

Our Whole-School Vision

The St Andrew's School vision isn't just a picture: it's the result of a long process, and this process is just as important as the (visual) result.

In June 2015, pupils, ex-pupils, parents, staff and governors collaborated with Oxford-based artist and graphic facilitator, Chris Shipton, to launch our school vision process. The school vision took a year of careful planning from conception to launch. Through an exploration of our values and visions, Chris Shipton supported St Andrew's create a more 'visual' vision in the form of a cartoon. The St Andrew's vision was launched against the backdrop of the school celebrating its community and creativity at its annual Summer Fair.

Graphic facilitation is an effective way of engaging lots of people; it is a democratic process, accessible to all. Graphic facilitation accepts that different people have different ways of approaching things – an approach which sits comfortably at St Andrew's. "The collaborative response of parents, pupils, community, teachers and governors is at the heart of this design. The visual representation of our values, principles and priorities captures the spirit of our school and clearly represents who we are and what we stand for. Everyone is different. Everyone is special" (Jude Bennett, Headteacher).

Since 2015, St Andrew's continues to be led by our motto 'Everyone is different. Everyone is special' and the values that underpin the Christian ethos of our school. Grounding our values in scripture and our vision within the bible, through the parable of the Good Samaritan, meant the verse 'Love your neighbour as yourself' became embedded with the school, as pupils -recognised as good citizens or good Samaritans -are celebrated and those embodying our values are recognised.

Through Covid years, the school had a large percentage of its children still in school, serving the community of many key workers. After lock-down, working towards seeing our full vision re-instated was key, as parents began to come back into the school, trips and enriching activities were re-established and the key role of a school within its community was revived.

Our whole school vision statement was consolidated, stating that:

We believe that 'Everyone is different. Everyone is special'. As Jesus taught us to love unconditionally, so we strive to nurture respect for all; to provide a rich and stimulating curriculum that considers the individual; and to care for the intellectual, social and spiritual well-being of our whole school community - encouraging positive engagement with the wider world, as affirmed through our school values and parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God ..." and, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Luke 10:27

With the change of leadership in September 2022, the vision was revisited, as it is every year by staff and pupils. Our vision is kept alive, not just as a 'visual' vision but in practice (as stated above): the underpinning values are explored each term through our collective worship and assemblies; good Samaritans are celebrated in our weekly celebration assembly as the pupils demonstrate how to 'love your neighbour as yourself'; staff and Governors strive to be examples of this too, working hard to help the school community flourish; Courageous advocacy is encouraged and opportunities provided within the local environment are taken up as the role within the community is explored. St Andrew's remains a vibrant, diverse community, living its vision to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Stages of the original visioning process:

The St Andrew's school vision is the result of a long dialogue, designed to ensure maximum engagement from governors, staff, parents and community.

Making plans: Any organisation's vision should be evident to anyone who visits the place: how they are greeted at Reception, how involved the domestic staff are, what the teachers are teaching, how effective the school council is, how the children present themselves. But in 2014, with a new head teacher in place, Mrs Jude Bennett, it was felt time to try to encapsulate who we are in a strong statement agreed and owned by the governing body, and linked to children's experience, attainment, progress, and preparation for life.

It was important that the vision reflected the whole school and encompassed all stakeholders' viewpoints. There is a lot of expertise around at St Andrew's: teachers know a lot about being teachers. Pupils know a lot about being pupils. Cooks know what really "fuels" learning. Ex-pupils know how the school has prepared them for transition to secondary school and the outside world.

A whole-school visioning evening was held (November 2014), to which a wide range of stakeholders were invited: governors, staff, pupils, parents, members of the community.

Asking questions: In order to involve even those who wouldn't be able to make the visioning event itself, a couple of questions related to the vision were included in the annual parent-view questionnaire:

- A school has many functions, academic and non-academic. What do you think are the most important outcomes for you and your family?
- What characteristics would you like your child to have developed at St Andrew's? What values and personal qualities would you like them to take with them to secondary school and, ultimately, into adulthood?

The responses to these questions showed that although parents thought academic attainment and progress were crucial, they also wanted their children to learn broader skills and values (such as how to develop good friendships, a love of learning, moral and ethical values, respect for others, tenacity, roots in the church or community). Another regular question in the questionnaire showed how much parents valued the wide range of enriching activities (such as music and sport) that are offered at St Andrew's.

Preparing for the visioning: After various discussions, it was concluded the best approach would be to unpack the school's well-loved motto "Everybody's different, everybody's special" and what that meant to us today.

This school motto dates back to 2006, when at a previous staff-governors meeting, governors and staff had suggested the school creed should be "We are a learning community where everyone is different and everyone is special". It was then discussed at School Council, and it was the pupils who re-worded it to its current, much snappier form.

The visioning event was publicised in the school newsletter and through put posters round the school in order to try to engage parents and the wider community.

In class work, pupils were encouraged to consider the school motto. With support from teachers, they started to understand the principle behind it and celebrate their differences. They framed examples in terms of “She’s better than me at that, but I’m better than her at this”. Some pupils were asked to write about what the school motto meant to them in literacy exercises.

In a training session, the staff discussed what the school motto meant to them and considered how it could shape their professional practice. They discussed ways in which the school’s motto could inform classroom management or translate into teaching. The outcome of this focus on the school motto was a deeper understanding of its relevance to the key stakeholder groups, in time for the visioning event itself.

The visioning event: November was the visioning event itself. The people who arrived had a variety of different connections to the school (staff, pupils, parents, ex-pupils, governors, members of the community, the vicar of St Andrew’s Church).

Chris Shipton brought simple cartoons to focus the exercises and placed them round the school hall. There were post-its, colouring pens, and sheets of card for people to draw on. The space of the school hall was used in a refreshingly different way: no rows of seats, just empty space, making for a very dynamic interaction.

After a warm-up exercise, groups used cartoons to show the thoughts, words and feelings of a stakeholder of our choice about the school motto (almost all groups chose a pupil). The groups presented their thoughts. In another exercise, the aim was to find out about the “personality” of our organisation: its values, attributes, relationships etc. The “values” were probed using simplified scenarios, which stemmed from real-life school situations. In a plenary, what was valued most about the school was celebrated.

Developing the drawing. The immediate outputs from the visioning evening were about 400MB-worth of drawings and post-it notes. Chris Shipton worked through all this material and transformed it into a rough drawing with a distinctive community feel.

Some of the abstract words that had been used to describe the school at the visioning (welcoming, inclusive, diverse) had made it as little cartoons, as had some of the activities that the school holds dear (enriching school trips, dance etc). A section portraying the Oxford museums and local landmarks underlined our roots in the Oxford and Headington communities.

The chair of governors advised Chris to integrate the school’s aims, mission and values (friendship, trust, forgiveness, hope, justice). These values had been elected by parents, and form part of our RE teaching (one value per term). The result was a very busy image, conveying the complexity of a very busy school.

This rough cartoon was presented to Full Governing Body for feedback. Governors felt the image contained a good balance of words and images, and they were pleased that it was people-centred and not too abstract. They made comments and suggestions and asked for small changes to detail.

The result was a more final version of the cartoon, which was submitted for final sign-off. This final sign-off process incorporated a second viewing by the governing body and comments from the school’s senior leadership team, who requested a couple of further refinements. These were duly made, and the result was the image that you now see.

