

CHELMSFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **ACADEMY STRATEGY
AND CHURCH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

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I. BACKGROUND

Our church schools are nothing unless they serve local communities with Christian confidence and offer an attractive setting in which children and young people develop sound academic and social grounding in the context of the Christian narrative lived out as well as taught. Our church schools directly serve 1 million children across the country (about 28,500 pupils plus their families in this diocese). Nationally, more people now attend Anglican schools than attend Anglican churches on Sunday. They are a principal means through which the Church has meaningful and sustained contact with the people of the nation, especially families and children. The Church's thriving formal presence in the public system also keeps open many other doors for parishes to have contact with a local school that may not be a church school.

This paper is largely about organisational issues as they affect church schools – about the fabric of our diocesan provision. But without good fabric, no attractive or hardwearing garment was ever woven.

Government policy since 2010 has been to encourage all schools to become academies; intensified following the 2015 General Election.

Schools placed in the two lowest Ofsted categories of 'Special Measures' or 'Serious Weakness' are now normally required to become an academy, *sponsored* by an approved body – another strong school or a multi-academy trust (MAT). The Secretary of State has created a national network of Regional School Commissioners (RSCs), informed by boards of elected headteachers and appointed members, to oversee these processes, monitor the progress made by sponsored academies and issue a 'warning notice' to any academy (or its sponsor) where progress appears insufficient.

The Education and Adoption Bill, currently before parliament, will extend each RSC's powers of intervention to include schools in the category of 'Requires Improvement', where it is considered insufficient progress is being made. It introduces the notion of 'coasting schools'. Schools in the two lowest Ofsted categories above will be *required* to become academies in all circumstances. It is expected the Bill will reach the statute book in the summer of 2016.

The Diocese of Chelmsford took steps in 2013 to create capacity to sponsor church schools: the Sower Trust and the Vine Trust were established. It was intended from the

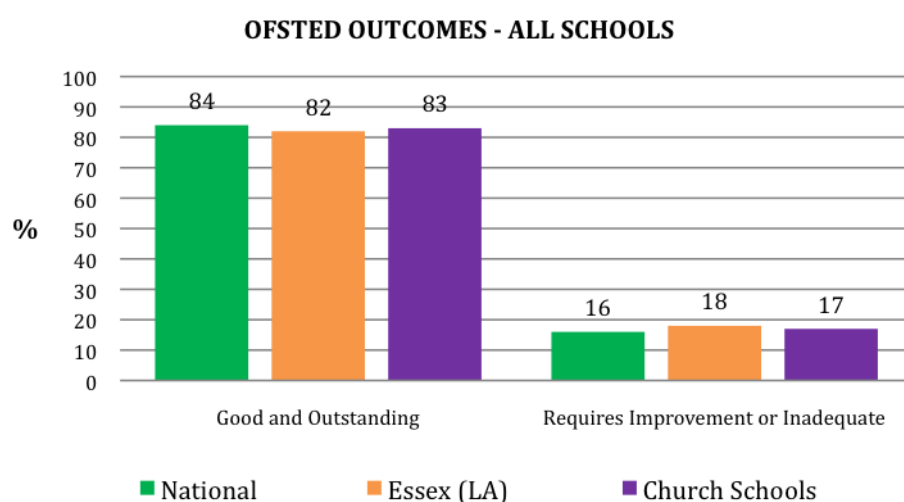
outset that they should not simply be ‘hospitals’ for school requiring intensive support, but families of schools at different stages of development. However, few stronger primary schools chose to academise 2010-15 and the Sower and Vine have remained small (4 and 5 schools respectively). The schools in the Trusts have improved significantly, and the RSC considers the Trusts to be effective at their stage of development. The Secretary of State issued an Academy Order on 11 Feb for a fifth school to be sponsored by the Sower Trust.¹

Since the General Election, the number of schools considering becoming an academy or concerned that they may be required to become an academy has grown considerably.

This paper sets out the basics of the strategy for moving our academy operation onto the next level, but first summarises church school performance.

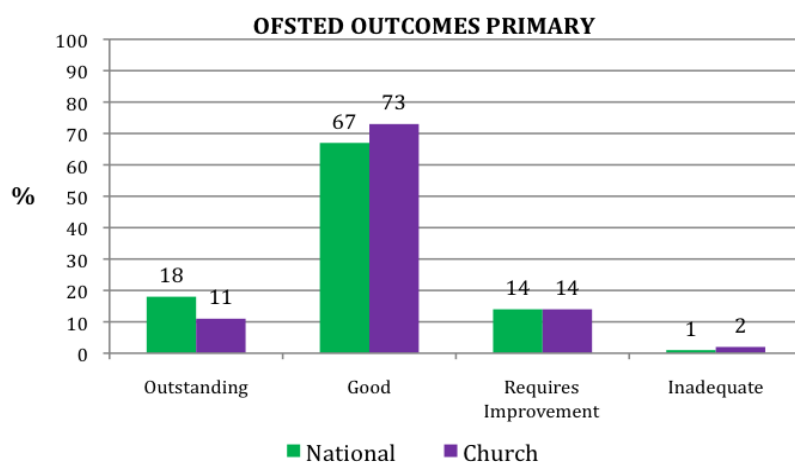
2. CHURCH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Our church schools are, on the whole, doing *reasonably* well according to Ofsted outcomes, though there is no cause for complacency.



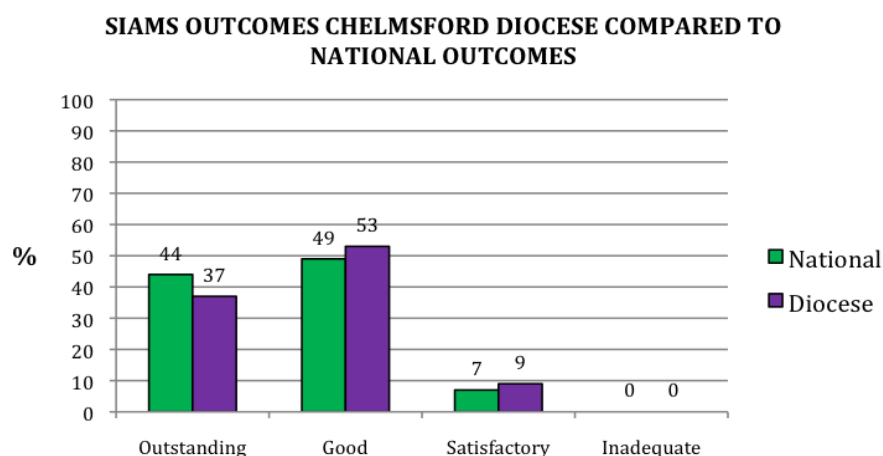
- ⇒ Church schools are slightly above the Essex average and slightly below the National average at 83%.
- ⇒ There has been a diocesan church school upward trend of 9% (from 74% to 83%) judged to be Good or Outstanding since October 2014.
- ⇒ Nationally there was an upward trend of 3% of schools judged Good or Outstanding since 2014.
- ⇒ Essex Local Authority (in which a large majority of our church schools are located) has an upward trend since 2013 of 9% of schools being judged Good or Outstanding.

¹ The Vine and Sower have their own websites: <http://www.vineschoolstrust.co.uk> and <http://www.sowerschoolstrust.co.uk> where more information about the Trusts and their schools can be found.



- ⇒ The trend for Church primary schools in the Diocese is upwards since 2014 by 8%.
- ⇒ Nationally there was an upward trend in primary schools being judged either Good or Outstanding since 2014 of 3%.
- ⇒ 81% of schools in Essex, Thurrock and Southend (combined) and 79% of schools in the London Boroughs were judged Good or Outstanding at 31 August 2015.
- ⇒ 82% of Essex primary schools were judged Good or Outstanding.
- ⇒ Of the four church Secondary schools in the diocese, one is 'Outstanding' and three 'Require Improvement' but are each making progress towards 'Good'.

Church schools are also inspected through a national Church of England framework, Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAMS).



- ⇒ 90% of Diocesan Church Schools are judged Good or Outstanding in SIAMS compared to 93% nationally
- ⇒ There has been an upward trend in schools judged to be Good or Outstanding since 2014 of 4% from 86% to 90%.
- ⇒ 90% of our primary schools were judged to be Good or Outstanding.
- ⇒ 100% of our secondary schools were judged to be Good or Outstanding.

3. MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST (MAT) STRATEGY

We started out to secure school improvement for struggling schools. This remains a priority. But we now need to be more ambitious. Our aim is to ensure a church-led Multi-Academy Trust ‘home’ for any school that chooses or is required to become an academy. This will be through our own diocesan MAT and a network of MATs that are led by strong schools themselves (‘school led MATs’).

The Department for Education now discourages primary schools from becoming ‘standalone’ academies on their own. Instead, they are encouraged to join an existing MAT or form a new (school-led) MAT. Only Good and Outstanding schools can initiate this latter process.

A small number of our good existing ‘standalone’ academies are now exploring creating a MAT through sponsoring or joining with other church schools; a small number of maintained schools are exploring creating a MAT from scratch themselves. An additional grant is available from the DfE where three or more schools join together to create a new MAT. Our diocese is large and diverse enough to accommodate a number of smaller multi-academy entities so long as they are sustainable and secure in their Christian vision and values.

However, capacity and economy of scale suggest the advantages of larger units, especially in the primary sector. We intend our own diocesan MAT to be such a unit, operating through smaller, more local hubs.

The Vine and Sower Trusts will therefore combine later this year (to be known as The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust). The first steps in the process are well advanced. The schools currently in the Sower Trust will form the Sower *hub* within the new Vine Trust. Two further groups of schools are now actively exploring with us becoming *new hubs* within this single Vine Trust. More are likely to follow.

A core purpose of the Vine Trust is to further develop the Christian character and identity of its schools as well as securing high academic standards. The Vine Trust will offer its schools expanded professional development opportunities, provision of new teaching resources and support for developing and celebrating welcoming and inclusive Christian learning environments.

Leadership

Sustaining good local school leadership and governance is an increasing challenge across the diocese, especially for small schools and in more rural areas where it is hard to recruit headteachers and local parishes are unable to identify suitable people from within the Christian community to become effective foundation governors.

Within the life of a MAT, models of local school leadership and governance can be very flexible – executive headteachers can operate across two or more schools and local governing bodies can be as small or large as appropriate and have as much or little devolved responsibility as agreed, since it is the Trust’s directors who shoulder the ultimate responsibility to the DfE for the performance of each school in the Trust. Some of the schools that have made the most rapid progress are achieving this through sharing a strong headteacher with a neighbouring school and/or having a small and

tightly focussed local governing body. The Vine Trust will continue to develop flexible approaches to school leadership and local governance as appropriate.

To manage the development and further expansion of the new Vine Trust, a full-time Chief Executive Officer has been appointed and this will be announced shortly.

The Directors of the Vine (and Sower) are appointed by the incorporated body established by, but legally separate from, the Diocese and its Board of Education to work with academies, *Chelmsford Diocese Educational Trust*. A current priority is to ensure the new Vine will have among its Directors people with the legal, financial and commercial skills to run the expanding company.

Mixed MATs

There is to be a new *Memorandum of Understanding* between the Church of England and the Department for Education to accompany the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The presumption will remain that a church school that is required to become an academy will only join a trust that is church-led (i.e. a diocesan trust, such as The Vine, or a church school-led MAT). This will remain our diocesan policy. However, it should be noted that all will depend on the availability and capacity and/or willingness of a suitable church-led trust to take on a school that requires a sponsor.

In the future, it is likely that a number of 'mixed-MATs' (i.e. MATs composed of former community schools and continuing church schools) will emerge up and down the country that may have few or no church appointed Directors. We remain very cautious about this. Although there would always be strong safeguards in legal agreements protecting an *individual* school's Christian character at *local* level, there is wariness about a school joining a trust whose directors may have no commitment to or understanding of the centrality of the Christian character of a church school and whose decisions and policies may impact negatively upon such character over time. Arrangements that might work in the short term, developed by people of good will, may not be sufficiently robust in the longer term given the very significant power held at director level in a MAT. We will continue to monitor this and contribute to national discussion.

New Schools

We should wish to establish new church schools, especially in new development areas and where there are shortages of school places and few church schools. Most new schools are now likely to be 'Free Schools' – academies promoted by an existing or new provider. A principal option will be for a new church academy to belong to the Vine Multi-Academy Trust. The Trust's suitability to promote a new school will be evaluated by assessing its capacity and track record. This is an additional incentive for it to create and attract good and outstanding schools.

4. RECOMMENDATION

The Synod is asked to Note this report.