

YORK DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION



A brief guide to the role of Foundation Governors in Voluntary Controlled Schools

ETHOS STATEMENT FOR CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS

'Recognising its historic foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church of England and in partnership with the Church at parish and diocesan level.'

'The school aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith, and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to all its pupils.'

Church schools have a particular role to play in the promotion of community cohesion both within the school and also in working with the parish to reach out to the wider community that it serves.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH SCHOOLS?

Lord Runcie once said that the purpose of Church schools is *'to nourish Christians in their faith, encourage those of other faiths, and challenge those of no faith'*. In its Resolution of 1998, General Synod stated that, *'Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'*. In its ensuing report, *'The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the new millennium'*, we are reminded that: *'no Church school can be considered as part of the Church's mission unless it is distinctively Christian'* and that their *'purpose is to offer a spiritual dimension to the lives of young people, within the traditions of the Church of England, in an increasingly secular world'*.

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH SCHOOL DISTINCTIVE AND DIFFERENT?

Whilst every school is distinctive and different in some ways, the question of distinctiveness is frequently asked with reference to Church schools. In *Excellence and distinctiveness*, it states that 'an important element in the distinctiveness of Church Schools will lie in the emphasis on the quality of religious education in the curriculum, which whilst covering other faiths will give particular weight to the Christian faith as held by the Church of England'. But Church schools should also be distinctive in their Collective Worship, their ethos, and the ways in which their distinctively Christian values are outworked in the daily life of the school. Some of the ways in which this might be seen, although the list is by no means exhaustive or exclusive, might include:

- A place of distinctive excellence where all are valued as individuals and as God's children;
- A safe place where there is no ideological pressure and yet Christian inferences are built into the ethos and the teaching;
- Understanding of and sensitivity towards those of other faiths and those of no faith;
- Effective links with the local Church, Diocese and local community;
- A deliberate attempt to link the concerns of Christ's Gospel with the life of the school;
- Visible signs and symbols of its Christian foundation around the school;
- Enduring values and relationships in which selfless care and Christian love are apparent to all;
- A place where learning and the acquiring of skills are seen as a part of the revelation of God and His continuous involvement in His creation;
- Collective worship that develops a true sense of awe and wonder, follows the liturgical year, and celebrates with the parish significant Christian festivals and feast days;
- Religious education that is seen as an important part of the curriculum;

- A commitment to developing the spiritual dimension both in the formal and the hidden curriculum;
- A place that takes the views of all the members of its community seriously and where the voice of the weakest is heard.

A good school is both reflective and evaluative, willing to challenge itself with the help of critical friends such as governors. *An effective church school extends these processes to include the development of the spiritual dimension.* Foundation governors have a particular role to play in this aspect of the school's management and governance.

THE TASK OF FOUNDATION GOVERNORS

All governors share the same responsibilities for the school: 'first and foremost to provide the best possible environment for children's learning and development, maintain and improve the standards of the school, respect and involve its parents, provide good governance and value for money'. (Joan Sallis 2006 NCC)

The key function of foundation governors is to 'explore, with their partners on the Governing Body, ways in which the Church's role in the school may be more fully and positively implemented'. (National Society 1996)

Foundation governors are the representatives of the Church of England on the Governing Body. Their task, on behalf of the Church, is to ensure that the Christian foundation of the school is upheld by endeavouring to cultivate respect for the spiritual and moral beliefs of the Christian tradition and by seeking to create a community in which pupils, cared for as individuals, are helped to find fulfilment as they grow towards adulthood within the context of the multi-faith society present in the UK today. Foundation governors can best serve this community by their active involvement in all aspects of the life and work of the school, not being afraid to remind the Governing Body of the Church's role and seeking ways of strengthening it. As an active Christian presence within the school they are a vital link between parish and school, playing a unique role in strengthening and enriching the dynamic relationship between school, church and the wider community.

It is helpful if foundation governors are aware of the contents of school's trust deed and of the criteria provided in the National Society's 'Self-evaluation Toolkit' for church schools (www.natsoc.org.uk) and 'Excellence and Distinctiveness', the York Diocesan Guidance for RE in Church schools (www.dioceseofyork.org.uk).

YOUR ROLE AS A FOUNDATION GOVERNOR OF A VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED CHURCH SCHOOL IS TO:

- Ensure that the school's **ethos** statement makes its Church connection clear so that Christian values inform the life of the school and are always evident in the attitudes and relationships of governors, staff and pupils.
- Work with your fellow governors and staff colleagues to set clear **aims and objectives** for the school that will promote high standards and a positive environment for learning and personal growth.
- Ensure that school **policies** clearly reflect Gospel values and legal requirements. (Guidelines or toolkits for key policies are available on the diocesan website.)
- Encourage the inclusion of **prayer** at Governing Body meetings.
- Encourage the **appointment** of good teachers and support staff who are well-qualified and excellent practitioners, are aware of the Christian ethos of the school and willing to support it.
- Ensure that **headteacher candidates** are asked to 'demonstrate their ability and fitness to sustain and develop the religious character of the school'.
- Ensure that new Heads have access to effective external **support**.
- Encourage senior staff to develop their **professional understanding** of the ways in which they exercise leadership in a Christian school.
- Promote quality in **Collective Worship** and in the **Religious Education** provided by the school. (These aspects are inspected under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 – Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS)).
- Ensure the provision of **denominational RE** where this has been requested by parents and approve the appointment of **reserved teachers** (most appropriately the RE co-ordinator in primary schools) for this purpose.
- Report to the **PCC and congregation** about the work of the school, encouraging parishioners to support it prayerfully and financially.
- Be prepared to present the **Diocesan Board of Education's** views to the Governing Body on any matter.

WHEN TO CONTACT THE DIOCESE

- If the school is holding a major event or is celebrating a success in which the diocese could be involved!
- If a vacancy for a Headteacher or Deputy Head occurs at the school - in order that the Diocesan Education Team may assist the Governing Body with advice about, and support for, the recruitment process.
- If there are plans to alter or extend school buildings.
- If you have serious concerns about aspects of the school or its governance which you need to share.