

The Maximilian

A monthly newsletter for governors within the Archdiocese of Southwark

November 2025

Reflection

Beloved Friends, Brothers, and Sisters in Christ,

In November, we remember the dead. I know some of you have recently lost loved ones, while others mark anniversaries of painful losses within your families and our school community. I am very sorry for your loss and pray that the Lord grants you, his consolation. May the souls of the departed continue to rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

We began the month by celebrating all the Saints in heaven on Sunday 2nd of November, and the next day, Monday 3rd November we prayed for all the Holy Souls. As I mentioned last year, everyone has lost someone dear—whether a distant relative, parent, schoolmate, colleague, child, friend, grandparent, or neighbour. We pray: "Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. **Amen.**"

November is a time for reflection and gratitude. Personally, I have so much to be thankful for, not least on a successful webinar for Racial and Cultural Inclusion by our Commission, as we continue to remind everyone to show love and compassion for each other, especially for those who are different from us. We believe there is always room for one more.

In November, we also celebrate Christ the King of the Universe, marking the end of Ordinary Time. As we honour this feast, I invite you to pray for peace in the world. At the close of the month, we celebrate the feast of Saint Andrew, the beloved Apostle of Jesus who was born in Galilee and spent much of his life preaching the Good News of peace. Andrew introduced his brother, Peter—our first Pope—to Jesus. Saint Andrew stands as a role model in these times, eager to lead us to Christ; eager to invite us to a culture of peace.

**Canon Victor Darlington
Episcopal Vicar for Education**

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School Financial Benchmarking

What is School Financial Benchmarking?

The schools financial benchmarking service provided by the Department for Education (DfE) allows you to identify schools that are similar to your own and compare your:

- Spending
- Performance
- Staffing structures

You can also find contact details for these schools.

The tool enables you to select multiple schools or trusts and add them to a "benchmark basket".

Clicking "View benchmark charts" allows you to view comparisons of the schools you have selected across 4 main areas. Within these areas there are charts covering more specific aspects. For example, for expenditure you can see charts focusing on expenditure in areas such as:

- Staff
- Premises
- Supplies and services

Please [click here](#) to access the tool.

Benefits of Benchmarking

Planning

There are 4 main cost areas for school budgets:

- Teachers
- Other staff
- Supplies and services
- Buildings and land

Benchmarking can help you:

- Look at spending in these areas overall, as well as sub-categories of spending
- Compare your school's spending with other similar schools
- Inform your school development process
- Making changes

Benchmarking helps you to connect with other schools to discuss challenges and successes.

This can help you to consider whether:

- Your resource allocations are working
- You can improve outcomes by making changes

Benchmarking is in itself a comparative exercise, and the benefit comes from what you do as a result of what you learn from the benchmarking.

Limitations of benchmarking

Benchmarking is only a guide. You should think about other things you know about your school when assessing the data.



What 72,000 Parents Really Want From Schools

This national research from Edurio, based on the feedback of over 72,000 parents and carers from 2022 to 2025, will help boards and schools to:

- Prioritise actions with the greatest impact on building trust with your community
- Support strategic decision-making with robust data to share with leadership teams, governors, or trustees
- Reflect on how your current approach to parental engagement compares to national trends.

The report considers national trends in satisfaction with engagement, communication, and being made to feel welcome; differences in parental views in primary vs secondary; differences depending on the school year of their child and factors that have the most impact on parent satisfaction and engagement.

[Download the report.](#)

Attendance targets introduced by DfE

The Education Secretary has announced that schools will be given an individual 'minimum attendance improvement target' from this month. This year's targets, which have been generated using AI, will be on a 'test and learn' basis. The attendance baseline improvement expectation (ABIE) will be based on schools' circumstances – including location, pupil needs and deprivation. There is no intention to publish the targets, or share the information with Ofsted, but the ABIE will be used to help target support through the RISE behaviour and attendance hubs. There are plans to have 90 hubs across the country, with 57 currently in operation.

There appears to have been some teething problems with the 'similar schools' reports which were shared with schools last week, with school leaders reporting inaccuracies in data, or 'similar schools' which were, in reality, very different from their own setting and context. The reports have currently been taken down, but the DfE expects them to be available again soon.

The DfE has highlighted significant falls in attendance levels during key transition periods, particularly from Year 6 to Year 7, and also from Year 7 to Year 8 when some pupils struggle to settle into secondary school life. Schools will receive a 'best practice toolkit', focusing on these transition points, sharing strategies which have worked successfully in schools across the country.

The DfE states that last year saw the biggest improvement in overall attendance for a decade, with a national picture of 5.3 million more days in school and 140,000 fewer persistently absent pupils, but has also identified that 1 in 3 schools have not achieved this level of improvement.

[Click here for press release](#)

DFE Governance resources - [Effective governance resources](#)

The full suite of resources covers five areas:

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- Working with governance professionals (clerks)
- Governing strategically in your school or academy trust
- Producing effective board reports for strong governance
- Creating an effective and agile governance structure
- Recruiting governors and trustees.

Curriculum and assessment review and government response

The government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review sets out significant changes aimed at improving educational outcomes, ensuring breadth, and preparing pupils for life and work. The government will maintain the existing structural architecture of subjects, key stages, assessments, and qualifications – including national primary assessments, GCSEs, T Levels and A levels, making improvements where the Review has recommended that change is needed. The new national curriculum will be drafted keeping in mind the teaching time typically available to schools in each key stage and the approach tested with teachers and curriculum designers. Governing boards should understand these changes to support strategic planning and accountability.

The key changes are:

1. Curriculum Refresh

Revised National Curriculum: Full refresh of programmes of study for all subjects, published in 2027 for first teaching in 2028

GCSE Updates: New specifications for first teaching from 2029

Principles: coherence, depth, subject mastery, and alignment of knowledge with disciplinary

skills Digital Curriculum: An online, interactive version showing links between subjects and prior learning.

2. Strong Foundations

Early Years & Primary: Greater focus on oracy, reading, writing, and maths

Ambition: 90% of children meeting phonics standard; expanded SEND support for reading

Maths: Strengthened Year 7 foundations and targeted support for disadvantaged pupils.

3. Subject-Specific Improvements

Languages: Explore earlier recognition of achievement (pre-GCSE qualifications)

Arts Education: Revitalised arts offer and new National Centre for Arts and Music Education

PE: Reinforce two hours of PE weekly and expand partnerships

Climate & Sustainability: Embedded across relevant subjects Digital, Financial & Media

Literacy: Integrated into curriculum.

4. Preparing for Life & Careers

Embed critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and social-emotional skills New oracy frameworks for primary and secondary

Employer partnerships to connect learning with careers.

5. Assessment Changes

Primary: Improve writing assessment

Secondary: Schools to assess writing and maths progress in Year 8

GCSE Exams: Reduce total exam time by 2.5–3 hours while retaining rigour



Support schools to develop a triple science offer, ahead of introducing a statutory entitlement for all GCSE pupils

Progress 8: Consultation on options to ensure breadth, including creative subjects.

6. Post-16 Pathways

English & Maths: New preparatory qualifications before GCSE resits 16–19 Reform: Simplify qualifications into:

Level 3: A Levels, T Levels, new V Levels.

Level 2: Streamlined technical and vocational options.

Emphasis on occupational competence and clear progression routes.

7. Enrichment Entitlement

Every school to provide a core enrichment offer: Civic engagement

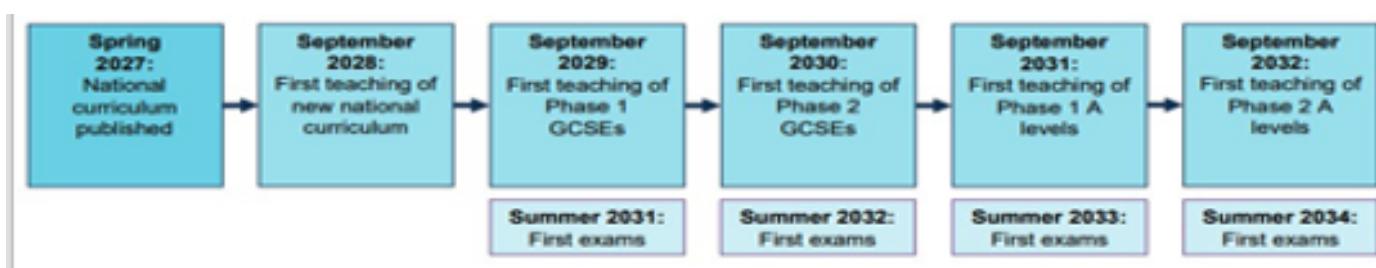
Arts & culture

Nature and outdoor activities Sport & physical activity

Life skills.

The government will publish a new set of 'enrichment benchmarks' with schools asked to ensure every child has access to activities across five categories of enrichment. Ofsted will consider how this expectation is being met, with information also made available to parents through school profiles.

Implementation timelines



Courses & Events

Details for out upcoming courses and events for this academic year are available on our website.

<https://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk/governor-cpd/>

Effective School Visits for Governors

Tuesday 13th January 2026. 5.30-7pm. Zoom

Finance for Governors

Tuesday 20th January 2026. 5.30pm-7pm.
Zoom

Employee Procedures and Hearings; the role of the Governor

Tuesday 27th January 2026. 5.30-7pm. Zoom

Handling Complaints for Governors

Thursday 5th February 2026. 5.30-7pm
Zoom

Clerks to Governors Forum

The next date for the Clerks to Governors Forums is Thursday 26th February 2026. 2-3pm.. Further details can be viewed here: <https://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk/clerks-to-governors-forum-topics/>





Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership



'Academies in Christ'
in the Archdiocese of Southwark



KCSP GOVERNANCE CONFERENCE 2026

JOIN US

17 MARCH 2026: ST SIMON STOCK CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, MAIDSTONE, ME16 0JP

Session 1: CSI Inspections, Catholic Education, and the updated Religious Education Directory (RED) - KCSP

Chair of the Trust Board Q&A

Session 2: Supporting disciplinary panels and the legal requirements - HR Connect

25 MARCH 2026: ST ANSELM'S CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, CANTERBURY, CT1 3EN

Session 1: SEND strategy and the changing landscape - KCSP

Chair of the Trust Board Q&A

Session 2: The new Ofsted framework and its implications for governance - NGA

Book your place [here](#) or via the QR code

