



BRENTWOOD DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE

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

January 2024

Dear chair

Blessings for the new term and a new year. I hope that over the festive period you were able to enjoy some well-deserved rest, relaxation and fun.

As we come to the start of another busy year, I would like take this opportunity on behalf of Bishop Alan, Father Stephen and Robert Simpson to thank you all for your significant contribution to the success of our Catholic schools.

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. I hope you find this summary useful.

Diocese of Brentwood News

Vision Document: Shaping Our Future

Bishop Alan's Pastoral Letter for the Epiphany reinforces his commitment to implementing the [Vision Document: Shaping Our Future](#) and urges everyone to help him move forward on this.

In this rapidly changing world with its new challenges, we should all long for the “*missionary aspiration of reaching everyone*” and Bishop Alan asks everyone to share in the recognition that change is necessary; and “we have always done it like that”, is not a reason for continuing to do things that way. In the words of Cardinal Newman “To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

In today's first reading St Paul says that “This mystery ... was unknown to... past generations.” Let us not let Christ, the Light of all Nations, remain unknown in this one!

RED Update

The Bishops agreed to defer the implementation of the Religious Education Directory (RED) to 2026 for ages 3 to 11 years at their plenary meeting in November 2023. Article 8 of the General Norms in the Religious Education Directory has, therefore, been amended for the purposes of ages 3 to 11 so that 2026 replaces 2025 at the request of the Bishops Conference.

Therefore for CSI compliance purposes the date for full compliance ie RED 2023 being taught in all age groups in primary school is **September 2026**. This will enable more time for schools to become fully resourced and familiar with the RED.

However, the Diocese would still advise schools to have plans in place for staff training and a roll out of the RED to full implementation.

CSI Inspections

CSI inspections in Brentwood will commence week beginning 15 January 2024.

Academy News

Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) weekly updates

ESFA's [weekly updates](#) provide useful information for trusts.

Academies Planning Calendar 2023-2024

ESFA's planning calendar summarises [key dates and actions relating to academy funding, finance and trust compliance with their funding agreement](#)

Governor Development

Online Learning

Gift-ED

Our Gift-ED library of online courses, supporting governors in their role, has been funded for 4 years but [there is now a subscription for this valuable resource](#).

You will not be able to access Gift-ED courses without a subscription. Has your school subscribed yet?

Subscription includes an Introduction to Catholic Studies for teachers and a five module programme for leaders of Catholic schools. [All resources are created by diocesan education specialists in partnership with Anspear. The 12 month subscription covers all courses for all users.](#)

Completed order forms should be returned to info@anspear.com

Governor Development

NEW DATE: Companies Day

Brentwood Diocesan Education Service are holding a second Companies Day on **Tuesday 30 January 2024** (9.30-14:00) at Campion School, Hornchurch. Governors are very welcome to attend, especially those with responsibilities for finance.

Church Marketplace are securing representatives from each of the following areas:

Energy

Catering

Cleaning

Reprographics

Stationery

Professional Services – HR / legal / payroll

Governor Training (Anspear-Gift-ED)

[Please use this link to book your place](#)

Webinars

Diocese of Brentwood Conference for Governors 2024

Our 2024 Governors Conference will be held as a series of interactive webinars over the mornings of **Tuesday 12 March 2024** and **Wednesday 13 March 2024**.



Tuesday 12 March 2024	
9:15	Welcome: Robert Simpson, Director
9:30	Webinar: School Admissions-Responsibility and Accountability of Governors and Trustees (Robert Simpson, Director and Teresa Kerr, Winckworth Sherwood)
10:45	Break
11:00	Webinar: Help! Practical advice for governors and trustees in managing complaints (Rosemary Lovatt, NGA Consultant)
12:15	Address by Bishop Alan
12:30	Close



Wednesday 13 March 2024	
9:15	Welcome: Robert Simpson, Director
9:30	Webinar: The Prayer and Liturgy Directory – what governors need to know (Maria Shepherd, Deputy Director and Grace Corry, Primary School Link Adviser)
10:45	Break
11:00	Webinar: The governing bodies role in tackling educational disadvantage (Fiona Fearon, Policy and Projects Manager, NGA)
12:15	Closing Address: Maria Shepherd, Deputy Director
12:30	Close

Delegates are able to book for either or for both mornings.

[To book your place](#)

NEW DATE: Safeguarding Children (webinar for school governors)

Did you miss our last safeguarding webinar? The next *Safeguarding Children* update will run as a webinar on **Monday 4 March 2024** (17:30-19:00) and cover all the essential information needed to understand your statutory responsibilities.

It is 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: Chairs' Forum

This important termly event for chairs and vice chairs covers key topics as well as advice on recent Diocesan and National educational developments. The next

meeting will take place online on **Monday 18 March 2024** (16:30-18:00) and we look forward to seeing you then.

Facilitators: Robert Simpson, Director of Education and Maria Shepherd, Deputy Director of Education. [To book your place please use this form](#)

Date for your diaries: Following feedback from chairs, the summer term meeting will take place face to face on **Monday 10 June 2024** (16:30-18:00). Booking available soon.

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 – Monday 13 May 2024 (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 – Monday 24 June 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](#)

Clerks' Conference (Essex Clerks' Association)

The provisional date for the [annual ECA Clerks' Conference](#) has been arranged for **Thursday 13 June 2024**. This free event for clerks who clerk schools in geographical Essex (including Southend, Thurrock or the London Boroughs which border Essex and/or have an Essex postcode) will take place in Chelmsford (9:00-14:00). Full details of the guest speaker and workshops will be circulated in due course but you may like to take the opportunity to mark the date in your diary and reserve a provisional place by sending an email to bookings@essexclerks.org

Governor Recruitment

Foundation Governor Vacancies

Foundation governor vacancies are advertised through the Diocesan website. As well as running periodic foundation governor recruitment campaigns through the local parishes, we also work with *Governors for Schools* and *Inspiring Governance* to identify suitable governors for our schools.

We have asked clerks to make it clear where there are [foundation governor vacancies](#) so we can support schools in filling these positions. 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.

Safeguarding News

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

The Government has published the revised version of [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) following the consultation.

They have put together a [summary of the changes](#) No statutory roles or functions have been removed and there is an increased emphasis on multi-agency working to safeguard and protect children.

Other key points:

- Changes to the law included, for example, Domestic Violence Act 2021
- Greater emphasis on extra-familial harms and exploitation
- Sets out what a good assessment (report) might include
- Useful annex of resources

Online Safety Bill becomes law

The [Online Safety Act](#) has been made law, meaning technology firms bear more responsibility for the content they allow on their platforms. Aiming to make the internet safer for children, it will require firms to protect children from content like child sexual abuse, controlling or coercive behaviour and promoting self-harm and suicide. Other powers will include cyber-flashing (sending unsolicited sexual imagery online) being an offence and making it easier for bereaved parents to obtain information about their children from tech firms.

Our [safeguarding checklist for governing boards](#) summarises the responsibilities for safeguarding and online safety of pupils.

How Ofsted Inspects Safeguarding

[Ofsted have recently published an update to their safeguarding inspection handbook, explaining how they inspect safeguarding.](#) If you want to know more about Ofsted's inspection of safeguarding you can find [a dedicated recorded webinar on their YouTube channel](#).

Ofsted are looking for a **culture of safeguarding**. They have updated the definition to make it much clearer that they *'expect all schools to have an open and positive culture around safeguarding that put pupils' interests first'*. (School inspection handbook, paragraph 367) with an important aspect of inspection and safeguarding being that the school is 'reflective and receptive to challenge' and that staff understand that safeguarding is a 'ongoing endeavour'.

Ofsted News

New Ofsted Chief Inspector

Ofsted inspections will not restart 'for a couple of weeks' new chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver has said, as he launches an internal review into response to the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. He has confirmed that emergency inspections will continue as 'they are about ensuring that people and children are safe'.

An immediate package of training for lead inspectors on mental health awareness has been put in place with a rolling programme of further mental health awareness training for all inspectors.

Sir Martyn Oliver says 'From January, it's about having a fresh start and really focusing and doubling down on having professional, courteous, respectful, empathetic inspections' [including a 'big listen' to get the sector's views on change.](#)

DfE News

Consultation on proposals for minimum service levels during strike action

DfE have launched a [consultation on proposals to introduce minimum service levels in the event of any future industrial action](#)

Proposals include priority attendance for vulnerable children and young people, exam groups, children of critical workers and primary school pupils, as well as the use of rotas for strikes lasting five days or more.

The consultation closes on **30 January 2024**

Gender Questioning Children - Consultation

DfE is seeking views on their [draft non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges about children questioning their gender](#). Aimed at supporting schools and colleges, the guidance emphasises the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, urging a cautious approach to requests for social transition.

The proposed draft provides guidance and practical support for schools and colleges, including:

- supporting children who are questioning their gender
- protecting children from bullying or abuse
- maintaining child safety and wellbeing
- the importance of respectful environments

Schools and trusts are encouraged to actively participate in the consultation process to ensure that their views are heard and taken into account. [The consultation closes on 12 March 2024.](#)

Investment to improve artificial intelligence tools for teachers

A £2million investment in Oak National Academy has been [announced](#) by the DfE to support teachers with resources powered by artificial intelligence (AI). The investment will assist with the development of high quality curriculum resources online, to create new teaching tools using AI, marking the first step towards providing every teacher with a personalised AI lesson-planning assistant.

Research report on Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2021 Reforms

September 2021 saw the rollout of DfE's reforms to the EYFS which aimed to improve early years (EY) outcomes for all children. It focussed on developing the building blocks that secure the future success of EY pupils such as mathematics, language development and literacy.

More than two years on DfE, informed by IFF research, has published a [report](#) to evaluate the 2021 reforms and identify areas requiring improvement. Reviewing and amending approaches to curriculum, learning and development were the most common change in EY settings following the reforms. This included a shift of focus away from recording observations to increased time being spent with children. Of those staff who made changes to curriculum practices, it was believed that reforms had improved the quality of teaching.

Latest Research and Resources

The importance of parental engagement

[New research](#) looking at parent satisfaction with their school's efforts to engage them has recently been published by Endurio.

Based on feedback from 38,000 parents and carers, it found that 58% of parents feel completely or quite satisfied with the school's efforts to engage them as parents, while one in five (21%) feel only slightly satisfied, or not satisfied at all. It also found that primary parents are far more satisfied than secondary parents with the school's efforts to engage them.

This report can be used by schools when reviewing their parental engagement strategies to better understand and facilitate the relationship between the school and its parents. Parental involvement is often key to student success and parents are one of the most important stakeholders for governing boards.

Our Gift-ED module *Engaging with Parents* shares useful advice and good practice.

Parentkind's National Parent Survey

Over a quarter of parents struggle with school costs, with uniforms, trips and meals being top concerns, according to Parentkind's National Parent Survey report. The report provides insights into parent perspectives on key education issues from cyberbullying to safeguarding and mental health. Findings also show that while 2.8 million children experienced bullying, 1.6 million did not receive adequate support.

Read the full report [here](#).

Mental health of children and young people in England

One in five children and young people in England aged eight to 25 had a probable mental disorder in 2023, according to new findings published in the [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2023 report](#), published by NHS England. The report also found that children aged eight to 16 years with a probable mental disorder were seven times more likely than their peers to have missed more than 15 days of school in the Autumn term of 2022.

Most children aged 11 to 16 years said that they were able to access to support at school, however, they were less likely to agree that 'I feel comfortable talking to adults about my mental health' (59.3% agreed) or 'The support at my school is helpful' (64.5% agreed).



Reflect:

How does your school address pupil mental health and wellbeing? Is there access to independent counsellors? Are you able to ring fence a proportion of catch up funding for mental health support?

Tackling School Absence – CSJ Report

Before the Covid pandemic just over one in 10 pupils were persistently absent from school, but in the 2022-23 academic year, DfE figures suggest 22.3% of pupils in England were persistently absent - 17.2% in primary schools and 28.3% in secondary schools - roughly double pre-pandemic levels.

A new report by The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) *Missing Link- Restoring the bond between schools and families* included a poll of 1,206 parents to better understand what is going on. This revealed that although the majority of parents (88 per cent) agreed that every single day of school matters and it is vital children attend school as much as possible, almost three in ten parents (28 per cent) felt that the pandemic has shown it is not essential for children to attend school every day.

CSJ recommend that multiple solutions are needed to tackle school attendance, largely focussed around engagement with parents. It also highlights:

- The importance of physical activity in helping children engage with their education, calling for a "right to sport" to be introduced to ensure every child has access to at least five hours of extracurricular activities per week
- The importance of mental health support being expanded to cover every school, and the rapid expansion of an existing government-funded mentoring project
- The need for a review into the effectiveness of fines and prosecutions for poor attendance.

DfE have launched a major drive to improve school attendance. This includes a national communications campaign on the importance of attendance targeting parents and carers. Under the strapline 'Moments Matter, Attendance Counts' it outlines the importance of attendance for attainment, wellbeing, and development.

DfE are also committed to further legislation in the coming months which will require all schools to share their daily school registers.

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.