

A male teacher in a maroon sweater and khaki pants stands in a classroom, pointing with a blue marker at a large whiteboard. He is holding a blue folder. Three female students in blue school uniforms are seated at blue desks, looking towards the teacher. The classroom has a white ceiling with fluorescent lights and a whiteboard on the wall.

HOW TO START A NEW INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Christian
Concern

| EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

MATTHEW 19:26

“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.”

PSALM 127:1

The great salvation purposes of God, as Jesus explains to his disciples, are impossible for man. But with God “all things are possible.”

Many Christians can see the value of an education that is Christian from top to bottom. They can see how a wholeheartedly Christian school could support the discipleship of Christian families and even provide opportunities for outreach.

But actually starting a school – that’s daunting.

If you read the stories of recent school pioneers, you will be amazed as to how God miraculously stirred the vision, drew people together, provided the buildings and the finances and led the school to open.

Such impossible projects are indeed possible with God, and indeed are possible for you, as you join him in building such a ‘house’.

Few feel qualified to undertake such a project. Nevertheless, time after time, we see God equipping ordinary people to turn the idea of a Christian school into reality.

This booklet starts by exploring the key steps that lead to the opening of a new independent Christian school. The following sections give you more detail on the specifics.

At Christian Concern, we’re very excited to see new Christian schools opening and we’re keen to help, even if you’re just thinking about the possibility. If you would like to discuss things further, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with our education team.

education@christianconcern.com
020 3327 1120

THE FIVE STAGES OF STARTING A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Vision

A Christian school does not start without a clear vision. It's important to understand that God initiates this vision. He speaks to someone – perhaps you – about being a leading figure in pioneering a new school.

This often comes through hearing the testimony of other Christian schools or seeing them in action. It can also begin from a realisation of the issues in society which affect children, which shocks or alerts the pioneers.

Quickly though, this general vision needs to be shaped. The sense of “You want a school here, don't you Lord!?” must lead to “What kind of school do you want?”. Seeing other models of Christian schools can provide great inspiration and clarify the vision. The vision, guided through prayer, will grow and start to become clearer.

The vision must also be guided through relationships. The leading figures who sense this calling must start to speak about the vision

to fellow Christians, church leaders and those who can support. By speaking out the vision in suitable contexts, such as church meetings, or parents' groups, a gathering of people can coalesce from those interested, and those who need to be part of the pioneering team. This is often where a shaping of the vision occurs, as a well-led group finds the mind of Christ together about what kind of school will best serve the purposes of God.

Writing down the vision, perhaps on a webpage or in a document, helps bring clarity to the vision and will help in sharing it with others. Remember though, that you are seeking always to follow what God is saying, and what he is doing. Put this at the heart of your vision statements and at the centre of your meetings by ensuring that prayer is prioritised.

A wise man once said, “if you don't see the value, you won't pay the cost.” As you speak of God's vision, speak of the value of our precious children, and his command to us to train them.

Some questions to consider:

- What are your motivations for starting a Christian school?
- Have you sought God's leading and direction through prayer?
- What model for Christian education might you want to follow and why?
- Have you written down your vision?
- What are your priorities for the school and what might be negotiable?



Gathering

Two groups of people need to be gathered to turn a vision into reality.

Firstly, a team of key people with a variety of skills and potential influence who will be the driving force in making the vision a reality. Secondly, a wider group of parents and supporters who will pray, serve and eventually populate the community of the school. It is important to be clear where early adopters of your vision will be best placed. Are they future governors, parents or staff, or are they general supporters?

Gathering people so you can explain the vision, especially to leading figures and potential pioneering team members, is essential. Focusing such a meeting with prayer and worship helps everyone to see that it is the Lord's will being sought, and it is all in submission to him. Worshipful, prayerful people are essential to have in the mix, not just those who have

practical wisdom or experience. Christian Concern would be delighted to join you at any such gathering event to provide a wider context to your vision, and support to your venture.

Beyond these times (you may need more than one in more than one venue), you can invite people to become part of the pioneering team. A balance of visionary leadership and accountable teamworking, built on strong, trusting relationships is very important. The enemy will often seek to thwart God's plans through relational disharmony, so a commitment to love each other through these processes is essential for the pioneering team. Wise support from church leaders in this can make all the difference.

You will come to a point where you see you have a team. You will then need to strategise together and enact a plan.

Some questions to consider:

- Who are the key people God has gathered to you so far?
- What is still lacking in your team that you can seek God for?
- How are you seeking to engage with potential team members from local churches?
- How will you keep good communication and strong relationships with key people?

Strategy

The most vital strategy to see a new Christian school come to fruition is faith and prayer – and then more faith.

You need people to be praying for you, perhaps on a WhatsApp group of interested parties or as part of a regular church small group. They need to be praying, along with you, and sometimes fasting, for the vision to be accomplished successfully.

Using the skills and giftings of the team (as it is not necessarily the gift of the inspiring pioneer) you should construct a plan which works back from an opening date and the more detailed vision of an open school, to where you are now. This detailed vision includes the kind of Christian education and the character discipleship, explained in clear key statements of vision (what you want to become), mission (what you will do as a school) and virtues (the characteristics and values you hold dear).

The strategic plan for the next year, if not three years, should include clear timescales, costs, and who is the key person driving forward the objectives. When a tall, secure skyscraper goes up, they can spend three years putting in the foundations before they ever build above the surface.

You need to clarify the proprietorial and charity structure you are aiming towards as part of your strategy, making sure to require Christian leadership. Planning in future vision casting occasions, and further gathering meetings in the early months is also important to continue to build momentum and update people. You should note where the Christian parents who may be interested reside, both in terms of

location and church affiliation. Christian home educators in a region are often interested. Your plan should include sections on staffing, premises, regulations and promoting the vision. You should be looking out for who the future headteacher might be; they may have come to light through the Gathering phase.

Reviewing the strategic plan every three months with the team will help you stay on track, and to adapt the plan as necessary. At a point where you have identified the leadership structure and buildings, you should begin to draft the necessary registration documents. A column in your plan where you can record progress will hopefully provide encouragement and prayer points. Issues inevitably arise and some things happen more quickly and many much more slowly than expected.

You may find it necessary to redraft the vision, as you start to discover who God is sending and what opportunities he is opening up. You may need a flexibility to the Lord's steadily revealed purposes, and yet a clarity as to what the vision is, and also a clarity on which details are negotiable. For example, having Christian staff should not be negotiable, but the kind of curriculum or premises may be.

Many, but not all, schools have found that starting with a group of around twelve younger children, and then building up the school as they age is the best way to set the school culture and grow in a manageable way. There are many ways the Lord may open doors however, and you may be provided with a large building with much capacity or a particular group of children or parents who the Lord is leading you to serve.

Some questions to consider:

- *Who is responsible for the strategic development plan?*
- *How much can be delegated to members of the team?*
- *How often is regular prayer planned regarding development priorities?*
- *Do you need to hone the vision statements in the light of how God is leading you?*
- *What advice might you need to receive on specific areas?*





Battle

There is much challenge and sacrifice in starting a new Christian school. The strength of relationships, forged through regular times of prayer and worship, will be essential for when you hit these times. They will come. The Lord will demonstrate his power through these times. He will prove that **he** is building the house.

Your godly faith, dependence and resolve to give him the praise and glory, and making time to do this, is essential. Pray. Pray together for **his** school that **he** is building. Often the battle is to find the right building, the key staff and enough committed families. Relational problems, government regulations and the registration process are also often significant challenges.

Some questions to consider:

- *What is the spiritual battle and where is the spiritual breakthrough needed?*
- *What sacrifices are needing to be made?*
- *How are you involving others to stand with you?*

Professional advice from others who have walked this path may also be necessary to stand with you to handle the battle with wisdom. Pioneers often do not like to rely on others, especially at times of battle. But God’s glory is often revealed through the team he brings together so that no-one can boast in their own achievements. His wider body, from different church backgrounds, may be crucial to his plan coming about. Ask for help, and trust that the Lord will guide others to help you to see the victory. Such battles will prepare you for the ongoing challenges of being faithful to the long-term vision, for the seasons of battle and victory that God has prepared for you as the school develops.

Celebration

At various points, you should be giving glory to God. For providing the vision, the team, the building, the finances, the support and the children.

Once you come to opening the school, make a clear, Ebenezer-like statement of your celebration of all that God has done to

accomplish the vision. Take photos, send a press release, plant a tree – do whatever you can to celebrate and mark God’s goodness. It may have taken several years to get to this point, and although a new level of work now begins, you should set a tone of celebration which will encourage joy to be part of your ongoing life together as a school community.

- *What kind of markers will you put down as your ‘Ebenezer’?*
- *At which points would you like to celebrate and give praise to God with others?*

Practical Support Available

Christian Concern’s education team is keen to provide support and encouragement to those interested in starting a new independent Christian school.

At the time of writing, we are working with around thirty groups which are at different stages of this journey of starting a school. We gather groups of people who are starting schools or developing plans, to update, encourage and equip one another, as iron sharpens iron. We also host events to help those pioneering schools and are creating more resources like this one which can be found on our Education website: **education.christianconcern.com**

We have relationships with leaders of other organisations and professionals who can provide advice and assistance. We can provide you with contacts to schools which are already operating so that you can see them in action and learn from them. All sorts of sharing of policies and expertise is already happening across the country.

Why not join this exciting movement?

To find out more about how we can help, please get in touch:
education@christianconcern.com
020 3327 1120



EDUCATION OPTIONS

There are different ways that education can be provided and the model you choose will depend on a variety of factors, not least the vision you believe that God is calling you to. This can evolve over time, but you need to start somewhere. The graphics below outline some of the different possibilities and some advantages and disadvantages of each. There is also a list of organisations working in these different areas which can be contacted if you would appreciate advice or support with specific questions.

It is likely that new government legislation will soon increase the level of monitoring and regulation of home education.

TYPES OF EDUCATION INITIATIVE OR INSTITUTION

HOME EDUCATION	From ‘unschooling’ to a classroom-like environment at home
CO-OP OR LEARNING CENTRE	Significantly working together with other families, under some leadership, with cooperation for some subject areas
FLEXISCHOOL	At school but with an agreement for parents to provide some education from home at specific times
DAY SCHOOL	Monday to Friday at school for all subjects
BOARDING SCHOOL	All accommodation and education provided for the majority of the year

CHRIST-CENTRED EDUCATION OPTIONS



KEY FEATURES

COMMITMENT AND REGULATION

ORGANISATIONS OFFERING SUPPORT IN THESE AREAS

- FAMILY HOME EDUCATION
- COOPERATIVE OR LEARNING CENTRES
- SCHOOLS

- At home the majority of the time
- Don't follow school term time
- Very flexible

- Part time education provided with others
- A mixture of home education and 'school'

- 'Similar' to state school but independent
- Each school has own distinctives and levels of parental engagement

- Very high parental time commitment
- Very low government regulation and inspection
- Very high parental influence
- Very low delegation of teaching
- Low set up time
- Very low fees

- High parental time commitment
- Low government regulation and inspection
- High parental influence
- Low delegation of teaching
- High set up time
- Low fees

- Low parental time commitment
- High government regulation and inspection
- Low parental influence
- High delegation of teaching
- Very high set up time
- Higher fees

- Christian Home Education Support Service (CHESS)
- Valley Online School (VOS)
- PX Classrooms
- SwitchedOn Education
- Dumb Ox
- Immanuel Online School (IOS)
- Arise Home Education
- Classical Conversations
- Christian Education Europe (CEE) and Accelerated Christian Education (ACE)
- Melville Knox (Scotland)
- Christian Schools' Trust (CST)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Please do also look at our Education Website for further organisations which may be of assistance.

education.christianconcern.com

APPROACHES TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Which approach to Christian education is ‘the right one?’ Off the shelf plans, principles to follow, or prayerfully ad hoc teaching? Charlotte Mason, Doug Wilson, David Smith or David Freeman? National Curriculum, online curriculum, character curriculum? Low fee, high fee, low salary, high salary, small buildings or big buildings? Primary school, Middle school, Secondary school or Sixth form...?

Comment on approaches

There is no one-size-fits-all model. Each form of Christian education has both strengths and weaknesses, and any honest advocate of a model will recognise this, no matter how enthusiastic they are for what they have become committed to. Those that emphasise curriculum can miss the importance of teacher relationship in the character formation of pupils. Those that emphasise relationship can miss the importance of the power of the messages that flow through curriculum. Those that use ‘off the shelf’ plans can lose out on the prayer processes that shape and motivate the teacher through the planning. Those that rely on their own prayerful planning, can lose out on wisdom written down and honed over years. There are dangers for those who adopt the National Curriculum and the secular messages conveyed through what is include or omitted. There are also dangers for those who adopt Christian Curricula that may not afford teachers and pupils the opportunity

Accelerated Christian Education

A self-instructional curriculum package, under teacher guidance, that integrates Bible truths and character values. Biblical principles and concepts are interwoven into the programme,

to expose the narratives pervading culture. The approach and methodology of the teachers you develop, and indeed retrain, is as important as the quality of the content they are asked to deliver. The design of your approach must emphasise Christian character training as much as, if not more than, academic excellence.

As many potential teachers will have been trained in a state system, with its assumptions and expectations, teacher training at the start and throughout will be extremely important to maintain the Christian distinctiveness of your vision. Whichever forms you are led to explore, once you have become convinced of a course, consider carefully how you might mitigate against the weaknesses of your chosen model.

Below you will find a brief alphabetical list of some models being adopted:

with science taught from the Biblical literalist perspective of creation. They have their own accreditation system.

Accommodated National Curriculum

The curriculum studied is broadly comparable to that of the state and is used to achieve standard state qualifications. However, opportunities are taken to include Christian worldview content, and additional subjects such as biblical studies are added to complement the teaching. This is a common approach in KS4, alongside mainstream qualifications.

Character approach

Aspects of the character qualities of God are planned to be taught throughout the curriculum, especially through topics. Through these the character of the child is also addressed, and the application of these traits in the purposes and actions which could ultimately result from any curriculum learning.

Classical Christian Education

An approach to learning which emphasises biblical teachings and a classical Greek model known as the Trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and has become a growing educational movement. Classical works are understood, critical thinking skills developed alongside an integration of a Christian worldview.

Metanarrative approach

The four-part Bible story of creation, fall, redemption and restoration are integrated as part of the key concepts taught in any unit of teaching, and progressively over time in age-appropriate ways. Content speaks of what God has made, man’s fallenness, how restoration can come through Christ’s people now and in the future, and are referenced in all curriculum subjects explicitly.

Catechistic education

Educating the foundational doctrines of Christianity through an agreed question and answer approach. This is often used to emphasise the key teachings for children, through memorisation. It is a systematic approach, used in many Christian traditions. It is usually a discrete aspect of Christian learning.

Charlotte Mason

British educator and reformer, who built her principles from biblical ideas. “Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life”. It emphasises reading high quality books and experiencing the natural world. The model is used extensively by Christian home educators and with the primary age groups.

Heart-concept Curriculum

Teachers plan each unit with the integration of Christian heart concepts. This is mapped across year groups so that key Christian concepts are integrated and reinforced through the teaching of curriculum subjects during the child’s progress through the school. This often works well with infant and primary topic teaching.

Online Christian schools

Several are becoming available. Programmes are delivered through online teaching by Christian teachers with pre-designed Christian curriculum. Children can be part of an online class community, or be supported more in their own home education programmes. Especially helpful to mobile missionary families, or secondary pupils served poorly by in person schools.

Parent focused approach

Christian parents are an integral part of the running of the school community, supporting the children’s teaching. This approach embodies the Hebrew expectation that parents are responsible to God for their children’s education, through high levels of involvement and volunteering in the school day.

‘What-if’ approach

This emphasises the methods and practices of the teacher. It is based on the premise that a Christian understanding of life makes a difference to everything which happens in the classroom. It focuses on what is embodied by the teacher, giving time to analysing what is best to be given significance in any teaching.

Prayer focused approach

This approach is focused on daily following the leading of the Spirit, through prayer, and the Bible. It is very flexible, as it draws on the questions and interests naturally flowing from the children, which are then supported by the teacher. It is noted for high degrees of motivation and retention in primary ages.

Contact us should you wish to know of locations or groups which have been inspired by any of these approaches.

As you consider these very brief definitions, consider what you might expect to be the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches as you pray through the vision the Lord is giving you.

Unless you are below the threshold for a full time school, you will need the ‘Register an Independent School’ Application form from the government website.¹ Here you will state that you wish to be designated as a Christian school, which gives you the right to employ only Christian teachers; a key to maintaining the Christ-centred nature of the school

You will then need to prepare the following documents demonstrating how you will meet the independent school standards found on the government website.²

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-an-independent-school-application-form
² www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-school-registration

DOCUMENTS NEEDED TO REGISTER YOUR SCHOOL WITH THE GOVERNMENT



DOCUMENT	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Premises Plan	Maps, diagrams, and explanations covering the Independent Schools Standards for premises e.g. demonstrating suitable changing room facilities
Curriculum Plans	Subject or age-based high level plans and vision, referencing Christian ethos and your approach to Christian Education that requires Christian teachers
Schemes of Work	Medium level plans, term by term, for all subjects, from which lesson plans could be derived by teachers for every year group you will receive
Pupil Assessment Procedures	Procedures for monitoring and testing to assess progress of pupils; when you will apply standards and which examinations you would aim towards
Four Key Policies	Fundamental policies needed for registration, referencing all aspects of the Independent School Standards which should include the Christian values underpinning your Christian approaches to those policies: 1. Anti-bullying Policy 2. Safeguarding Policy 3. Health and Safety Policy 4. Behaviour Policy
Complaints Procedure	The four-stage process and who will handle complaints at each stage
Covering Letter	Also called ‘Independent School Statement’ where you state some brief history of your group, that you wish to be independent and when you wish to open
Proprietor details form	Information including photographs and credentials of relevant people who will function as the proprietor

Detailed guidance, including on applying for religious designation, is provided on the government website.³

Copies of such documents from other schools that have completed these processes can be obtained by permission of Headteachers, through our developing networks. Many examples are already freely available online from school websites. For example, see the ‘Find a school page’ of the Christian Schools Trust website.⁴

³ www.gov.uk/guidance/religious-character-designation-guide-to-applying
⁴ christianschoolstrust.co.uk/



COMPANY, CHARITY, CIO?

REGISTERING YOUR SCHOOL

It is possible to use a variety of company or charity structures to set up and register a school, and there are different benefits for each. The tables below summarise the advantages and disadvantages for each of the options.

CHARITY

A charity is an organisation which exists for public benefit and has charitable objectives such as advancing education.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The ability to claim Gift Aid - a scheme available to charities which means they can claim extra money from HMRC. The charity can claim an extra 25p for every £1 that is donated.	Trustees are ultimately liable if the charity collapsed and they would need to pay for any debts however accrued, unless they insured themselves against such an eventuality.
Charities are regulated by the Charity Commission. Regulation is 'light touch' and involves limited scrutiny.	When closing a Charity, the Trustees must distribute assets to another charity with the same or similar charitable objects. If the charity loses its charitable status the Trustees lose control of this process and the assets are given away to a similar entity.

More information on what is required to set up a charity can be found here: www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity

CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION (CIO)

A CIO is another form of charity which has limited liability for its trustees.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The CIO enjoys most of the characteristics of a limited company whilst being a charity.	If the Charity Commission revokes the charitable status, the organisation, your school, would simply cease to exist and be immediately closed. Any assets would eventually be distributed to another charity with similar objects and trustees would not have control over this.
These are relatively easy to set up and because it is regulated by the Charity Commission, it enjoys relatively 'light touch' regulation.	
It was devised to ensure the protection of trustees from liability if the charity collapses.	
The ability to claim Gift Aid.	

COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

A member-controlled company, rather than one where shareholders make a profit.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Members of the company have their liability capped at the amount they put into the organisation, which can be as little as £1.	It is not possible to claim Gift Aid because there is no charitable status.
This is a straightforward way of setting up a company with a 'not for profit' ethos. It wouldn't have shares in the way that a profit-making company limited by shares would and therefore there are no mechanics for this nor the need for distribution of profits.	A company limited by guarantee is regulated by Companies House and falls within their remit and the provisions of the various Companies Acts for its regulation. The regulatory burden is higher than that of a charity or CIO.

CHARITABLE, COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

As above but has only charitable objects and so can register with the Charities Commission.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Were it to lose its charitable status, this structure just reverts to being a company limited by guarantee; members can continue to operate the business, the school, as a noncharitable company.	Slightly more complex to set up as the company must have charitable objects to qualify as a charity and all of its activities must be charitable in 'advancing education' or otherwise.
The ability to claim Gift Aid.	Regulated by both Companies House and the Charity Commission, and returns have to be made to both.



OTHER HYBRID OPTIONS

In addition to the above there can be all manner of hybrid arrangements where an organisation can have a trading division and a charity that sits alongside. This can offer great flexibility but it would be necessary to discuss options with lawyers who have experience in this area. Legislation can change so the model would need to be kept under regular review.

Many new schools or learning centres have their charitable or company status, and accompanying documents, free to view on the Charity Commission or Companies House websites. These can be used as guides or templates for your own documentation, having considered the points above. Please do contact us if you would like any further advice.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON 'RELIGIOUS ETHOS' AND 'RELIGIOUS CHARACTER'

Schools with a religious ethos (affecting admissions)

The application form for registration will ask whether or not the school has a religious ethos. Details of any religious ethos declared will be recorded on GIAS (Get Information about Schools). **Independent schools registered as having a religious ethos are able to admit**

pupils and provide, to pupils, education and access to other aspects of school life on religious grounds. Such discrimination is generally prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, but a specific exemption exists for independent schools registered as having a religious ethos.

Schools designated by order as having a 'religious character' (affecting admissions, recruitment and dismissal)

In addition, the Religious Character of Schools (Designation Procedure) (Independent Schools) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended allow the Secretary of State to make an order designating an independent school as having a religious character where the requirements set out in the regulations are met. Independent schools designated as having a religious character can:

- discriminate on the basis of religion in admitting pupils and provide, to pupils, education and access to other aspects of school life on religious grounds;
- give preference in connection with the appointment, promotion and remuneration of teachers on religious grounds;
- take into account conduct incompatible with the precepts or tenets of the religion in appointing or terminating the employment of teachers.

The Equality Act 2010 is not breached by doing anything listed above as permitted as a result of religious designation. However, these freedoms which are granted in relation to schools which have a religious designation (and the ones listed above for independent schools registered as having a religious ethos) do not constitute a discriminatory free for all. They only relate to discrimination on religious grounds and they do not permit such schools to discriminate (in doing the things in question) on grounds of gender, race, sexuality, and so on. **The proprietor of a registered independent school, or a proprietor planning to open an independent school, can apply for designation of the school as a school with a religious character. Full details and an application form will be sent on request or at the time of registration.** A school can also seek designation at any time after opening.

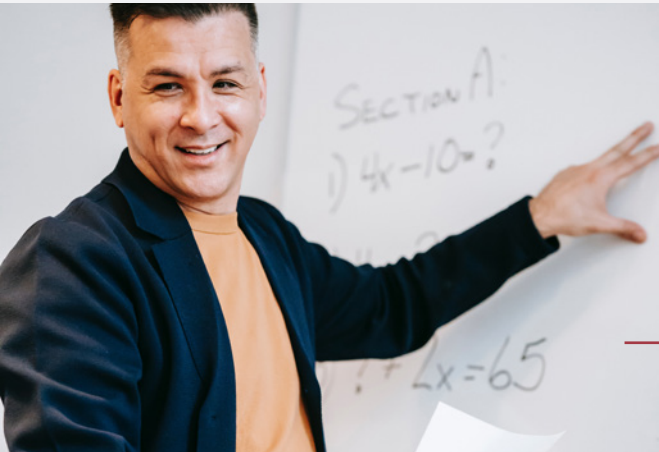
ORGANISING A 'GATHERING' MEETING

The 'gathering' meeting is a key time to vision cast, to draw the crowd into what the Lord is saying for your community and to help find the committed 'team' of people who will move the vision forward.

Vision casting	Purposes
• Be clear in your own mind which aspects of the vision are critical to the initiative. It is OK for some aspects of the vision to be unclear if the Lord is yet to reveal his purposes • Try to communicate with clarity and conviction the non-negotiable parts of the vision. Use presentations, video or a website if appropriate to showcase the benefits of a Christian education and the initiative you are proposing • Where the vision or the details are not yet clear – for example, regarding buildings, curriculum or the age range of pupils – take a 'vision exploring' tone rather than a 'vision casting' tone. Demonstrate prayerful flexibility and a willingness for God to guide the project in the months and years ahead	• The meeting should increase understanding. For this to occur, there must be significant time allocated for Q&A, with members of the team willing to answer together at the end. • A key purpose is to engage with the 'crowd', not just to speak at them. These could be potential committed team members or future staff, as well as parents who might send their children • What must not be missed is that this is an opportunity to focus on God and his purposes. His guidance sought through prayer. Honouring him as Lord through worship and the attitude of those present will set a tone for future meetings and communications. This is not just a project that some good people have cooked up
Promoting the meeting	
• Agree a brief summary of the vision and purpose of the meeting for advertising • Create advertising materials including a flyer, social media posts, promotional emails and ideally a website • Use the contacts and relationships you have, especially through church communities • Allow at least six weeks to promote the meeting before it takes place	• Remember the church leaders are key gatekeepers and potential advocates; can you get a phone call, online meeting or go to a joint meeting such as Churches Together to promote your event? • Recommunicate with potential attendees wherever you can two weeks before the event • Pray together with the team for the Lord's favour ahead of the meeting

Example schedule for a 90-minute meeting

- Take contact details for future communication at the door when greeting and welcoming
- Allow time at the start for people to mix, relationally connecting with who is there, and for them to look at any resources you are providing, or which are on a rolling slide show
- **(7.30pm) Welcome:** Thank people for coming, introduce key people and pray or sing a widely known worship song or hymn
- **(7.45pm) Vision presentation from team:** Keep this to 30 minutes; be confident that anything else that needs to be covered will come through Q&A
- **(8.15pm) Q&A**
- **(8.40pm) Next steps:** Summarise the next steps you believe you should take and thank those who have come
- **(8.50pm) Prayer:** Pray together for a) God's wisdom b) a team to form and grow c) the children of your area
- Allow time at the end for any final announcements that may be needed. Also plan time for informal discussion after the formal close of the meeting



It may be that you need to have a simpler and smaller prayer meeting as an initial step where you have very small numbers. The kind of gathering meeting described above can work well with 15-100 people and clearly needs prayerfully adapting to your local needs and circumstances. May the Lord bless your preparation!

Data collection

- The 'Gathering' meeting is a key opportunity to discern who is part of the 'crowd' and who could be part of the committed 'team'
- Prepare an easy sheet or online form for those attending to complete. Use tickboxes to make sure that attendees can give consent for you to contact them via email or to add them to any groups (e.g. WhatsApp) that you might use to continue the project.
- Ask them about the skills they might offer, their reason for coming and for the ages of any children they have
- At the end of the meeting, encourage anyone who has not yet left contact details or consented to be contacted to do so. These contacts are crucial to maintaining momentum for the initiative

Follow up

- Have a meeting date prepared for your 'team' to review progress and consider if anyone who came could be invited to join the core team
- Consider how best to keep engaging with the 'crowd'; how will you continue to contact and engage with people electronically? Will you hold annual meetings or invite people to pray together regularly?
- Prayerfully consider any refocusing of the vision given your meeting
- Develop your strategic planning document

ENGAGING CHURCH LEADERS

Church leaders are the key gatekeepers of church communities, filled with families who could benefit from your vision. Your own senior church leader may need persuading and helping so that they can hear what the Lord is saying to you about providing better Christian education. Your love and understanding of them in their

role, combined with your prayer for them, is so important. From this relational connection you may be able to access and support their congregation and other churches so you can bring your vision to a wide group of parents and church members.

Understanding the Church leader

Senior church leaders are often extremely busy. You probably don't realise quite the level of workload they have, or range of issues they are facing. Accept and understand that they are busy and let them know you understand. When you do get time with them you want it to be a blessing to them, and at a time which is not rushed.

Church leaders often focus on 'mission' and see social action and engagement as high priorities. Engage with this, but address the fact that training our children is a major part of the Great Commission of discipleship given to the Church. Churches today have generally delegated this to the world, through the state. Training children well so they want to follow Christ is a mission

critical activity of the Church and, until recently, has been a major priority.

Find out what their own personal views and concerns are regarding education, especially related to their own children and grandchildren. They will have the potential to feel criticised, especially if they are a young leader or are nervous that their choices are being judged.

Recognise that they are often trying to hold a church together, and congregants and the wider leadership may have a variety of views. Work with them and be seen as someone who wants to help with that. You want to hear the Lord together with them about how best to serve God's children.

Level of engagement

- 1. Fearful: They do not understand and are concerned as to your vision being a threat in some way.
- 2. 'For' you: They understand and are supportive of you and your vision. They are willing to promote you.

- 3. Funder: More than just understanding, they are willing to promote and resource you from the church.
- 4. Founder: They become a foundational member of your team and their church vision may also align.

Think of your church leader as being someone on this scale: from fearful to founder. How might you pray for them and support them to be involved at a deeper level? The fearful leader will be very wary of you, so lots of friendly conversations need to occur. Once they are in a position of truly understanding the vision, they may feel free enough to let you advertise your vision. Hopefully you can get them to be increasingly 'for' you. Keep them in touch with what is going on as you move forward, seeking their prayer and advice. This may help you to even include them as a founding member of your governing board. Their spiritual advice and wisdom is likely to be incredibly valuable. They may even commit to financial support, cheap use of facilities, free use of administration or

other resources. This brings them into the level of a funder. Should you have a strong sense of vision from your church leader, by far the most impactful engagement is for them to agree that – personally or as part of the vision of the church – they would want to be a founder of the new school.

Schools that have a vibrant link to church communities through their leaders are able to receive huge strength and encouragement. Many of the best schools have been ministries of the local church and fully part of the Christian community. Engaging successfully with church leaders as the gatekeepers of their church families in the ways described could be a key for your education initiative.

ENGAGING PARENTS

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from

within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”

Romans 12:2
JBP Translation

How culture has shaped us

The 'world' has a powerful effect to shape the thinking of parents. Parents are by far the biggest factor in the success of generational transfer of a Christian worldview to children. The Lord needs to reshape our thinking through the power of his written word and the presence of his Holy Spirit so that we all see the pre-eminence of the parenting responsibility and

the stewardship of our community's children from a biblical perspective. There are three ways to frame how this shaping has taken place in our British culture. We have often imbibed 1) a 'state culture' 2) a 'self culture', and 3) a 'slavery culture'. Exposing how the culture around has moulded us is a key to getting effective parental engagement.

The **‘state culture’** can be summarise by the following attitude from parents: “*I give my children to others, and they are responsible for their education*”. This has grown up through the development of the welfare state providing state education for all. It also has developed in Christians through the steady abrogation of the understanding within the Church that the Great Commission which Christ gave his disciples also involved the teaching of the readiest to be taught: children and young people. These children are not merely the parents’ children, and certainly not the state’s children (which the state increasingly assumes), but God’s children first as he created them to be loved and stewarded by parents and community. This ‘state culture’ now extends to the expectation even to feed our children. The British state should not be idolatrously seen as the saviour, healer and provider, when this is God’s place.

The **‘self culture’** is one which moulds thinking and is founded in consumerism and ‘my rights’. It can be summarised as, “*I choose; I buy; I expect the product I want*”. Unless parents can unpick this attitude, they will approach you with what they expect from you in providing them a service. A Christian Education is not a consumer product to be bought, but a family project to invest in with others. It is not just about them and their family, but the family of God and his mission for his children. Just as we should not

consume but serve in our churches, so it is with the relationships in a Christian school. It will require sacrifice from both staff and parents. It is not primarily about getting my needs and my child’s need fulfilled. Living sacrifices, worshipping and honouring God, through teaching children about service through the adults and parents acts of service, is what will set a school culture which will counteract the world’s selfishness.

Parents, along with all of us can find ourselves trapped in a **‘slavery culture’**. The worship of career, and the qualifications which can get you to the ‘best’ careers, can shape parents and school thinking to push way beyond the plans and priorities that the Lord may have for his children. It can be summarised by the statement of a parent’s attitude as, “*I value career and require earning at the expense of godly motherhood and fatherhood, and time with our children*”. The level of mortgage (which means ‘death grip’) taken on, and cultural expectations of career and earning, can enforce parents’ absence. Freedom is needed from the cultural expectations which damage our children. The expectations for the school to provide multiple qualifications, at the expense of discipleship, play and time for relationship, can lead to disillusionment and exhaustion, the fruits of slavery in our families.

throughout all activities of life, and that the ‘Hear O Israel’ community was a vital support in this.

As the child’s capacity for learning and development increases, so the engagement of the community around becomes more important to release the gifts and talents within the child and to correct the sinful nature and selfish dispositions. However, this never undermines the parental responsibility, especially in the early years, but this does allow for the full participation and steady releasing of responsibility to the young man or woman,

within community, as they enter the teenage, ‘bar/bat mitzvah’, age. This is when they begin to make their own personal commitments beyond the faith of their parents. The posture of your school should be to support the ordained process of significant parental involvement at an early age then, as they become teenagers, to support the parents by providing a faith-filled community of educating disciplers, supporting the young people to make their own decisions fully informed by the scriptures. Parents and communities who understand and engage with this are much more likely to pass on an authentic Christian faith to their children.

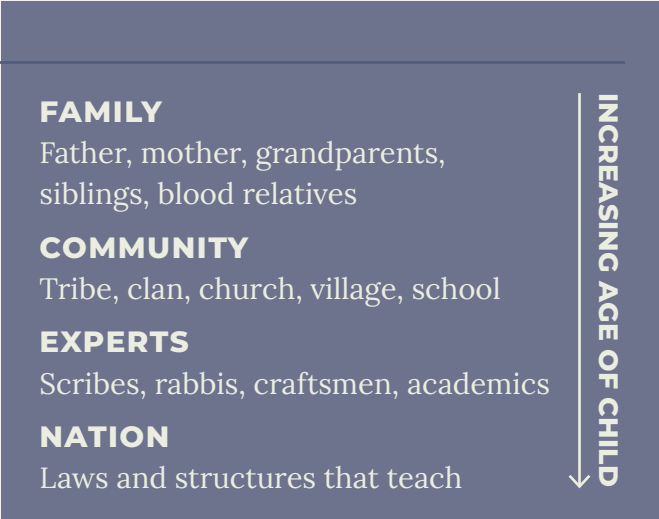
Key issues to address

- 1. As part of your vision, develop a biblical understanding of the primary role of parents as educators and the community’s role. Deuteronomy 6 is a great place to start.
- 2. Research the cultural background of the groups God is calling you to serve, to understand how they see the parental role. Are they from a UK culture, different ethnic backgrounds or ‘broken’ families?
- 3. Consider your approach to training and supporting parents annually, especially at the early stages of them engaging with the vision and when they apply to join your school.
- 4. Plan for how you will value mutual, open, communication between home and school, so it is not just a brief annual parent’s evening or report when engagement occurs. Many schools are not good at this, to the detriment of the children and God’s design for their flourishing in community under their parents’ authority.

- 5. Address attitudes of ‘my consumer choice’ when they arise and regularly communicate a vision of ‘community/village of servants’ as a church community should be.
- 6. Expect and work hard to welcome and plan volunteering from parents throughout the school week and school calendar. This is so important for the children’s development so that they see from a young age that parents are involved. Otherwise, they can partition off their faith life and ‘performance’ to only school or home, rather than having an integrated foundation being built.
- 7. Hear from God what you should or shouldn’t do, especially in relation to breakfast clubs, after school care, providing for very young children or how many GCSEs to offer. Time with parents and time for discipleship training is squeezed out in so many school communities due to our being shaped by the world around us.

God’s design

The word education, from the Latin root ‘educare’ means to ‘bring up’, or to ‘lead forth’. The bringing up of children is seen from natural law and the design of the family, to be firstly and foundationally the responsibility of parents. They are charged with leading them into a trajectory of following Christ and the community around is charged with supporting this. The book of Deuteronomy makes clear that parents should teach and direct their children



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