



AVANTI SCHOOLS TRUST

Ethos Handbook

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Ethos Handbook

Introduction

This guidance document aims to:

- ensure that the unique ethos of the Avanti Schools Trust (hereafter the “Trust”) is understood, upheld and not compromised.
- be a resource for relevant parties in carrying out their role and responsibilities in relation to the ethos of the Trust.
- ensure there is consistency between the ethos and the activities of the persons and bodies that represent the Trust.
- give guidance and clarity so that everyone in our school communities can feel welcomed and included; that there is a good understanding of the faith-influenced ethos.

Target Audience

The intended target audience for this document includes, but is not limited to, Trust schools, staff, SSC’s, PTA’s and any other body that represents the Trust or its schools (hereafter the “stakeholders”).

Parts of this document will also be relevant to other persons such as volunteers, suppliers and visitors.

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to familiarise themselves with this document and adhere closely to the principles and procedures laid out herein.

When in doubt about the practical application of this document, ask. Stakeholders are encouraged to seek guidance from the Trust if there is ambiguity about a particular situation or any of the content in this document.

Stakeholders should always be mindful to promote and uphold the ethos of the Trust. This is especially important during pupil interactions to ensure consistency and integrity of message for the young people in our care; where they can see that the ethos is for everyone and not just for them. If a stakeholder(s) has a personal view that is different to the Trust’s ethos (e.g. vegetarianism), he/she/they should be mindful to refer to the Trust’s ethos in the first instance. If the stakeholder does then go on to present a personal view that is contrary to the Trust’s, (s)he should make clear that it is their personal view being presented. They should also refer the pupil to an appropriate person who can represent the Trust’s ethos – this may be the Principal or another Senior Leader within the school.

Designated Faith

All schools which are part of the Trust family are designated as Hindu faith schools.

Specifically, the Trust follows the teachings of Krishna Chaitanya and promotes an inclusive, accessible approach towards spirituality.

The DfE recognised religious authority for the Trust is iFoundation (the equivalent of a Church of England Diocesan authority). iFoundation draws upon the teachings of Krishna Chaitanya, as practised by ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

iFoundation is authorised to carry out Section 48 inspections under the Education Act 2005.

Section 48 inspections provide a process for evaluating the extent to which Trust schools are distinctively and recognisably applying the faith principles of the Trust.

Ethos Statement Introduction

All schools in the Avanti Schools Trust prepare pupils for their respective life-journeys by promoting educational excellence, character formation and spiritual insight.

Educational Excellence

An emphasis on independent thought and personal choice fans every pupil's innate and emerging passion for learning. Our personalised approach provides tailor-made learning paths for all pupils. This motivates and enables all pupils to become reflective, articulate and independent thinkers, laying solid foundations for their future learning, vocation and self-fulfilment. Our approach is characterised by a mentorship and academic support system that is delivered in close partnership with parents.

Character Formation

Trust schools prepare pupils to take their places as loyal, responsible and broad-minded British citizens. Our ethos acknowledges that personal virtue, responsibility and a wholesome sense of identity underpin success in all endeavours. It nurtures conduct consistent with the universal virtues of respect, integrity, courage, empathy, gratitude and self-discipline. Trust schools promote holistic, responsible lifestyles through a vegetarian diet, a curriculum that integrates yoga and meditation and a built environment that actively fosters environmental concern.

Spiritual Insight

The development of spiritual insight is at the heart of the curriculum and draws on the teachings of Krishna Chaitanya, which embrace a universal, inclusive approach to

spirituality, aimed at rekindling a personal, loving and spontaneous relationship with the divine (Krishna). The curriculum offers opportunities to explore the philosophies and traditions of different faiths. Collective Worship includes the following practices: kirtan¹, meditation², worship³, reflection, song, prayer, and story-telling⁴.

How we achieve our Ethos

Educational excellence will be achieved through:

- Happy and fulfilled learners and teachers.
- Highly-skilled and actively engaged leadership and governance, dedicated to continuous improvement and to realisation of the school's distinctive vision and ethos.
- A broad and challenging curriculum focused on core skills and subjects.
- Continuous development of the professional knowledge and skill of all staff, and adequate respect for their professional discretion and integrity.
- Staff with high expectations, convinced that every child is both uniquely gifted and has identifiable areas for improvement.
- Personalised targets and learning paths for all pupils, supported by thorough, learner- focussed mentorship and effective ICT systems.
- Provision of subject and qualification choice, ensuring that each learner maximises his or her talents and never becomes lost.
- Provision of a broad, flexible and challenging curriculum that allows students to develop in the direction best suited to them, at their own pace, and which promotes realisation of their full potential.
- Curriculum that includes a focus on ethics, philosophy, the creative and performing arts, and valuable cultures of ancient and contemporary civilizations.
- Values-based approach to the humanities and its emphasis on the artistic and spiritual realms.
- The study of Sanskrit⁵ as the root of almost all eastern and western languages.
- Progress-tracking using rigorous intra-year staff assessment, self and peer assessment, formative assessment, detailed reporting, and – as needed – early intervention and support classes.

- Lessons designed to be relevant to students' lives, to develop learning and questioning skills, and to deepen motivation, understanding and personal insight.
- Partnerships with universities, links with businesses, and opportunities for apprenticeships and work-related learning.
- Sincere and committed engagement of parents (and other family members) as co-educators.

Character formation will be achieved through:

- A curriculum that challenges students to reflect, think for themselves, explore the links between character and conduct, develop moral literacy and make their own well-informed lifestyle choices.
- Empowerment of students to empathise with others and to deeply reflect on their own choices and their social and personal impacts.
- Dedication to community cohesion, especially through service to the community and active partnership with other social, charity and community-based groups.
- Encouraging students to adopt conscientious and balanced lifestyles, underpinned by a sense of stewardship and an innate reverence for life, nature and the earth's resources.
- Provision of classes in yoga and meditation, and a vegetarian diet that is healthy and freshly cooked.
- Clean, uncluttered and sustainable learning environments that support the school's emphasis on mindfulness.
- Working collaboratively with the wider community, especially partner public agencies.
- Visits to diverse sacred places and educational venues.
- A broad offering of competitive and non-competitive sports, both within the curriculum and as extra-curricular opportunities.
- Opportunities for developing leadership, team building and personal integrity through partnerships with other organisations.
- Dedication to leadership at every level and nurture of students' voice and involvement, up to Governance level.

Sanskrit is as close as we can get to an essential language and contains divine concepts, a flawless system of grammar and gives access to the great eastern texts such as the Bhagavad Gita.

Spiritual insight will be achieved through:

- Positive and uplifting experiences of RE and Collective Worship.
- The singing of the names of the divine, with special but not exclusive focus on Krishna.
- Opportunities for self-discovery and spiritual exploration.
- Effective pastoral care that supports each student's personal, emotional and spiritual journey.
- Dedication to working in partnership with other faith schools/organisations to provide students an authentic experience of diverse spiritual traditions.
- Recognition that all of the world's great spiritual traditions represent the divinity in their distinctive ways.
- Authentic understanding of the worldviews underpinning various manifestations of religion and spirituality, with stress on their shared essence: a loving reciprocal and personal relationship with the divine.
- Exploration of faith and spirituality across different traditions in a probing and dialogic manner, with constructive critique of practices, philosophies and epistemologies to promote honest and empathetic dialogue.
- Encouragement of students to develop a broad-minded perspective by acknowledging the key roles of free choice, fidelity to tradition and exemplary role models.
- The warm and welcoming enrolment of young people from all backgrounds.
- Preparation of students to make up their own minds on issues of faith and belonging, religious and otherwise.⁶
- Rekindling of an awareness of an essential spiritual identity that unites all living beings, transcending all designations related to age, race, gender, species, faith affiliation and ability.
- This element of the school's work will become increasingly more sophisticated as the pupils grow in experience and maturity, but it will be an entitlement for all.

Krishna Chaitanya

Chaitanya was born in 1486 in Nadiya, then East India's epicentre for learning and scholarship. At an early age he founded what quickly became the region's foremost school, widely renowned for its teaching in logic, grammar and rhetoric. He went on to lead an early civil disobedience movement, contesting religious sectarianism. In later life, he turned his attention to spiritual ideals that transcended social and religious boundaries and thus paved the way for a great spiritual renaissance. He taught that the essence of education is to appreciate how everything has a special relationship with the divine and that such an understanding culminates in a profound spiritual realisation of love, compassion and selflessness – the original, pure nature of every being. He emphasised spiritual equality and advocated that humanity can be united through a shared love of God, expressed through the singing of God's many names. Chaitanya's exemplary life heralded the dawn of an inclusive spiritual resurgence that continues to inspire people from all faiths.

Further information on the key philosophical tenets of the Chaitanya tradition will be provided at schools induction and/or training days, and further details of its application at Trust schools will be provided as and when required.

For those who are keen to understand more on the philosophical tenets of the Chaitanya tradition please contact Nitesh Gor at the Trust office on 0208 731 1454.

Collective Worship

Once established in their final building location, all Trust schools will follow, without compromise, the agreed daily Collective Worship model, where all elements of worship are linked to learning.

Staff will participate in Collective Worship unless agreed otherwise by the Principal. Collective Worship will normally take place daily, either in a school hall, a shrine area and/or in the classroom.

The school should ensure that any requests for opting out of CW are in writing and signed by the parent(s). Pupils who are opting-out should be appropriately and meaningfully engaged during this time.

Where a request is made directly from the parent/child to an individual or representative body, they should be encouraged to discuss their concerns with the Principal.

Vegetarianism, Intoxication, Gambling and Sensuality

A lacto-vegetarian diet (which means no meat/fish/eggs or their derivatives) is a core part of the Trust's belief, and in our Ethos Statement we stress the importance of compassion for

other living beings and an awareness of our ecological impact on the world. According to the teachings of Krishna Chaitanya there are also faith-related requirements of no onion, garlic or mushrooms.

Refraining from alcohol and gambling are principles from the teachings of Chaitanya and are described as 'principles of freedom', and are aimed at encouraging individuals to live free from potentially harmful habits. There are also of course clear safeguarding concerns around the mixing of alcohol and children. Smoking is not permitted anywhere within a school premises or perimeter (including cars in the car park areas).

Where staff, individuals or representative bodies bring food/drink onto a school or other Trust premises, they should respect the dietary guidance above. The guidance around meat/fish/eggs must be strictly observed; whereas onion/garlic/mushroom should be avoided if possible and if unavoidable, included only where the food is for personal consumption.

Where food is to be shared with other stakeholders, or with children, individuals should be aware of the risk of excluding colleagues/children if it does contain onion/garlic/mushrooms.

This guidance also extends to school events, school trips, all lettings and external events officially organised by the school, staff or a representative body of AST (including PTA's). Where an event is hosted on-site the food must not contain onion, garlic or mushrooms. It should also be noted that the presence of alcohol or meat would unfairly exclude some families and staff of the school community.

Another principle of the Trust is aimed at ensuring that our children and school communities are not exposed to inappropriate/overly sensualised images, musical lyrics, styles of dance etc. Representative Parties should be aware of this when in the classroom and in internal/external events.

Schools are Sacred Places

Schools are sacred places, no less than places of worship. Event and class content, particularly where it is on-site and for entertainment purposes, should be fit for the spiritually sacred place that every school should be.

Dress code for all should be modest and appropriate. This is also relevant to external events organised by the school or a representative body.

Shoes are not to be worn in the specified shrine area and general atmosphere of respect should be maintained at all times. Areas in immediate proximity to the shrine can be used as a teaching space; if unsure about the nature of the activity to be conducted there, please ask.

Diversity and Inclusivity

The Trust's faith perspective acknowledges the Divine in everyone's heart. Adults must create a fair, positive, emotionally safe and spiritual atmosphere where a service attitude encompasses care and consideration for everybody regardless of religion, status, race, age, gender, and all other protected characteristics. It is imperative to see everyone with equanimity and to respect all living beings.

The Trust's ethos is an inclusive one and as such, the activities of the representative persons and bodies need to be sensitive to the risk of inadvertently excluding children, parents, SSC members or staff.

This guidance does not wish to infringe upon personal lifestyle choices. For example, Trust schools serve vegetarian lunches but do not insist upon vegetarianism at home.