

As we launch in to 2021 with rapidly rising numbers of infections and continued expectation that the pandemic is set to get worse before the
dition, it is all too easy to lose our bearings, writes Nigel Genders – The



The Church of England

So much of the current debate about schools returning after the Christmas break seems to divide along the usual political fault lines, and it is no surprise in a world where the tendency for simplistic binary arguments has increased through social media, to see newspaper articles putting the blame either on “incompetent politicians” or “radical school staff” according to their editorial bias. But there must be a better approach where we can take a step back and consider what is really in the best interest of the children, staff, and communities we serve.

The Church of England provides a quarter of England’s primary schools and more than 200 secondary schools, so I know first-hand, from school leaders the length and breadth of the country, how tirelessly schools work for the good of the nation’s children and how committed they are to continuing that work in 2021.

Over the last four years since we published the [Church of England vision for education](#), I have been constantly reminded of the need to root ourselves in our Christian perspective on education, especially in the most difficult of situations. Making sure children and young people flourish must be at the centre of our work. We know children are served better by being in school, but where this is not possible the need for high quality online learning is paramount.

Making decisions at a local level, when there is so much seemingly conflicting advice and argument, is difficult. But as we say in our vision, we need to move away from disagreements and conflict, to a deeper mutual understanding and to peaceful, negotiated settlements that can live with ongoing tension.

Schools are facing seemingly impossible decisions with pressure on both sides. It is time to take the politics out of those choices. Politicians, professional associations and school leaders and governors need to come together to enable wise decisions for the future because what we do in our schools impacts on real children and their families, our staff and the whole community.

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My prayer for this new year, and a new term, is formed around that core strand in our vision, for wisdom; that our schools and all who support them will know wisdom from above as they wrestle with deeply complex problems where no easy solutions are available, and that the system leaders, officials and politicians in the educational landscape will listen to one another and find ways through seemingly intractable problems, always putting the interests of our children and young people at the centre.

This wisdom for living is itself underpinned by hope. Not simply the hope which comes from the vaccine programme which is now well underway (and which must reach all school staff along with other key workers as soon as possible) but a certain hope in God’s future for the world, in God’s ongoing love and compassion for all people, and for the whole of creation, and in God’s promise of life in all its fullness.

Revd Canon Nigel Genders - Chief Education Officer for the Church of England

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