



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

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Annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) to DBF Academic year September 2024 – August 2025

1. Summary

This paper reports on the work of the DBE in the 2024 – 2025 academic year unless otherwise stated.

The 71 Church of England (CE) schools in the Diocese of Bristol serve approximately 14000 children and young people on roll. Schools are the meeting places of not only these children, but their families, friends, churches, partner organisations, and the local community. They are anchor institutions in their community, offering belonging, stability, care for the wider family and hope. They celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion.

Schools are often the largest worshipping communities in an area, with every child or young person, staff and volunteers invited into a daily act of collective worship. For many, this is their ‘church’ and it provides a valuable partnership into existing church communities of many denominations. Spiritual development is also a statutory part of the curriculum and taken very seriously.

2. The DBE, Education and Young People Team

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE), a committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), directs the work of the Diocesan Support Staff (DSS) Education and Young People Team to ensure work in education across the diocese alongside the Transforming Church. Together (TCT) Children, Young People and Families workstream (CYPF) promoting collaboration with other DSS teams who also deliver CYPF focussed activity.

The Diocesan Board of Education currently has an established role with its 71 Church of England schools, a function given in the DBE Measure 2021. Their role continues to focus on the broad themes of securing Christian distinctiveness throughout each

school community through strong vision and values, standards (The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspections), property management, religious education, collective worship, curriculum design, secure governance, leadership, succession planning and models of leadership including academisation, and partnership with the diocese and other organisations it promotes.

The DBE Measure expects Boards to influence the quality of religious education and collective worship in all schools, not only in Church of England (CE) schools. DBE continue to work with schools through Local Authorities (LA) and Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) partnerships. In the past, in this diocese, DBE advisers were contracted as professional advisers to LA Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs). This changed in 2024-2025 and diocesan advisers now hold the position of CE representatives on SACRE enabling them to work more extensively and strategically with Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and LA school Alliance groups, where church schools and schools without religious designation come together in families.

The role and remit of Diocesan Boards includes substantial leadership, partnership and governance support to ensure sustainability of schools and planned growth where possible. Advising and guiding on models of leadership including academisation remains a key DBE task, alongside growing current and new education leaders. Senior leadership including Headship and MAT executive leadership is demanding and attritional; DBE monitor closely and advise on all senior appointments.

The new 2025 DSS 'Vision and strategic plan for Children, Young People and Families 2040' details nine outcomes to bring our CYPF across the diocese to experience flourishing; life lived in all its fullness.

- There is a diocesan culture where CYPF are included and deeply valued in all settings as part of a flourishing ecology of schools church and community (Priority)
- Deep and flourishing relationships between churches and schools enable the flourishing of all (Priority)
- Churches are connected with their communities across all ages creating a family / intergenerational and inclusive culture for the flourishing of all (Priority)
- Young people have agency to advocate and be involved in church governance and ministry
- Diverse expressions of church are available to enable individuals, groups and communities to thrive
- A skilled and committed children, youth and adult workforce engage safely and effectively with CYPF
- Discipleship pathways are planned and delivered confidently for and by Under 18s, the families and communities
- Local and regional partnerships are strong and enable community flourishing and spiritual development

- Diocesan support services support and sustain parish, school and family relationships and delivery for flourishing CYPF

‘Growing Faith’ is the movement that exists to put children, young people and families instinctively at the heart of all the mission and ministry of the Church by changing the culture of the Church of England. It involves churches, schools, households and the wider community working together to help children, young people and families explore and be disciplined in the Christian faith. It is integrated into the above strategy.

The DBE’s Education and Young People team comprises:

- Diocesan Director of Education (DDE)
- An Education and Schools team of 3 Schools Advisers supporting Christian Distinctiveness, Collective Worship, Religious Education (RE), Governance, Admissions, Property and Estate and SIAMS inspections
- A Children, Young People and Families team consisting of a Senior Adviser (new Jan 2026), Strategy Enabler, Chaplaincy and Youth Engagement officers, and South West Youth Ministries (SWYM) seconded Advocate
- 2 administrators/ co-ordinators

All team members work part time or term time only. Effective communication is a priority. Salaries are paid from DBF, TCT Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) funding, grant making bodies and the diocesan Educational Foundation. The team generated significant income by their activity to have covered all salaries except the DDE role in 2024-2025.

3. DBE Governance

The current make-up of the DBE is as follows:

Category	Number allowed	Number in post
Bishop’s appointee	2 + Bishop’s Representative	2
Elected	4-6	4 (2 to be elected)
Co-Opted	4-8	7

This current Board was established in Sept 2025 and runs for three years. The DBE has two sub-committees 1. School Effectiveness & 2. Strategy, as well as a group overseeing the use of the Educational Foundations Fund.

4. Diocese of Bristol Academies Company (DoBAC)

After exploring numerous options and the reputational risk of many academies, Single Academies Trusts (SAT) and MATs having to rewrite Articles, this company will continue to exist but with minimal membership as all business for all schools is conducted through the DBE.

5. School Governance

Total number of Foundation Governors	239
Number of vacancies	39
% of posts vacant	16%
Applications pending	10

Some of the vacant posts are reserved for the incumbent, so where there is no incumbent, the role remains unfilled. The majority of our schools with vacancies have only one unfilled post.

6. School Organisation

All former Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT) schools are well established in their new Trusts and DBAT has officially been struck off.

There are now seven Trusts with Church of England schools from Bristol diocese within them. Two more CE schools are on track to join Trusts in 2026, and a number of schools are actively investigating joining an Academy Trust, while others are working on strong LA partnerships or associate MAT service level agreements (SLA). The DBE advocates that schools should be working in collaboration with others, but as yet does not insist on academisation.

We await the publication of the Department for Education's (DfE) Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill, scheduled for spring 2026. This bill will outline the government's approach to Academisation and give us more idea about the future of the education landscape.

There have been several government publications in 2024 – 2025 for DBE and schools to take note of including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education Sept 2024-2025
- Best Start in life – National early years strategy Sept 2025
- Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper Oct 2025
- Children's Social Care Strategy Ongoing 2024-2025
- Children's Poverty Strategy – ongoing
- New Ofsted framework Oct 2025
- Curriculum review Nov 2025
- White Paper Feb 2026

7. Academy Trust Overview (as of January 2026)

Trust	Total number of Schools	Number of CE Schools
Blue Kite Academy Trust (BKAT)	25	10
Cathedral Schools Trust (CST)	12	2
The Leaf Trust (Leaf)	14	2
Lighthouse Schools Partnership (LSP)	33	3 Bristol, 12 Bath & Wells
Mosaic Partnership Trust (Mosaic)	12	3
The Park Academy Trust (TPAT)	10	2
Severn Federation Academy Trust (SFAT)	9	1 Bristol, 7 Gloucester Diocese. 2 more Bristol for later 2026

School Improvement:

8. Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS)

20 schools were inspected in 2024-2025, 18 receive 'J1' outcome reflecting they are 'living up to their church foundation and enabling pupils and adults to flourish.'

1 secondary school received a 'J2' judgement reflecting the school has strengths in most areas, but 'insufficient provision for collective worship at sixth form level.'

1 primary school received a 'J2' judgement reflecting strengths in most areas, but urgent issues with the 'quality of the RE curriculum.'

Schools receiving a J2 judgement are now being supported by a senior adviser with a focused action plan before being reinspected after three years.

The Diocesan Deputy Director of Education (DDDE) maintains a role as a SIAMS inspector and continues to complete 3 inspections per year as well as undergoing regular inspector training.

Within the 5-8 year SIAMS inspection cycle (still on covid-19 catch up), all schools receive a minimum of two adviser visits, (mid-cycle and pre-inspection) bespoke resources and training where required, a prayer card; during inspection a call and visit; post inspection a certificate.

Advisers are currently exploring ways in which this support offer can ensure cyclical engagement of schools, not just when they are in the inspection 'window', and we anticipate a change to this model in 2026-2027.

9. Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

Sixteen schools received OFSTED inspections in 2024-2025, some later in the period when a change from a single word judgement system to a five-band scale was introduced. In summary outcomes can be reflected as:

- Outstanding - 2

- Good - 11
- Requires Improvement – 3

A completely new framework is now in use from November 2025 and judgements from the new framework must not be compared to old judgements as they are not compatible.

10. Leadership appointments:

10 new headteacher posts have been supported - recruitment, appointment and induction including a training day at the cathedral and commissioning service at the Lord Mayor's Chapel led by the suffragan Bishop. All new Heads are set up with a pastoral partnership ('buddy') between an experienced and new CE headteacher. Note, there is already a higher churn in this academic year to last with many headteachers deciding to leave the front-line profession before retirement age.

11. Training and Support

The Education Team have delivered the following training, visits and courses, with consistently high evaluations of impact:

- Annual DBE conference Nov 2024, 'Love mercy; Act justly', 80 delegates
- Annual RE conference January 2025, 131 delegates
- SIAMS training, Head Teacher SIAMS network meetings, New RE leaders training, Hub leader RE training, University of Bristol Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) RE training, Collective Worship & Spirituality training
- 41 School visits
- 39 bespoke school staff training/INSET sessions
- 6 local governor training sessions
- DBE annual conference FlourishED Nov 2025 – 155 delegates school and MAT leaders, MAT Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), incumbents, ministry teams and church school workers and partners
- 1:1 Headteacher visits from DDE

'Created to Lead' - Diocese of Bristol Schools Partnership:

In the academic year 2024-2025 the DBE team wrote and initiated a new programme of MAT partnership and training, the 'Created to Lead' programme. This ensures knowledge and capacity at trust level to support the Christian Distinctiveness and flourishing of pupils and adults within all partner MATs. It also sustains a long-term accountability framework to ensure sustainability and promote the transfer of CE school capacity into other MAT schools.

Trust engagement

- Regular Bishop and DDE lunch engagements with all CEOs
- All trusts part of 'Created to Lead'
- 1:1 DDE regular contact
- Mosaic training and development days and RE leader training sessions

- Blue Kite Academies Trust (BKAT) RE/Christian Distinctiveness ‘Bricks’ training
- Lighthouse School Partnership (LSP) CE Headteacher networks
- Senior advisers now Trustees on BKAT, Mosaic and The Park Academies Trust (TPAT) Trust Boards
- DBE as Bishops representative on all Boards as a corporate member
- Annual conversations with all MAT leaders
- Several MAT chaplaincies developing

12. Religious Education

Advisers remain very much engaged with the regional and national picture for RE. They continue to facilitate and engage with strategic groups and networks such as:

- National ‘Strictly RE’ Conference, Jan 2025 (National Association of Teachers of RE)
- Annual local SACREs RE conference (facilitated by the Diocesan team) Jan 2025
- Regional SACRE Conference, March 2025
- South West RE Advisers network 3 per year (SWARE)
- Learn to Lead RE Area 2 Annual Conference, St Michael’s Community Centre, July 2025 (organised, facilitated, attended)
- South Glos Schools Virtual Interfaith Day, Nov 2024 (led, delivered)
- Membership of both Area 2 and 3 Learn Teach Lead RE Programme Steering committees and training of regional teacher hub leaders.

In the year ahead our senior advisers will be significantly engaged in strategic planning around important developments in RE:

- The new national CofE Statement of Entitlement, published January 2026
- The consultation on Religious Education becoming part of the national curriculum
- 4 SACRE Locally Agreed Syllabus reviews of RE

13. Church and School Partnership (CSP)

One school has been awarded the Silver and one the Gold CSP Award.

The award application process has been updated to align with *Growing Faith* principles and to enable schools in the very early stages of connection to build their partnership around a framework of activities which will facilitate a culture change. The Award can now be achieved in Bronze, Silver or Gold. We will be encouraging schools and churches to work towards the award in 2026 by inviting schools that have previously attained the Award to re-apply (it is only valid for 3 years)

After research with many head teachers and diocese leads, Revd Malcolm Strange wrote a paper regarding the Home-School-Church Partnership, many of his findings are incorporated into our 2024-2025 strategy.

14. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice

Significant training and capacity has been established in this area during 2024-2025. The DDDE and training partner Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam have now received training in the new CE resource 'Christianity as a Global World Faith' (CGWF). We are very grateful Anjali has agreed to undertake a role as a Global Multi Heritage (GMH) trainer on this programme, launching May 2026.

One of the Senior schools' advisers has also undertaken training in the 'Difference' training programme, designed to establish psychological safety and explore issues of culture and difference in both primary and secondary schools. This programme will now be shared with schools in May 2026, with a view to being used in Summer 2026 as a pre-cursor and partner to the use of the CGWF materials above.

Sadly, after a first round of recruitment, we were unsuccessful in appointing a 'Racial Justice schools' adviser'. The DDDE and the Diocesan Racial Justice team are now reworking the plan for this role, to be established in 2026.

15. CYPF Strategy

As noted above, the team has moved from an Under 18s approach to a CYPF approach. Areas of activity now include:

Growing Faith and Chaplaincy development

- **Growing Faith Chaplaincy** - 4 pilots discerned for Phase 1, 5 chaplains recruited to bespoke projects. Phase 2 in 2026 2 more. Further emerging models in Swindon and Hanham & Kingswood.
- **MAT Chaplaincy** – 7 pilots within MATs agreed. 1 embedded at TPAT (from DBAT.) 2 further MATs recruited, 1 further advertising.
- **School Chaplains** – support and network set up for individual school settings with chaplaincy.
- **FLOURISH** - Two 'Flourish' pilot projects (worshipping communities in schools funded by the National Society for Education) at St Chad's, Patchway and St Mary Redcliffe and Temple (SMRT), Bristol. 'Flourish' is based on young people leading the dialogue around worshipping communities including a Chaplaincy model and a Growing Faith curate post.
- **ECO Growing Faith hub**- In partnership with Hazelnut Community Farm. Now a year in, this hub has spent time growing a group of Eco youth champions. New plans emerging for a young people led eco festival in the summer.

- **Growing Faith Hubs** – successful bids at Horfield and St Nick’s, both looking at creativity and spirituality across the church/ home/ school spheres with a Music focus.
- **Further Education chaplaincy** – new model emerging between St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School (SMRT) and Bristol Cathedral Choir School for student led activity
- **Chaplaincy Adviser and Diocesan chaplaincy infrastructure**- appointed Oct 2024 to support the growth and development of chaplaincy models. Now includes a toolkit for chaplaincy; documents to help with setting up chaplaincy; resources for chaplaincy development; established networks for peer support; 1:1 support; signposting resources and training; hosted learning community for chaplains working with under 18s across the Diocese.
- **National networks** – active engagement in national research and networks e.g. Growing Faith Hubs, ‘Flourish’, Growing Faith Champions.

Youth Voice

- **Echo** - A programme to ensure the voice of young people is heard. The first topic the young people identified was to talk about ‘safe spaces’. This has informed onward actions such as clergy training –Launchpad, delivered through our partnership with South West Youth Ministry (SWYM). Next Echo to be released spring 2026 for schools and youth workers to engage in at a local level and feed back to the Youth Engagement Officer.
- **Youth engagement** - Continued relationship building across the diocese to share models of Children, Young People and Family engagement, such as incredible impact at Shine Pinehurst.
- **Vacancy in See** – over 400 young people contributed to the consultation through Echo.

Pipelines into training - equipping, visioning and growing the CYPF workforce

- **SWYM partnership**- Summer 2025 SWYM partnership established considering training opportunities across the workforce and looking to build capacity for CYPF related training for clergy, lay ministers and volunteers.
- **Youthscape** - Essentials and Launchpad courses, online and face to face, to be delivered through our SWYM partnership in 2026. A CYPF Advocate (partner) has been seconded to the Diocese for two days a week through this partnership.
- **Growing Faith Strategic Leaders** – 4 local leaders took part in this national programme in 2024-2025 and 8 people are recruited to start this year. Drawing from a broad base of participants, it brings together those united over a vision of culture change and a heart for children.

- **Trinity** - Theological College training programme underway for SW clergy including DoB with a clear focus on children, young people and families.
- **IME 2** – Initial Ministerial Education (IME) training for curates including visiting schools, intergenerational ministry and culture change. Education and CYPF now embedded in all training years.
- **Inaugural CYPF conference 13 June 2026** – ‘Celebrating our ministry with CYPF across the Diocese of Bristol’ - A time to celebrate, be encouraged and inspired as we dream together. An event for all involved in CYPF ministry or dreaming of a church where CYPF feel welcomed and involved.
- **New Senior Advisor for CYPF** - Appointed to support the ongoing culture change across the spheres of church, home and school and ensuring strategy delivery maximises cross directorate working and positive parish relationships.
- Choosing the right delivery model with trusted partners is proving utterly key.

16. DBE Budget

The Education Department within the DBE (which is consolidated within the BDBF numbers) is materially neutral to the overall BDBF Budget. In the Calendar Year 2025 it was Budgeted at a £(33)k net loss and in Calendar Year 2026 it has been Budgeted to make a £(6)k loss. This is partly due to the Educational Foundation making a Calendar Year End contribution to the Education Department. The DBE, while consolidated into BDBF numbers, is a Sub-Committee of the BDBF tasked with ensuring the BDBF fulfils its statutory obligations for Education. It should also be noted that available cash balances from the Educational Foundation Bank Account were deployed towards the end of Calendar Year 2024 to help repay the BDBF Bank Loan and in 2025 the BDBF Finance Committee agreed that the Educational Foundation should accrue market rate interest payable by the BDBF non-educational elements. Thus, while at a consolidated BDBF level this nets to zero, the Educational Foundation provides considerable benefit to the BDBF as a whole.

Calendar Year numbers for 2025 for the Education Department and the Educational Foundation are currently being finalised as part of the BDBF Financial Statements and will be reported on in due course.

17. Current and Next Steps Sept 2025 – August 2026

The Education and CYPF vision statement and operational plan was reviewed and updated in July 2025 and January 2026 and reviewed by DBE.

Our five main priorities remain:

- A** Develop opportunities to explore, experience and encounter faith, based on the CYPF 2040 Strategy (CYPF, Schools and Growing Faith focussed activity)
- B** Promote deep partnership between churches, schools, homes and their communities (Growing Faith Approach)
- C** Develop and sustain the quality of education, Christian character and leadership of schools (Schools focussed)
- D** Enable sustainable schools through appropriate governance, structural collaborations, compliance, estate management and financial support (Schools focussed)
- E** Build robust relationships, communication, business systems and processes across the Education and CYPF teams (Whole team focussed)

Liz Townend
Diocesan Director of Education Jan 2026