Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust

ODS 26.7

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Focus on Schools

By way of background to this item, there is a note from each of our diocesan Multi-Academy Trusts: from Sharon Mullins, CEO of Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust and from Sulina Piesse, CEO of Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust.

Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust

Background

Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST) was established in 2012 by the Diocese of Oxford and is now one of the largest trusts in the country by its number of schools. The trust continues to grow and currently consists of 43 schools and over 8000 pupils across the diocese within Oxfordshire and Berkshire. From July it will be joined by another three schools including its first 11-18 secondary school.
The trust supports and leads its schools using a hub model which enables a culture of peer support, shared leadership and professional development, ensuring that best practice is shared as part of how we work collaboratively together across schools.

How we support our schools

ODST has a well-established central team who are skilled and knowledgeable. We know our schools well and support them in the way that they need to continue to strengthen and improve for our children. Through regular school improvement and central team visits our schools are supported for education, development, finance, human resources, premises and governance.

This year we have further expanded our team to strengthen marketing support and ways to enhance and develop inclusion support within our schools for those pupils who have different needs.

ODST Ambition

Our next priorities reflect the next stage of the trust development with our strong commitment for our vision and values. We aim to deepen collaboration and ensure that every school and community it serves can flourish.

Our next strategic plan until 2029, will focus on a clear set of priorities centred on educational excellence, organisational sustainability and community impact.
Through our six goals we aim to -

- **Raise standards for all pupils** – improving attainment, attendance and inclusion, with a strong focus on closing gaps for disadvantaged learners.
- **Ensure sustainable and efficient schools** – strengthening financial planning, shared services, IT systems and support for small schools to secure long-term viability.
- **Invest in people** – prioritising staff wellbeing, professional development and leadership pathways to attract, retain and grow talent across the Trust.
- **Strengthen governance** – enhancing oversight, local governance models and partnership working to ensure effective leadership at every level.
- **Promote flourishing communities** – embedding inclusive, values-led education, strengthening church school distinctiveness and supporting our communities including vulnerable pupils and families.
- **Grow and strengthen our reputation** – expanding the Trust's reach, increasing collaboration, and positioning ODST as a recognised leader in education regionally and nationally.

A Reflection for Synod 2026

Sulina Piesse, CEO — Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust (ODBST)

The Church of England's schools remain one of its greatest acts of public service and one of its clearest expressions of mission. As Chief Executive Officer of the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust, I have the privilege of witnessing, each day, the dedication of school leaders, staff, clergy and governors who continue to serve children with compassion, despite the mounting pressures borne by schools and families across society. For many of those families, our schools have become the primary point of engagement with the Church.

The ODBST

Before turning to wider reflection, I would like to briefly outline what the ODBST looks like in practice. The Trust is now a substantial Church of England educational institution, serving thousands of children, families and staff across two local authority areas.

Established September 2017, by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education	**Schools** 15 academies in total: 14 of primary phase and one secondary (Chiltern Hills Academy)	**Region** Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes (the Buckingham episcopal area)	**Age range** 2 to 19 years, inclusive of new school-based nursery provision
Setting mix Rural, suburban and urban communities; voluntary aided and controlled, ecumenical, and former community schools	**Chief Executive** Sulina Piesse, formerly an Executive Headteacher, Principal and Ofsted Inspector	**Mission** Empower Lives and Flourish Together: life in all its fullness, for all	**Growth plan** Sustainable growth toward up to 30 schools, subject to demand and DfE permission

Outcomes, growth and impact

- **Performance** In the 2024/25 Buckinghamshire Primary school performance tables published by the Department for Education, two ODBST schools placed within the county's top six, and seven of the Trust's eleven eligible schools secured places within the top fifty. This represents striking consistency for a values-led Trust serving a wide range of communities.
- **School improvement School improvement.** The Downley joined the ODBST in September 2023 as a sponsored school, following an inadequate Ofsted judgement; Chenies School joined in December 2023, following a 'requires improvement' inspection; and Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School, previously placed in special measures as a maintained school, has since been judged 'Good' by Ofsted (November 2023) under the Trust's stewardship. The Trust has also welcomed Chiltern Hills Academy, an 11 to 19 Church of England secondary school in Chesham, bringing established secondary provision to the ODBST family.

- **Early years investment** Great Horwood CofE School opened its Seedlings Nursery and Preschool in October 2025, as part of the first wave of 300 school-based nurseries funded through the Government's School-based Nursery Capital Funding programme, offering 48-week care from 7:30am to 6pm.
- **Sustainability and stewardship of creation** The Trust hosts an annual ECO Conference for children across the family of schools, and St John's CofE Primary School in Lacey Green has installed a substantial array of solar panels and battery storage, providing a leading example of Christian stewardship lived out in practice.
- **Leadership and professional development** An annual Leadership Conference and a robust professional development programme underpin a 'school-to-school' improvement model, facilitated by a shared services team that includes former headteachers and a former lead Ofsted Inspector.

Priorities for Synod 2026

Looking toward Synod 2026, four priorities deserve our collective attention. First, the wellbeing of children and young people: across the ODBST family, the scale of mental health need is significant and growing, and the Church has an important voice in calling for compassionate, long-term support. Second, intentional investment in Christian leadership: the Trust places considerable weight on vocation, formation and moral responsibility, not merely on management and accountability. Third, the strengthening of partnership between schools and parishes; where these relationships are strong, ODBST communities flourish, as clergy, congregations and schools each enrich the spiritual and social life of the families they serve. Finally, the continued articulation of why Church schools matter: in a fragmented society, they offer spaces in which dignity, compassion, justice, reconciliation and hope are lived out daily.

My hope, as we approach Synod 2026, is that the Church will continue to place education at the heart of its mission and public witness. The Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust remains committed to serving children, families and communities with faith, excellence, partnership and hope.