



BRENTWOOD DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE

*“Supporting Catholic schools to provide excellent education where pupils flourish,
and Christ is made known to all”*

September 2023

Dear chair

Welcome back to the start of term. I hope you managed to enjoy some time over the summer to refresh and relax to recharge your batteries for the forthcoming academic year.

This twice-termly chairs' mailing is part of our commitment to support you and keep you up-to-date with educational developments and good practice, both locally and nationally. So much is constantly changing as you can see from this issue. I hope you find this summary useful.

Diocese of Brentwood News

Catholic Schools Inspectorate

As you are already aware, Catholic School Inspections in Brentwood Diocese commenced January 2023 and they will start again this term from week beginning 18 September 2023. Inspection notification is 2 working days (including the day of the call).

Schools in the Diocese of Brentwood which were last inspected under Section '48 from May 2017- February 2018 can expect to be inspected under CSI between September 2023 and July 2024. (Please note this may be subject to change if inspection administration circumstances outside of our control dictate).


Reflect on these points as you prepare for inspection:

- It is vital that schools have their Catholic School Self-Evaluation documents (CSED) ready as these will need to be sent to the Lead Inspector after their initial telephone call. The [CSI website has some useful downloadable documents for inspection](#), including a CSED. This form in itself is not mandatory but some form of self-evaluation is and this form indicates the information required by inspectors on the day of the telephone call
- How well does your website reflect the Catholic Life, R.E and Prayer and Liturgy of the school? Remember the inspectoral team will have looked at it 8 days before you get the call as inspectors have 10 days notification of the school they are inspecting
- Are your Religious Education Policy, Prayer and Liturgy Policy and RSHE Policy up to date, regularly reviewed to reflect actual practice and easily located on your websites?
- Has your RSHE Policy been consulted upon appropriately and are you using Catholic materials to deliver this curriculum?

New Religious Education Directory (RED)

As you know, the new [Religious Education Directory \(RED\)](#) for Catholic Schools is now available. This replaces the 2012 RECD but **full implementation is not expected until 2025**.

Leaders and governors must ensure that the school curriculum for religious education is a faithful expression of the RED and **from September 2023 they should be able to articulate their plan for the implementation of RED**. The new RED needs to be taught in all year groups from September 2025.

	<p>Summary for Governors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All teaching staff should have their own hard copy of the new RED• Leaders and governors should have a plan of how and when they will roll out the new RED to different year groups• Leaders should have a clear timetable/costed plan for CPD training and formation for all teaching staff• Leaders and governors should set aside money to properly resource the new RED so that resources can be quickly purchased when they become available• How will leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the planned implementation of the new RED? What mechanisms are in place to do this?• How are the school taking advantage of/going to continue to take advantage of diocesan training and support for RED?
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Headteacher Appraisal

Many of you will be setting objectives for your headteacher this term as well as assessing their performance and professional development needs. Effective oversight of the headteacher performance management process is one of the most important roles in the overall governance of the school and an essential part of driving school improvement.

Please ensure that governors appointed to undertake this crucial role are trained so they can effectively play their part as a member of the headteacher appraisal panel.

The Diocese has written a practical online course for governors serving on the headteacher appraisal panel as part of the Gift-ED library.

Jargon Buster

Education jargon is constantly changing and evolving and can be a cause of frustration, especially for new governors! To support you, we have [updated our jargon buster which you may like to share with your governors](#).

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)

You cannot have escaped seeing the media attention around RAAC over the past week. Following an announcement that further schools will need to put in place new safety measures to address concerns relating to buildings with RAAC, DfE has updated its [guidance](#) to take a more precautionary approach and the new update clarifies the funding support available. The guidance advises responsible bodies to vacate and restrict access to the spaces with confirmed RAAC. Spaces should

remain out of use until appropriate mitigations are in place, even where they would have been deemed 'non-critical' previously.

DfE have made a questionnaire-based system available for responsible bodies to report the confirmed presence of RAAC in educational settings. The diocese has completed this questionnaire for VA schools and reported a strategy of visually inspecting roofs during this year's condition survey followed by more extensive investigations where necessary. Academy Trusts will have completed the questionnaires for our academies. Three school buildings in the diocese have been confirmed to contain RAAC and since last weeks change in policy, these schools are working with the DfE to manage the process of taking areas with RAAC out of use.

Since the change in policy, the need to identify RAAC has intensified. The DfE have delegated responsibility to inspect school buildings for RAAC to responsible bodies and the diocese has completed a desktop exercise to assess the likelihood of RAAC components in all its maintained schools including academies. Over the next few weeks, the diocese will inspect building drawings contained in its archives to identify possible RAAC components in school buildings. We will share this information with the relevant responsible bodies for our academies. The diocese will take advice from the Catholic Education Service about the best way to undertake further investigations to confirm the presence of RAAC in its voluntary aided schools.

[This guide to identifying RAAC](#) may help schools to visually check for RAAC. This isn't always possible as the underside of roofs are often hidden by ceilings and most ceilings must not be disturbed without first checking for asbestos. However, if schools do identify the presence of suspected RAAC, your responsible body will then arrange for a surveyor to visit the school as soon as possible.

Further information regarding RAAC can be found here [RAAC in education settings](#)

Academy News

New Academy Trust Handbook published

The Department for Education (DfE) has published the new [Academy Trust Handbook](#) (also known as the Academies Financial Handbook), which came into effect from **1 September 2023**. This provides an overarching framework for implementation of effective financial management and other controls and Academy trusts **must** comply with this handbook as a condition of their funding agreement. The Handbook looks very different to previous years but [there are only a handful of substantive changes](#). Most of the best practice advice which has been removed should still be followed by trusts and will be reiterated in other documents such as the Governance Handbook.

DfE guidance on commissioning

Accompanying the Trust Handbook, DfE has also published [new guidance](#) on how it takes decisions about growing, consolidating and creating academy trusts. It clarifies how the DfE's regional groups will define and judge trust quality under the recently established 'five pillars' model.

Governor Development

Online Learning

Gift-ED

Informative and easy to follow, the library of online courses are designed to support governors in our Catholic schools in their role and can be completed using multiple devices in short bite-sized chunks.

Congratulations to the following governors who have recently completed at least 6 courses in the Gift-ED library and given permission for their names to be published:

Marian Anderson (12 courses) – **St Joseph the Worker Catholic Primary School, Brentwood**

Mary Ball (8 courses) – **St John Payne Catholic School, Chelmsford**

Clare Barton (8 courses) - **St Joseph the Worker Catholic Primary School, Brentwood**

Donna Ellard-Pierre (7 courses) – **St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, Canvey Island**

Shelagh Facchini (14 courses) - **St Joseph the Worker Catholic Primary School, Brentwood**

Stephen Foster (7 courses) – **St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, Stanford-le-Hope**

Vincent Toman (7 courses) – **St Anne Line Catholic Junior School, Basildon**

Dr Victor Utti (6 courses) – **St Benedict’s Catholic College, Colchester**

As previous advised, training via the Gift-ED App has been funded by the diocese for 4 years and we have also written the materials - but from 1 September 2023 there will be a charge for using this valuable resource.

This is currently being finalised with the provider, Anspear, but is likely to be about £160 plus VAT for a primary school for a group of governors and £320 plus VAT for a secondary school for a similar grouping. A link and full update will be sent to headteachers and chairs later this month.

Webinars

NEW DATE: *Joining a Catholic MAT (CMAT) – Your Questions Answered*

In his [letter for Education Sunday 2021](#), Bishop Alan reflected on his firm belief that the best future for our schools is to work more closely together by joining Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMATs) to formally shape the Catholic education system in their locality. This webinar on **Tuesday 19 September 2023** (17:30-19:00) is a short course intended to support governing bodies of Catholic maintained schools as they start to explore joining a Catholic multi-academy trust (CMAT) and provide the opportunity to ask questions.

The training will cover:

- Current position of CMATs in the Diocese
- Structure of CMATs & role of members/trustees
- Potential advantages and challenges of joining a CMAT
- Next steps

Facilitator: Stephen Adamson, Diocesan MAT Development Officer

[Book your place](#)

NEW DATE: *Safeguarding Children (webinar for school governors)*

The next *Safeguarding Children* update will run as a webinar on **Monday 2 October 2023** (17:30-19:00) and cover all the essential information needed to understand your statutory responsibilities. It is so important that all governors are aware of their responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding - especially new governors as part of their induction and governors with a lead for monitoring safeguarding in your school. To [book a place](#) please use this form.

NEW DATE: *Religious Education Directory (RED) Training for Governors*

The RED is the new [Religious Education Directory \(RED\)](#) from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, with which Catholic schools must be in full compliance by September 2025. It covers Religious Education as delivered in primary schools and in secondary schools up to and including Key Stage 3.

This webinar on **21 November 2023** (17:00-18:30) about the directory (a repeat of the webinar held for governors in June) will enable effective and informed monitoring of Religious Education in coming years. We will be looking at the requirements and the structure of the directory, at content and pedagogy, and at implementation and timelines. Our aim is to give governors an informed and strategic understanding of the Directory.

Facilitators: Maria Shepherd, Deputy Director of Education and John Adams, Secondary RE Adviser

[To book your place please complete this form](#)

NEW DATES: *Induction - Being an Effective Governor in a Catholic School*

As well as in-school induction, it is important that new governors attend Induction training to gain confidence and knowledge of their role within a Catholic setting.

Diocesan Induction training consists of two modules and the expectation is that governors attend both to complete their induction training:

Module 1: The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Schools – Wed 13 December 2023 (17:00-18:30)

This module explores the distinctive ethos of church schools and the role of governance within a Catholic setting. [To book a place](#)

Module 2: An Introduction to the Roles and Responsibilities of Governors – Mon 22 January 2024 (17:00-18:30)

This module will help governors gain confidence and knowledge of the 3 core functions of governance and share good practice. [To book a place](#)

NEW: Conference for directors and governors of Catholic MATs - 13 October 2023
The Catholic Education Service and partners are running *Building a Catholic Multi-Academy Trust – a day of reflection and inspiration for directors and governors of CMATs* on Friday 13 October (St Margaret Clitherow Centre, Croxteth Drive, Liverpool).

This is a unique opportunity to reflect on the mission of a CMAT and how Catholic Social Teaching can be at the heart of that mission. The charge is £75. [For further details and how to book.](#)

Governor Recruitment

Foundation governor vacancies are advertised through the Diocesan website. As you may know, we ran a foundation governor recruitment campaign through the local parishes last term and we also work with *Governors for Schools* and *Inspiring Governance* to identify suitable governors for our schools.

We have asked clerks to advise us of [foundation governor vacancies](#) - **if your school is not shown and you need support in filling a foundation governor vacancy please get in touch** (debbibotham@brcdt.org).

Schools looking to recruit governors may also be interested in [our flyer](#) to distribute to parents and the local Catholic community. Get in touch if you would like a word version so you can adapt the flyer for your school.

Nomination for new Foundation Governors and Directors and Re-appointing Foundation Governors

Please note that the nomination and disclosure forms have been updated when seeking approval for the appointment or reappointment of foundation governors. All candidates must be practising Catholic as verified by a priest's reference.

Further details about [the criteria for becoming a foundation governor can be found here](#)

- [To request the reappointment of an existing foundation governor;](#)
- [details of a potential new foundation governor](#)

Nominations for prospective trust directors of one of the Catholic Education Trusts (CMATs) [should use this form](#)

Priests' References- Verifying Catholic practice

Please remember that a priest's reference is required for the appointment or re-appointment of Foundation Governors **so please ask the priest in advance to alert them that a request will be made.**

Similarly, if a priest's name is going to be cited as a referee for a reserved post, you should have asked them in advance if you can do this.

Effective Complaints Management for Governors and Trustees -Toolkit

All schools/trusts must have a complaints procedure in place that encourages resolution of concerns and complaints on an informal basis without recourse to the formal stages of the procedure. However, inevitably there are instances where

individuals wish to make a formal complaint and a small group of governors or trustees may then become involved.

I am a member of the Eastern Region Coordinators of Governor Services (ERCOGS) and we have commissioned a complaints toolkit from Norfolk Governor Services, one of our members. This is now available at no cost to governors and trustees across the Diocese of Brentwood.

The package includes an hour-long online presentation with voice over and slides and an extensive and detailed workbook which will be updated and reviewed at least annually. The advice in this course is aligned to the process set out by DfE's [Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures](#) (DfE 2020) and [Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) (DfE 2021).

Link to the YouTube online training session is as follows:

<https://youtu.be/RmmxQS75rfl>

[Download the workbook](#)

Safeguarding Update

Keeping Children Safe in Education – statutory guidance

DfE has published the [2023 version of the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education](#). This came into force on **1 September 2023**.

Filtering and Monitoring - The main focus for changes this year is around filtering and monitoring. In particular, all staff are to understand their role in this and DSLs are expected to have the 'lead responsibility'. The standards can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges/filtering-and-monitoring-standards-for-schools-and-colleges>.

Governing bodies will wish to ensure that this new responsibility is included in the job description for the DSL.

The draft guidance states:


“Whilst considering their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and provide them with a safe environment in which to learn, governing bodies and proprietors should be doing all that they reasonably can to limit children’s exposure to the above risks from the school’s or college’s IT system. As part of this process, governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their school or college has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place and regularly review their effectiveness. They should ensure that the leadership team and relevant staff have an awareness and understanding of the provisions in place and manage them effectively and know how to escalate concerns when identified.

Governing bodies and proprietors should consider the number of and age range of their children, those who are potentially at greater risk of harm and how often they access the IT system along with the proportionality of costs versus safeguarding risks.”

There is also a reference for the board to review the DfE filtering and monitoring standards and work with IT staff and service providers to support the school in meeting the standards.

Other Changes

- Guidance about children ‘missing education’ now talks about children who are ‘absent’ from education, particularly on repeat occasions or for prolonged periods.
- Where schools are used for non-school activities, those providers are expected to meet the guidance in [Keeping Children Safe in Out of School Settings](#) (see paragraph 167). If schools receive allegations related to an incident that ‘happened when an individual or organisation was using their school premises for the purposes of running activities for children ... the school should follow their (own) safeguarding policies and procedures including informing the LADO’

	<p>Action to take</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure your school’s Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is updated to reflect the KCSIE changes• Ensure there is a clear plan to implement the Filtering and Monitoring Standards. Some useful links can be found here• Make sure Filtering and Monitoring is included in the staff CPD programme• Make sure that ‘lead responsibility for Filtering and Monitoring’ is added to the DSL job description and that they understand what this involves• Ensure that out-of-hour hire contracts for organisations working with children meet the expectations in Keeping Children Safe in Out-of-School Settings and that they are aware that in the event of an incident, the school will follow its own policy including informing the LADO
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Ofsted News

Ofsted changes to improve aspects of its work with schools

Revisions to school inspections will see inspectors return more quickly to schools graded inadequate where this is only due to ineffective safeguarding, and proposed changes to Ofsted’s complaints process will increase transparency and make it easier for schools to raise concerns.

Ofsted Changes to Inspection Framework

Ofsted’s [Education Inspection Framework \(EIF\) was revised mid-July 2023](#) with a new section added to the framework on evaluating safeguarding culture as part of the Leadership and Management section. **This came into effect on 1 September 2023.** The [Independent Schools Inspection Handbook](#) (updated August 2023) can be found here.

Safeguarding

Inspectors will now return more quickly to schools graded inadequate overall due to ineffective safeguarding, but where all other judgements were good or better. They will return within 3 months of an inspection report being published, and parents will be informed of this intention in the report. If the school has been able to resolve the safeguarding concerns it is likely to see its overall grade improve. The Secretary of State will then be able to decide whether to revoke any academy order applying to

the school, or withdraw any warning notice issued to an existing academy, and will not have taken any decision pre-empting the re-inspection.

Ofsted will offer schools greater clarity about the threshold for effective versus ineffective safeguarding through the inspection handbook, as well as regular blogs and webinars. They will also describe ineffective safeguarding more clearly in inspection reports, to help reassure parents and others that these judgements are not made lightly.

Changes to Ofsted's post-inspection arrangements and complaints handling: proposals 2023

Ofsted have launched a [consultation](#), closing on 15 September 2023, on 'significant' changes to the complaints system, aimed at resolving complaints more quickly through improved dialogue between Ofsted and providers, reducing the administrative burden on those making a complaint, and increasing transparency in the process.

Key proposals include:

- Extending on-site dialogue during inspections, to help address any issues at an early stage
- Introducing a new opportunity for providers to contact a Senior HMI the day after an inspection if they have concerns about the process or outcome
- A new conversation between the complainant and the investigator at the beginning of the process, aimed at making it more responsive to the specific concerns
- New arrangements for formal challenges to inspection outcomes to be considered sooner than is currently possible, so they can be addressed and reports finalised more quickly
- Allowing complainants to escalate concerns to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO) at an earlier point in the process
- A new, periodic review of closed complaints by external representatives, to provide additional scrutiny and challenge

Inspection timelines

Ofsted are giving schools more information about the broad timing of their next inspection. Schools will still get one day's notice of an inspection, but there is more clarity about the year they are likely to be inspected.

When will my school be inspected?

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/12/when-will-my-school-be-inspected/>

Sharing information about judgements

Inspectors will be clear that it is up to a headteacher to decide which colleagues, or others, they share their inspection outcome with – being aware that judgements are provisional until the report is finalised. Provisional outcomes can sometimes change and shouldn't be published or shared with parents until finalised. This will also now be set out in the covering letter that accompanies draft inspection reports.

Language within the report

From September, when discussing areas of weakness, inspection reports will refer to 'the school' by default, rather than individuals. The contextual information at the end of reports will also be amended to list all those with responsibility for the school.

International Perspectives on Early Years Education

Ofsted has published a report that explores early years provision in an international context. The [International Perspectives on Early Years report](#), provides useful background for those governing when discussing the early years strategy for their schools and trusts. As well as providing a comprehensive analysis of global practices in early years education, the report re-enforces the importance of high-quality provision, parental involvement, and strong partnerships with local communities.

Maths subject report

Ofsted has [reported](#) that maths education is 'broadly more positive' than it was 11 years ago, with school leaders focused on delivering a high quality curriculum. Drawing on evidence from subject visits to a sample of primary and secondary schools, Ofsted found that there had been a "resounding, positive shift" in primary maths and notable improvements at secondary level.

However, the inspectorate also highlighted early gaps in knowledge that may be difficult to identify 'until a significant amount of time has elapsed'. The recruitment and retention of specialist maths teachers was also identified as a significant challenge. Recommendations include developing a curriculum that emphasises secure learning of maths knowledge and prepares pupils for transitions between key stages. [Read the full report and recommendations here.](#)

DfE News

Updated Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance

DfE has updated their [statutory guidance on the suspension and permanent exclusion of pupils from maintained schools and academies](#) which **came into force on 1 September 2023, as well as a [guide for parents](#)** on school behaviour and exclusion. Clerks may wish to include a link to this guidance when communicating with parents prior to an appeal meeting.

Remote Meetings

The updated guidance allows parents to request a remote meeting. Where a meeting is being held in person social workers and the virtual school head are permitted to join virtually if certain criteria are met. The governor panel cannot insist on a virtual meeting, it is for the parent/carer to request one.

The guidance explains 'Where a parent does not request a remote meeting or does not state a wish either way, governing boards and arranging authorities must hold the meeting in person unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so in person for a reason related to extraordinary events or unforeseen circumstances such as an unforeseen school closure due to floods, fire or outbreak of infectious illness/disease.' The guidance also stresses 'It is important to note that headteachers and governing boards should not place undue pressure on the parent or excluded pupil (if they are over 18 years old) to request a meeting to be held via the use of remote access, even if doing so means that they will arrange a meeting any sooner'.

The guidance also explains that for a meeting being held remotely, or where some individuals are joining remotely, the chair of the meeting will need to

explain at the outset how people should indicate that they wish to speak, how, or if, the chat function should be used and whether there will be any planned breaks in the meeting.

Cancelling exclusions

The updated guidance also sets out legislative changes to support head teachers to cancel exclusions where appropriate, if new information becomes known which warrants a review of their decision to exclude in a lawful, reasonable and fair way.

Publication of the Estate Management Competency Framework

DfE has published an [Estate Management Competency Framework](#) which may be helpful for governing boards and schools (particularly MATs) when recruiting to positions such as premises managers or supervisors. Developed in close partnership with the sector, it sets out the functions, skills and knowledge required to effectively manage the school estate and provides practical advice to build the capability at all levels of the school estate profession.

The areas covered within the framework are:

Strategic estate management
Planning and organising estate resources
Understanding and managing land and buildings
Performance management and sustainability
Health and safety compliance
Maintaining the estate
Managing estate projects

Sustainability Leadership

DfE published their [sustainability and climate change strategy for education](#) in April 2022 and have now followed this up with [non-statutory guidance for governors and school leaders](#).

The strategy sets out that 'By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan'. The recent guidance explains that 'sustainability leadership' could be a group of people or an individual responsible for the development and implementation of a climate action plan. It further expands that a 'climate action plan' is a detailed plan to enable your education setting, or trust, to progress or commence sustainability initiatives.

The guidance also mentions the role of the governing board, saying that, as senior decision makers, the senior leadership team and governors should support and drive the school's sustainable activity. They should:

- Provide the authority and support to drive and embed culture change
- Ensure climate change and sustainability feature on the agenda at key meetings
- Be responsible for succession planning, so that commitment to sustainability endures in the setting

A climate action plan should typically cover the following 4 areas, to align with DfE's sustainability and climate change strategy:

- **Decarbonisation** - for example calculating and taking actions to reduce carbon emissions, such as becoming more energy efficient
- **Adaptation and resilience**, such as taking actions to reduce the risk of flooding and overheating

- **Biodiversity**, for example engaging with the National Education Nature Park and enrolling in the Climate Action Award
- **Climate education and green careers**, such as ensuring the education provided gives knowledge-rich and comprehensive teaching about climate change, and that teaching staff feel supported to offer this.


Attendance: DfE government publish response to consultation

DfE data reveals that post-pandemic absence rates are not improving with claims that one in five children regularly miss school, especially on Fridays if parents are at home.

Following last year's consultation on changes to school attendance data and fixed penalty notices, **DfE is proceeding with the requirement for schools to keep electronic admission and attendance registers**. Designed to cut persistent absence rates (currently one in five pupils), it is hoped these records will better make it easier to address potential or established patterns of absence through early intervention.

There is less certainty around a national threshold for the use of fixed penalty notices. The government 'remains committed' to improving consistency in their application, but this proposal was tied to the now axed Schools Bill.

Other changes will include requiring schools to provide data on pupils who have missed, or will miss, 15 days of school due to illness, while removing the grounds for pupils to be deleted from roll due to illness.

	<p>Reflect</p> <p>All trusts and governing bodies should provide support and challenge to their schools around trends on attendance in the school community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How regularly do you review attendance data at governing body meetings? What is this telling you? Do you discuss and challenge trends? Do you know how your school addresses poor attendance?• Do you help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most?• If you are part of a CMAT, do you share effective practice on attendance management and improvement across schools?• If your school is struggling with good attendance, how do you support school leaders to develop a comprehensive attendance action plan to improve attendance, which is evaluated and reviewed regularly?
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DfE has published guidance [Working together to improve school attendance](#) which includes advice for trusts and governing bodies.

School Food in England

DfE has [updated its guidance to help when planning and providing food in schools](#). It explains how legislation applies to food provided within schools in England. It outlines the role of school governing bodies, and stipulates the legal requirements for food provided across the school day. The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the national school food standards are met in England. Governing bodies are

strongly encouraged to work with the senior leadership team to develop a whole school food policy, including:

- setting out the school's approach to its provision of food
- food education (including practical cooking)
- the role of the catering team as part of the wider school team
- the school's strategy to increase the take-up of school lunches

Latest Research

Writing enjoyment at all-time low since 2010

The National Literacy Trust is calling for urgent action to be taken to 'provide opportunities aimed at reconnecting children and young people with the creative elements that transform writing into a pleasurable personal experience.'

These calls come in light of the [latest findings](#) from the organisation's annual literacy survey, which explores children and young people's enjoyment of writing at school and during their free time. The survey revealed that just over a third (34.6%) of children and young people said they enjoy writing in their free time, indicating a 26% reduction over the past 13 years.

Annual Report from Youth Sport Trust 2023

According to the Youth Sport Trust's (YST) latest annual report, which aims to track awareness and attitudes to PE, school sport and physical activity, activity levels of children remain worryingly low, with only 47% of young people in England meeting minimum physical activity levels.

Written in collaboration with YST, NGA's [PE and school sport guide](#) for governing boards, highlights the importance of an inclusive PE and school sport offer in pupils' wider development including their mental health and wellbeing.

How affordable is your school uniform?

A survey published by The Children's Society claims parents spend on average £422 a year on secondary and £287 on primary uniforms. The charity, which polled 2,000 parents from across the UK in May, said the high costs are partly due to the requirement from some schools for branded items which have to be bought from specialist shops rather than supermarkets or high-street chains. They found pupils were still expected to have an average of three branded items of uniform, while almost a third of secondary school pupils are required to own four to five branded items.

[Statutory guidance](#) came into force last September to ensure the cost of school uniforms is reasonable and secures the best value for money. It included new rules on branded items and affordability as well as the provision of second-hand uniforms. Schools were expected to review policies to ensure they were compliant with the guidance by September last year - but nearly half (45 per cent) of parents reported that policies had not been updated. **All schools should have been fully compliant with the guidance by summer 2023.**

Where suspected financial hardship resulted in 'non-compliance' with a school's uniform policy, the guidance states schools would be expected "to take a mindful and considerate approach to resolve the situation". However, the charity's findings claimed a fifth of parents reported their child had been put in detention for breaking

uniform rules due to being unable to afford the right clothing. One in eight had been placed in isolation, while some had even been excluded.

DfE national behaviour survey report

The findings from the first report cover school behaviour policies and culture, school environment and pupil experience, the frequency and impact of poor behaviour, and how schools responded during 2021/22.

A couple of standout statistics from the report are:

- When asked how often they felt safe at school, 41% of pupils said that they had felt safe at school 'every day' in the past week in June 2022
- In June 2022, just under half of pupils (49%) said they enjoyed coming to school 'every day' or 'most days' in the past week, with this being lowest for Year 9 pupils at 41%.

Thank you for all that you do for your school.

Debbi Botham
Diocesan Governance Development Officer

Diocesan communications are issued solely to support you to carry out your education functions as a Catholic school leader on behalf of your diocesan bishop. They may contain sensitive information and must be respected as private communications and not be shared with any third parties external to the diocese without written BDES consent.