

### Open Academy's Christian ethos

- The purpose of Open Academy is *“to provide a transformative education for the students of our community. Inspired by our Christian ethos, we exist to develop every child, regardless of their beliefs and background, as the unique blessing that they are. Acting with the example of Jesus, we provide an inspiring education which allows our students to reach their full potential morally, academically, and personally.”*
- Open Academy's Christian ethos dates back to when it opened in 2008 as the first academy in Norfolk. Its co-sponsors, the Bishop of Norwich and Graham Dacre, a local Christian businessman, identified the need for financial and social investment in the Heartsease community that Open Academy serves. Over time, Heartsease had become an area of low aspiration and generational disadvantage. Outcomes and expectations were poor.
- Since 2008, Open Academy's simple Christian values have put it at the heart of the community's regeneration. Since joining DNEAT in 2014, Open has continued to provide the Heartsease community with a school to be proud of, and a school that understands, values and broadens the horizons of its young people and their families.
- Our [vision and purpose](#) are wholly Christian. We are challenged to serve all children, of all faiths and none, and to see every child as a blessing, as someone special to be supported to success.
- Our vision arose initially from a deep reflection upon the Church of England's [Vision for Education](#). Following wide consultation with parents, students and staff, it was codified in 2018. This brought the academy's ethos fully into line with that of the Church of England, highlighting the four strands of the Church's vision, *“educating for Wisdom, Hope, Dignity and Community”*, in a uniquely Open way.
- All elements of the Academy's development over the last 5 years have been rooted in this document. Each element of our vision links directly to the Church's vision and each was recognised as a strength at our most recent inspection.

### Our values

- Our shared Christian values underpin these improvements and guide our strategic development with a positive impact on our students and the community we serve. This is exemplified below by the findings from our most recent inspection.
1. “HARD WORK and PERSEVERANCE evidenced by our continually improving outcomes which show our commitment to educating for wisdom.”
    - *...pupils are now making steady progress through the curriculum.*
    - *There is a well-planned curriculum in place. Concepts taught build directly on what has come before, whether within that term or in a previous year. (Ofsted; March 2023)*
  2. “The celebration of our students' successes provides the narrative of how we educate for hope showing our values of ASPIRATION, THANKFULNESS and COURAGE “
    - *The sixth form is small. Students choose it for the nurturing community feel and/or the specialist football academy course. The subjects available to study are not*

*limited by the size of the sixth form. Leaders are ambitious for students, supporting them to find varied destinations, including placements overseas.*

- *Leaders promote pupils' wider development well. Careers education is carefully planned. It gives pupils lots of knowledge about the different opportunities they can access in the future. (Ofsted; March 2023)*
3. "The positive impact we have across our wider community is a testament to how we value SERVICE, HUMILITY and LEADERSHIP"
- *Pupils feel they have a voice in collective decisions. This is seen in the way pupils make considered submissions to leaders that have informed jewellery and uniform policies*
  - *Staff know pupils very well. They quickly spot any concerns. Pupils access a wide range of support in school. Leaders work closely with external agencies, such as the police and children's services, to keep pupils safe.*
  - *Pupils learn about different cultures and ways of life. (Ofsted; March 2023)*
4. "The RESPECTFUL relationships evident across the Academy show how we educate for dignity by valuing INTEGRITY, FORGIVENESS and TEAMWORK."
- *Behaviour has improved over time.*
  - *Staff at all levels feel well supported by leaders, both professionally and personally.*
  - *Pupils socialise in groups that reflect the broad ethnic mix of the school community. (Ofsted; March 2023)*

### **Inclusive education**

- Our vision statement celebrates the fact that, *"Open Academy is a beacon of hope for success in inclusive education inspired by our Christian ethos."*
- We serve a community with high levels of deprivation. Over half of our students are disadvantaged. Students with SEND make up nearly a third of all students. Our autism specialist resource base is an integral feature of our SEND provision and has been rated highly by the Autism Education Trust and the Local Authority.
- Our inclusive practice springs from the deep-seated sense of vocation shared by its leaders which is grounded in the tradition of the Church of England. This uniquely protects the inclusive nature of the school in a way that other schools would be unable to do.
- The Academy's vision was comprehensively tested during our recent inspection which judged the school to be good in all areas.
- Inspectors described Open as "an inclusive school" where students are "tolerant of difference and supportive of peers who find things difficult."
- They noted that students "know that the values of the school are important for their own development. They respect each other and are polite...Pupils learn about different cultures and ways of life. The 'open way' (be ready, be respectful and be safe) is embedded through leaders' curriculum. Pupils explain that this

teaches them to be understanding when others may have different opinions to themselves.”

### **Sustainable long-term improvement**

- DNEAT is a high-performing trust of over 40 schools, making it one of the largest school trusts in the country. Over 90% of its schools have been judged good or better.
- DNEAT’s rigorous school improvement model has been a key driver in Open’s recent success, securing and embedding inspirational and visionary leadership at all levels. The trust’s Christian values have played a key role in attracting high quality leaders, teachers and associate staff to serve the local community with its significant challenges.
- The step change in standards has been achieved while maintaining the inclusive ethos required to support this traditionally challenging area of the City of Norwich.
- As the only secondary academy within DNEAT, we actively build external partnerships to support our further improvement. We collaborate strongly with St Benet’s, the other academy trust within the Diocese of Norwich, as well as the network of Catholic academies in East Anglia.
- Once we have secured designation as a Church of England school, we plan, in the medium term, to seek permission to join the St Benet’s MAT. Having two secondary-phase Church of England academies in the same trust will not only help to secure Open Academy’s future sustainability and success but support the continued improvement of other schools in St Benet’s. We believe that the wider alignment of values will lead to strong collaborative leadership opportunities as well as shared curriculum planning and CPD.

### **Demand for the change**

- Community is a key strand of the Church’s vision for education. Diocesan schools play a leading role in supporting and bringing hope to disadvantaged and deprived communities. The whole diocesan family of schools, and the wider community including that served by Open Academy, will benefit if there are more Church of England secondary schools bringing their expertise to bear.
- Previously, members of the local community had raised concerns about the potential impact on admissions if Open were to secure a Church of England designation. These concerns have been subsequently allayed by the school’s outward-facing and inclusive ethos, based unashamedly on clearly articulated Christian values. Open Academy meets the needs of pupils that other local schools are less well-equipped to meet. As a result, demand for places has risen by over 10% in the past two years, particularly for pupils with SEND (a 43% increase since 2017). Our intake is genuinely comprehensive, reflecting the make-up of the local community.
- Church of England designation would protect the unique character of the school and secure our clear vision for SEND within the Church of England’s Vision for Education.

**Anticipated consequences if this is not approved.**

- Nationally, there are on average about 5 Church schools in every diocese. At present, there is only one Church secondary phase school in Norfolk, one of the largest counties in England. A second Church secondary school would provide greater choice for those parents and carers who wish their children to attend a Church secondary. Maintaining the *status quo* would continue to place a ceiling on parental choice.

**Conclusion**

- We have grown into a successful, inclusive academy because we have fully embraced the Church of England's Vision for Education over the last 5 years. Supported by DNEAT, CEFEL and the NSLN we have shown that this is a strong framework for the Academy to improve further.
- The next natural step is to secure our distinctively inclusive ethos for the long term through redesignation as a Church of England school, and the associated scrutiny that would be applied within the SIAMS inspection framework.
- The Academy's leaders have established the momentum for sustained improvement in line with the founding ethos. Redesignation will help to ensure that this is maintained beyond the current leadership and as the Academy grows in the future.

**References**

- [Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good, the Church of England Vision for Education](#) (2016)
- CEFEL - Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership
- DNEAT - Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust
- NLSN - National Secondary Leadership Network