

DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Diocesan Board of Education held on Tuesday
2 December 2025 at 1.30pm in the Boardroom and via Zoom

Prayers: Archdeacon Rich led the opening prayer.

Present:

Mrs Jane Addis
Mr Tim Fairbairn (via Zoom)
The Ven Rich Henderson (Chair)
Mr Hugo Parker

The Revd Rachel Revely
Mrs Debs Shipp
The Revd Canon Susan Taylor

Apologies:

Mrs Liz Campbell
Mrs Maggie Elder
Mrs Julia Grainger
The Revd Jo Gunn

The Revd Laura Mumford
Mr Paul Ryle
The Revd Toby Tate
Mrs Sue Todd

In Attendance:

Mr Mark Bennett	Head of Performance, Partnership and Development, SCC
Mrs Victoria Bush	Diocesan Schools' Adviser
Miss Rachel Cutts	Diocesan Schools' Adviser
Mr Daniel Jones	Diocesan Buildings Officer
Mr Phil Knowles	Diocesan School Effectiveness Officer (SEO)
Mrs Jane Sheat	Diocesan Director of Education (DDE)
Miss Jacqui Studd	Administrator (Education)

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and also paid a warm tribute to the SEO who would be retiring in December after 11 years and thanked him for his contribution to the work of the DBE.

25.49 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2025 were approved and signed.

25.50 MATTERS ARISING

None.

25.51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

25.52 DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION'S REPORT

The DDE referred to Paper A, which provided an update to DBE members on issues arising since the last meeting. The DDE paid tribute to the SEO and his support for schools over the past 11 years. The DDE noted that:

- Rachel Cutts, Diocesan Schools' Adviser, will assume responsibility for SIAMS support on a permanent basis from January and Heather Hann, Head of Professional Development in the Diocesan MAT will provide support on a part-time basis for approximately one day a week for the spring and summer terms 2026
- an advertisement for a permanent replacement will be placed in due course to start in September 2026
- Hopton CEVCP joined the Elveden Schools Trust on 1 October and Honington CEVCP joined the All Saints Schools Trust on 1 November. No further academy conversions are expected at this stage
- Thedwastre Education Trust is still pursuing a MAT merger and DBE approval will be required at the next meeting on 11 February 2026
- trends in pupil numbers at our schools will be shared at the next meeting.

The DDE invited discussion amongst members on what can be done to support schools with falling numbers on roll. Debs Shipp highlighted that projections from the Local Authority appear low and suggested reviewing historic predictions for accuracy. The DDE advised that the low projections might be based on in catchment areas and Jane Addis added that catchment data can also be determined by transport, housing developments and other factors. The SEO noted that school leaders would know the factors affecting catchment in their schools and communities. Debs Shipp suggested targeting schools where the Ofsted report could impact on parental choice. Jane Addis suggested learning from schools which have seen an increase in roll and sharing good practice.

The DDE further noted:

- the Headteachers' wellbeing session on 10 October at which Tracey Caffull, CEO of the Diocesan MAT and Archdeacon Sam had been excellent keynote speakers
- the annual church school leaders' conference on 13 November with the theme of "Leading a church school with joy and hope". The conference had received excellent feedback
- church school leadership development training in Chelmsford Diocese and our own offer for new Headteachers as well as for existing Headteachers.

The DDE invited discussion amongst members on ways in which we could support new heads and existing heads. Debs Shipp asked about introductions for new Heads and mentors. The DDE advised that these were provided and that the Local Authority also offered mentors and the Suffolk Learning Improvement Network (SLIN). The DDE noted that new Heads used to be invited to the Bishop's House for lunch in their first year, to provide a sense of belonging to the church school family. The Revd Rachel Revelly suggested phased onboarding with a collection of half day sessions half termly to introduce new Heads. Sessions could introduce SIAMS, collective worship and preparing for the first Headteacher performance review and provide a toolkit of answers to questions Heads would have liked to know on their first day. The Revd Canon Susan Taylor asked if there would be a cost attached and the DDE advised this would be free.

The DDE further noted:

- the Church of England has launched a second round of Flourish and is inviting bids from dioceses by January 2026
- the National Society for Education is hoping to recruit more SIAMS inspectors in the east of England

- of the 18 schools due a SIAMS inspection this year, six have already had their inspection this term
- the White Paper on SEND and school reform has been delayed until the new year.

Action: The DDE to liaise with the Local Authority about historic forecasts on numbers on roll.

The Chair thanked the DDE for her report.

25.53 GOVERNANCE

The DDE referred to Paper B, which provided information on governance arrangements in church schools. The DDE noted the strategies in place to promote the foundation governor role and invited discussion amongst members on good practice when recruiting governors.

Mark Bennett arrived 1.57pm

Tim Fairbairn noted that personal contact is important, commitment is needed but not to place too much emphasis on skills. Revd Canon Susan Taylor agreed and added that training for governors is available from both the Diocese and Local Authority to help governors with skills.

Tim Fairbairn highlighted that governor workload could deter people from becoming governors, that governing bodies need to review their own efficiencies, specifically regarding committee meetings and lead governors, and a well-planned governor induction process is crucial for ensuring new governors are effective, engaged, and remain in their roles.

Debs Shipp highlighted the importance of a proactive local incumbent and the key responsibility of foundation governors to maintain the ethos of the school which is difficult if the governor is not immersed in school life. Jane Addis highlighted the importance of clergy being aware of the special role and qualities needed to be a foundation governor and asked if training was available on this and developing the role of and supporting the foundation governor. The DDE confirmed that it was.

Daniel Jones arrived at 2.06pm

The Chair extended his thanks to the DDDE for her report.

25.54 ADMISSIONS

The DDE referred to Paper C which provided an overview of the support provided to schools on admissions. The Administrator highlighted the resources available on the [admissions padlet](#).

The Chair extended his thanks to the DDDE for her report.

25.55 SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

The SEO referred to Paper D, providing SIAMS outcomes for church schools published since the previous meeting, as well as an analysis of attainment and progress data for summer 2025. The SEO noted:

- reports for recent SIAMS inspections
- the report for Bedfield CofE Primary had been published and would be included at the next meeting, the school received a J1
- KS4 data held by Fischer Family Trust Aspire is currently incomplete
- KS2 data indicates, as in recent years, that outcomes for children in receipt of free school meals, those in receipt of Pupil Premium and children who have

Education Health and Care Plans are noted within the lower performing bracket. The SEO added that this data doesn't represent the whole picture

- KS2 reading and Maths are slightly up although writing is slightly down.

Mark Bennett noted that further data for some primaries had recently become available which slightly raised the figures. Tim Fairbairn asked if any church schools had yet been inspected under the new Ofsted Framework and the DDE advised there hadn't been although Mark Bennett advised that Claydon Community Primary School was being inspected today. Mark would report back to the DDE on any feedback on inspections.

The Chair thanked the SEO for his final report.

25.56 DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' ADVISERS REPORT

The Schools' Advisers referred to Paper E and noted:

- the final report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) was released in November 2025 which recommends that RE should be moved to the National Curriculum
- a staged approach is to be taken to including RE in the National Curriculum involving a task group led by Dr Vanessa Ogden followed by a formal consultation on the curriculum content and proposed changes to the legal framework
- the government has accepted the recommendation of the CAR and have said that they will release a whole new national curriculum in September 2028
- the Emmanuel Project was recently presented to Wiltshire teachers alongside its new agreed syllabus
- the KS1 enquiry units of the Emmanuel Project will be re-written this academic year
- a nursery version of the Emmanuel Project is currently being drafted and trialled by a local school
- a RE Roadshow took place at Debenham High School this term with a team from St Philip's Centre in Leicester who shared their worldviews with pupils and staff
- discussion has taken place with the CofE on how to enable schools to receive training on the Difference course, which develops equity, diversity, inclusion and justice awareness and can be run in schools, churches and prisons.

Discussion followed on the CAR, the benefits and drawbacks. Debs Shipp asked about the impact on RE and the Schools' Adviser highlighted that this could help combat disparities in the teaching quality of RE and content across the country.

The Chair thanked the Schools' Advisers for their report.

25.57 SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Schools' Adviser led primary school activities on spiritual development with members.

25.58 SCHOOL CONDITION ALLOCATION 2025/26

The Buildings Officer referred to Paper F which provided an overview of the school condition allocation capital programme for voluntary aided schools. The Buildings Officer noted:

- the 2025-26 allocation is £293k for six voluntary aided schools
- all major projects in year are now complete and signed off in respect of finance, asbestos removal and building regulations compliance
- one safeguarding capital requirement arose at a school this quarter

- the shortfall of funding available versus condition need means that prioritisation of bids is primarily based on safeguarding, health and safety, legislative compliance and urgent condition need.

Revd Canon Susan Taylor thanked the Buildings Officer for his support with the accessibility alterations project at Sir Robert Hitcham CEVAP, Debenham.

The Chair thanked the Buildings Officer for his report.

25.59 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

Mark Bennett referred to Paper G, the Local Authority report and noted:

- no Suffolk schools were involved in Ofsted's pilot of the new inspection framework but the Local Authority will monitor inspection outcomes and report back
- overall attendance in Suffolk is 94.1% which is in line with the national figure
- the Early Years and Childcare Service has overseen the Government's final expansion of the funded early education entitlements with take up in Suffolk higher than the DfE published expected rates
- initial feedback from the LA maintained school partnerships is positive from school leaders who value the sharing of good practice and the opportunity to belong to a family of schools
- the consultation on the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for the 2027-2028 school year is now closed and the arrangements will be determined by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday 27 January 2026. The admission arrangements for all voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies will need to be determined by 28 February 2026 and then added to the school's website and sent to the Local Authority by 15 March 2026
- the national closing date for primary school applications for the 2026-2027 school year is Thursday 15 January 2026. Parents/carers are encouraged to apply online and all the information can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions
- the consultation on the school term dates for the 2027-2028 school year will close on Tuesday 16 December 2025
- discretionary grant vouchers from the Household Support Fund will be available for the Christmas and February half term holiday periods. SCC has not yet been provided with information from the Government on whether funding will be extended beyond Easter 2026.

Revd Rachel Revely left at 2.57pm

The Chair thanked Mark for his report.

25.60 CONFIRMATION OF FOUNDATION GOVERNORS

The DBE ratified the appointment of Foundation Governors listed in Paper H.

The Chair noted that information on how long foundation governor positions have been vacant had been included in the Appendix. This represented vacancies across all 87 church schools and work continues on governor recruitment, networking and learning.

The Chair thanked the Administrator for her report.

25.61 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Trends in pupil numbers

Ofsted inspection outcomes

DfE White paper on SEND and school reform

The Chair advised members to email either the DDE or Administrator if they have suggestions for items to include for discussion at future meetings.

25.62 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

25.63 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting would be Wednesday 11 February 2026 at 1.30pm in the Boardroom.

The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the meeting. The meeting closed at 3.00pm.

Signed: _____
[Chair]

Date: _____