



TUTORIAL

Understand how schools uphold their aims and values

For a school to understand its purpose, values and priorities in terms of the way it educates and caters for the well-being of its students, it must begin by creating a mission statement. This lays down in writing the school's reasons for existing and its overall goals. As part of this statement, or as separate written statements, the school will also define several other aspects of its identity.

The school's ethos is its characteristic manner or spirit. This provides a background or context in which education and student support is delivered. For example, a school may decide that part of its mission is to particularly help gifted and talented children. Therefore it may develop an ethos where challenging learning is embraced and enjoyed, where academic successes are celebrated, and where teachers inspire and stretch gifted and talented children's abilities whilst supporting their needs for praise and recognition. This ethos will create the background and the right sort of learning environment for gifted and talented children to thrive, and so it helps the school achieve its mission.

Underpinning the school's ethos will be a core set of values. These are the beliefs the school holds which influence the way it delivers learning.

In some ways, a school is just like a person. A person may have certain goals for their life; so does a school, it will write them down in its mission statement. The person also has a character; they may be particularly honest and trustworthy or perhaps an extremely positive person, and they may be particularly interested in certain specific subjects or topics. This is like the school's ethos. And in just the same way as a person has beliefs and values which influence the way that person behaves, so too does a school. A person may believe that being late is rude and does not show respect for the other people you are meeting. As a result that person will strive to always be on time for meetings, and will also expect the same from others. In the same way a school may hold the value that everybody should contribute towards keeping the planet safe for the next generation of children. As a result perhaps the school involves students in its environmentally friendly schemes such as recycling, or investigating the possibility of having solar panels to provide green energy.

The school is also likely to have a written set of aims. The mission statement will already set out the overall aim or purpose of the school, but in the set of aims, the school will break down in a more detailed way exactly what it is hoping to achieve, or targets for the steps it will take to get there. So, for example, in our school that wanted to help gifted and talented children, the more detailed aims might include:

- To become the school of choice for gifted and talented pupils in the local area.
- To cultivate a positive attitude among students towards high academic achievement.
- To provide specific classes for gifted and talented pupils which stretch their abilities.
- To ensure that gifted and talented pupils are stretched whilst remaining fully integrated with other students and the life of the school.

The school's mission, ethos and values give others an idea of what the school stands for, and what students can expect if they attend. They can also provide guidance when staff are unsure how to make a particular decision. They combine to help the school maintain its direction and to work steadily towards its goals. In this way it is easy to see that they are very important indeed.