith Foundation’ programmes, networks and research.	5.4 To further deepen the <b>mutual partnership between church and state</b> , at national, regional and local level, to enable the ongoing flourishing of church schools for coming generations.



# A Flourishing Schools System

This document has outlined our hope for the flourishing of children, young people, adults and institutions, as the further outworking of the 2016 Church of England Vision for Education, ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’. While each element of flourishing can be read and reflected upon alone, its vibrancy is in the ecology of flourishing that these elements create with and between one another.

Throughout the document, we have shared our deep hope for a flourishing schools system through a range of specific recommendations for different parts of the sector. In this section, we have collated these by role – school leaders, school trust leaders, diocesan leaders and government leaders.

The Church of England Education Office is committed to playing its full part in the creation and sustenance of the flourishing schools system for the next season of its development. While there are many challenges that face the sector, through our collective work in Developing Leaders, Shaping Policy and Growing Faith, we offer ourselves in the service of schools, their communities, governors, leaders, staff, families and children.

In offering this renewed hope to the nation, we invite dialogue, debate, questions, collaboration, and the development of flourishing partnerships (both within the Church of England and across the entire sector) as we seek to play our part in the next part of the schools system’s journey together.

Our six recommendations for **SCHOOL LEADERS** as part of a flourishing schools system:

1.1 To embed transformational programmes for <b>developing young leaders</b> at all Key Stages which instinctively place the voice of children and young people at the centre of school leadership.	2.1 To embed professional learning programmes and networks which effectively <b>combine instructional and transformational approaches</b> to teacher/leadership/governance development.	3.1 To significantly <b>increase the proportion of all under-represented groups</b> (having regard for all protected characteristics) taking up school leadership positions at all levels.
1.2 To implement <b>curriculum models which blend the academic, technical and vocational</b> , ensuring children have the opportunity to flourish in a wide range of learning contexts (not simply those that are externally measured), enabling them to have a transformational impact on the world as adults.	2.2 To seek every opportunity through effective governance to simplify workflow, reduce bureaucracy and <b>alleviate negative pressures on work-life balance for all staff</b> .	3.2 For Church of England schools not academies to <b>engage proactively with their diocesan vision for collaboration</b> and sustainability (including, but not limited to, academisation).

Our six recommendations for **SCHOOL TRUST LEADERS** as part of a flourishing schools system:

1.3 To embed a vision for the trust that prioritises <b>formation of character and spiritual/moral/social/cultural development</b> , all of which enhances its focused pursuit of the best academic outcomes for every child.	3.3 To develop and sustain a unique vision for each individual school in the trust to <b>meet the very specific contextual needs of the particular community</b> it serves.	4.1 To embed school trust leadership teams in vibrant professional networks, peer review activities and <b>systemic and deep collaboration between school trusts</b> , that bring benefit to the region and the system beyond.
1.4 To lead and resource learning experiences for all children which relentlessly and intentionally <b>celebrate equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion and justice</b> at every opportunity.	3.4 To proactively address the greatest challenges of school improvement by embracing <b>schools in need of the greatest support</b> .	4.2 To work closely with other school trusts and dioceses, to co-construct <b>a coherent vision and strategy for the sustainable flourishing of small schools</b> .

Our six recommendations for **DIOCESAN LEADERS** as part of a flourishing schools system:

2.3 To offer transformative <b>pastoral and wellbeing support, coaching, mentoring</b> to leaders across the diocesan school family.	4.3 To design and implement an ambitious and pragmatic approach to <b>sustainability of Church of England schools through structural collaboration arrangements</b> (including, but not limited to, academisation).	5.1 To ensure that <b>education is central to the mission of the wider diocese</b> through strategic leadership decision-making, resourcing and strategies for growing younger and more diverse.
2.4 To sustain a culture of continuous and sustainable improvement across school leadership development with particular regard to <b>RE, collective worship and support for SIAMS inspections</b> .	4.4 To <b>attract, recruit, train and retain governance leaders</b> at local and board level to ensure the long-term sustenance of a Deeply Christian vision for education.	5.2 To place <b>children and young people instinctively at the heart</b> of the diocesan vision and strategy, providing real influence through leadership development programmes and structural engagement with the Growing Faith Foundation’ programmes, networks and research.

Our ten recommendations for **GOVERNMENT LEADERS** as part of a flourishing schools system:

<p>1.5 To prioritise the individual needs of the most vulnerable through a <b>once-in-a-generation re-imagination of SEND</b> funding, provision, training and development.</p>	<p>1.6 To enable local, regional and national services for <b>mental health support for children</b> in education to flourish through secure long-term funding, incisive research, and effective service co-ordination and collaboration.</p>
<p>2.5 To <b>reduce anxiety in the system by empowering school leaders</b> through creating structures and processes which release genuine professional autonomy, trust, agency and support.</p>	<p>2.6 To make the courageous systemic changes required to workload, pay, conditions and accountability to ensure that teaching is again regarded as a <b>vocation in which adults can truly flourish and to which they choose to commit for the long-term.</b></p>
<p>3.5 To work collaboratively with school leaders to develop intelligent and <b>compassionate accountability</b> through the wise re-imagination of inspection processes and comparative school performance measures.</p>	<p>3.6 To develop broader curriculum models that balance <b>academic, technical and vocational pathways</b> to enable children to develop as global citizens, who understand the vital role that religious literacy plays in the world.</p>
<p>4.5 To extend the golden thread of professional development from ITT/ECF/NPQ to include <b>evidence-informed funded pathways for support staff.</b></p>	<p>4.6 To invest proactively in the development of system leaders for the next generation of school trusts through <b>effective MAT CEO (and senior trust team) development programmes and professional networks.</b></p>
<p>5.3 To co-develop wise, pragmatic and well-funded partnership solutions with DBEs which enable the <b>long-term flourishing of small (or geographically isolated) schools within appropriate structural collaborations.</b></p>	<p>5.4 To ensure the educational <b>partnership between church and state</b>, at national, regional and local level, enables the ongoing flourishing of church schools for coming generations.</p>

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## For further reading

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