

SALISBURY DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

CHURCH SCHOOLS IN SALISBURY DIOCESE

BEING AN EX-OFFICIO GOVERNOR

The Church school offers a distinctive language for understanding life and interpreting human experience. As a community of faith, the Church school should, in its best expression, reflect the nature of the Trinity, a life shared and defined by reference to others. Here we can begin to discover who we are, why we are, and – perhaps most importantly – what we might be. The Way ahead: Church of England Schools in the new Millennium (The Dearing Report). Church House Publishing 2001.

Introduction.

All Church Voluntary schools have Foundation Governors. These are normally appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) in consultation with the local PCC. One of these Foundation Governors is always identified as the ex-officio governor. There is a legal and ecclesiastical expectation that the parish priest should assume this role unless there are particular reasons against – see below.

The Foundation Governors of a **Voluntary Aided** school form a majority group; their number must always exceed the total of the other governors. This is because of the nature of the legal ownership of the Aided school. The foundation governors are responsible for ensuring that the school lives up to its original purposes as set out in its Trust Deed. They are also responsible for ensuring that religious education and worship take place in accordance with ‘the doctrines and principles of the Church of England’. These responsibilities are scrutinised by OfSTED within the framework of the Section 48 Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS), which looks specifically at the ways in which the Voluntary school fulfils its distinctive role.

In a **Voluntary Controlled** school, the Foundation Governors form a minority group, but they have similar responsibilities to those outlined above in regard to worship and RE. The ex-officio governor can be a crucial figure in enabling the foundation governors to influence school development here, despite their limited voting power.

What does being an ex-officio governor involve?

As parish priest – or his/her representative – you have a particular leadership role within the foundation group.

- You set the framework within which the school and church will work together in the community.
- Through your leadership of acts of worship for the school, both in church and in school, you will establish a relationship which expresses the parish’s Christian commitment as well as your own.
- You have a monitoring role as a governor, but with particular reference to the school’s fulfilment of its Foundation mission as outlined above.

- As the person who would normally open each meeting of the Governing Body with prayer, you set the tone for that meeting and for the way in which the governors are reminded of their school's Christian foundation and all that that means.
- Your relationship with the Headteacher will be pivotal to the school's development as a Christian community.
- You will be responsible for developing the parish's relationship with its school, helping it towards a fuller understanding of how church and school form a powerful Christian partnership.
- You will be instrumental in calling out and supporting lay vocations in governorship, classroom support and teaching; and especially in developing the Headteacher's lay ministry.
- The Diocesan Director of Education may well seek your advice and guidance over sensitive issues relating to the school.

How much time will this take?

There are no rules. The school will absorb as much of your ministry as you are prepared to give to it. The Church believes the Church school should '*stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation*' (Dearing). Much will depend on your estimation of the importance of the school to your ministry as a whole. Points to bear in mind:

- Resist all encouragement to become Chair of Governors. This is a difficult role for the parish priest to perform especially in times of trouble for the school. It is also extremely time-consuming.
- If at all possible, do not sit on more than one Governing Body. This can be difficult in multi-parish benefices.
- Governors' meetings, especially committee work, will occupy on average at least one hour per week in term time – maybe more.
- Establish a clear pattern of visits, perhaps based around your Worship sessions, which can incorporate a pastoral meeting with the staff over coffee, a chat with the Head, or a classroom visit, fulfilling both your pastoral and monitoring roles appropriately.
- Make sure that the school understands your pastoral role with them as an important part of your parish community.
- Ensure that your fellow foundation governors are pulling their weight in visits to and involvement with the school in the name of the church.
- Seek ways of engaging other members of the ministry team, and of other denominations, without losing your sense of identification with 'your' school.

What might come my way as ex-officio governor?

- Be prepared to act as a member of any Appeals or Grievance panel. You will be perceived as an ideal candidate by virtue of your calling!
- You will be involved in staff appointments, ensuring that the school is concerned to maintain its Christian ethos through the staff it appoints. The appointment of a new Headteacher will be a time of particular importance. You will almost certainly need to allocate substantial amounts of time to shortlisting and interviewing.
- All the unplanned aspects of your pastoral ministry will be present in the school. Bereavement; personal crisis; controversy; accident; celebration; the school should

see itself as an integral part of your parish and will expect you to be alongside as you would for any other family in the community. You will need to exercise your priestly discretion, and to maintain 'Chinese walls' when dealing with some issues.

- There is a growing interest in the school as a baptising, confirming community, and as one which celebrates the Eucharist. This will require sensitive preparation on your part but can be immensely rewarding.

What might prevent me from being ex-officio governor?

- Although the position is yours by right, you can decline it. Unless the circumstances are very unusual, however, this would be an extraordinary decision for an incumbent to adopt.
- In multi-parish benefices, it is only too easy to find yourself serving more than one school as ex-officio governor. We strongly advise against accepting this role in more than one school.
- The Archdeacon appoints the ex-officio governor. This normally takes place as part of the legal rights and responsibilities of the incumbent at institution or induction. However, the Archdeacon can appoint a suitable lay person (or another member of the ministry team) to act as ex-officio under some circumstances.
- Until very recently, it was impossible for an ex-officio governor to be removed from office other than by voluntary agreement. New regulations permit the governing body to request the Archdeacon to remove the ex-officio governor and to provide a replacement.

What help is available?

- The Diocesan Director and his staff are always ready to give advice, help and training, and are in regular contact with the Church schools in the diocese.
- The Archdeacon receives a termly briefing from the Director on all the Church schools in his Archdeaconry, and is familiar with most of the key issues of Church school leadership and governance.
- The relationship between church and school at parish level forms a part of CME training, generally led by DBE staff.
- The DBE website, www.salisbury.anglican.org is regularly updated.
- The Dearing Report remains the best and most accessible introduction to the place of the Church school in Anglican thinking. Please contact the DBE for details.

What's my responsibility for non-Church schools on my patch?

All schools within your parish or benefice form a part of your parochial ministry. Although it should be easier to establish a working relationship with church schools, there is excellent work going on within community schools through the interventions of the local ministry team. This is especially true of the local secondary school, which is unlikely to be a Church foundation but which should welcome your support for its work with adolescents – an area which the diocese has identified as particularly important for deaneries and parishes.

You could well find yourself invited to join the governing body of a community school. This will require some evaluation of commitments, but also consideration of the most effective ways in which you can offer support to all the schools in your care. To become a governor of your local community secondary school could add a very valuable dimension to your ministry – but it would need to be weighed against your existing commitments to your church school(s). The Board is always ready to offer advice.

Conclusion.

I hope you are looking forward to your work as ex-officio governor. A fruitful relationship between Church, school and parish can be one of the most rewarding parts of your parish ministry. The Dearing Report reminds us that *‘Church schools are not an add-on, but integral to the life of the parishes.’* Viewed from a purely practical perspective, the school can bring you into contact with more families more easily than many other pastoral activities you might undertake. But above all, you will set the tone and the pace for the relationship which grows within the parish between its constituents, of which the Church school is such an important one. The Diocesan Board is always ready to help and advise, either through one of staff members or via its website, www.salisbury.anglican.org. I attach a staff list and structure diagram which may be helpful.

May God prosper your work with the schools in your care. Our prayers and good wishes go with you.