

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD**12 MARCH 2016****DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION - LOOKING TO THE FUTURE****(A) A vision for church schools**

This paper is presented at a time of great educational change and challenge, where the Diocese of St Albans has a golden opportunity to re-shape its involvement in statutory education for the next 25-50 years.

Church schools in the Diocese of St Albans have much to celebrate. Standards are high, with the percentage of good and outstanding schools consistently outperforming national averages. Diocesan schools are distinctively Christian, community-focussed and serve the common good, with the vast majority achieving good or outstanding SIAMS inspection judgements. There is within the Board of Education a clear vision, commitment and passion to create, sustain and develop vibrant Christian learning communities in Barnet, Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Within this vision it is recognised that church schools are at the heart of the diocese's mission and an expression of the Church of England's presence in local communities. The provision of statutory education across the Diocese of St Albans and its 136 schools is a gift offered by the Church for the common good, as an act of service and an expression of the love of Christ. It benefits over 28,000 children a year who are educated in our schools. Through strong partnerships with local parishes, these children and young people have the opportunity to learn and experience what it means to be part of a community that is orientated towards the person of Jesus Christ.

In celebrating the continued success of its schools, where 88.2% are good or outstanding, the Board of Education recognises that to maintain high standards and to ensure the Christian distinctiveness of its schools, change is required. In implementing these changes the diocese as a whole will require generosity, imagination and courage if together we are to maintain and enhance the contribution church schools make to the lives of the 28,500 children they serve.

(B) National Context**1 Academisation of Schools**

It is now the declared government policy that in due course all schools should become academies and free of Local Authority control. Current government policy is that schools can no longer become a stand-alone academy but must become part of a multi-academy trust. In the case of Church of England schools the conversion of a school to become an Academy is covered by education and charitable law; a Memorandum of Understanding is in place to ensure that church schools join MATs that have the capacity to support and develop the Christian ethos of the school. In practice this means that church schools should join MATs with church majority governance. There are currently no local, school-led, Church of England majority Multi-Academy Trusts within the Diocese.

2 The Education and Adoption Bill

The Education and Adoption Bill which will be enacted in April of 2016 will enforce the conversion of failing schools to become Academies. The presumption of consent

from interested parties (ie site trustees) has been removed and the Regional Schools Commissioner will have the responsibility of placing such schools with local Multi-Academy Trusts. Again, the expectation is that failing church schools will be placed in Church of England Multi-Academy Trusts. The Education and Adoption Bill therefore provides the Diocese with a potential opportunity to promote actively the establishment of vibrant, high quality Church of England Multi Academy Trusts able to support schools if they find themselves in difficulty.

3 The decline of Local Authorities

The declining role of LAs continues to place increasing demands on the Board, especially in relation to schools causing concern. The Board currently works with six local authorities, three of which continue to exist as traditional local authorities, whilst Central Bedfordshire Council only offers commissioned support to schools causing concern. Currently the Board supports the delivery of RE training to all Bedfordshire schools and the Service Level Agreement provides significant support to school leaders and church schools causing concern across the diocese.

4 Challenges

The introduction of Academies and Free Schools, the debate about British Values, religious extremism, the opportunities to develop new schools, and changes to the teaching of Religious Education are all areas where the Board has had to make quick, incisive decisions to maintain the standard of education across the diocese. A current example with which the Board is working is the Education and Adoption Bill.

(C) Diocesan Context

- 1 The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is unique amongst diocesan boards in that its purpose is outlined in an Act of Parliament: the Diocesan Board of Education Measure 1991. This measure defines the work of the Board as being primarily *to promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese, being education which is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England.*
- 2 The work of the Board is primarily funded from interest accrued on the Consolidated Fund for Statutory Education (CFSE), a fund that comprises largely the receipts of S554 orders which control the use of the proceeds from the sale of closed church schools. The Board receives a small subvention from the Diocesan Board of Finance of £10,000 per year (approx 2.57% of its total budget), a grant from the Hockerill Educational Foundation, income from the DBE Service Level Agreement (SLA) and fees for administering government-funded LCVAP building projects.
- 3 The DBE's work is multi-faceted and complex. It is required to interface with diocesan teams, parishes, the National Society, schools, local authorities and national government. Much of the work the DBE undertakes in supporting its schools is controlled by national education policy and externally regulated, statutory frameworks which are subject to change on a regular, if not annual, basis. Both the Ofsted Framework and the SIAMS Framework have been significantly revised in recent years.
- 4 The DBE has an excellent track record of promoting education which, in the words of the Measure, *is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England.* We are the top performer in the region with 88.9% of our primary schools being judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted. We have a talented team, strong leadership and strong parish/school partnerships. There is, of course, always room for improvement, but the record is good. This has been achieved by hard work, high quality engagement with schools and a readiness to respond to the changing educational context.

- 5 As of September 2015 the Diocese of St Albans had 19.25% of schools with fewer than 90 pupils, and 46% with fewer than 150 pupils. 60% of our pupils are educated in a primary school of one form of entry or less. Ofsted states that 263 pupils is the average size for a primary school in England.

(D) Translating Vision into Policy and Practice

To implement its vision and maintain and develop new schools that are distinctively Christian, Community-Focussed and Serve the Common Good, the Board of Education needs to be able to respond quickly and effectively to a fast-changing educational environment, translating vision into policy and practice.

Working within a complex context as outlined above, the Board is facing a number of immediate challenges as it plans for the future. As indicated, action is required to ensure that the Board of Education has the capacity to maintain and enhance educational provision across the diocese.

Examples of areas the Board is currently working to translate vision into policy and practice include:

Distinctively Christian

The Board of Education remains committed to supporting its schools to be distinctively Christian. It is the Board's conviction that being a distinctive Christian school impacts on every area of school life. In the Diocese of St Albans this is often worked out through an explicit set of lived Christian values and virtues that are adopted and accepted by the whole school community.

Church schools across the diocese strive for academic excellence and high standards but are not defined by this alone. Through an enriched curriculum they offer an education for all, characterised not only by academic excellence but also by enabling all pupils to flourish as individuals and as members of the wider community.

In maintaining this emphasis on Christian values and the promotion of human flourishing, both individual and communal, the Board needs the ability to maintain majority governance arrangements across its schools (especially those which are Voluntary Aided) where schools express a preference to become an academy and join a Multi-Academy Trust. This will require the Board to promote and support the establishment of a variety of academy solutions including local, school-led, Church of England majority governed Multi-Academy Trusts.

Community-focussed

Within the educational context the definition of community is being re-defined. The dual system of Local Authority and Voluntary Controlled or Aided schools is now rapidly being replaced by a system of single Academies or clusters of Academies joined together in Multi-Academy Trusts, which are independent of local government control.

One of the strengths of schools in the Diocese of St Albans is the sense of community, of belonging, which exists across our 136 schools. To maintain this sense of community and the Christian ethos and values that underpin it, the Board of Education now requires the ability to promote and establish a range of Church of England Academy solutions which enable our schools to remain distinctively Christian and community-focussed. One such solution is the formation of a Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust which has the capacity to support schools in difficulties and to enable the DBE to open new church schools. This would sit alongside a range of local school-led Church of England Multi-Academy Trusts.

Serving the common good

In articulating a vision for church schools in the Diocese of St Albans the Board of Education acknowledges that the creation of many of its schools was rooted in a commitment to serve the common good. Church schools across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Luton and Barnet are still to be found in the centre of their communities, offering an education for all, infused with Christian values. The next 20 years will see an explosion of housing development in our diocese. In serving the common good the Board of Education is committed to establishing schools in new housing developments, continuing the vision that saw church schools established in the mid-19th Century. To achieve this vision the diocese needs to establish the means to sponsor new schools which will be Free Schools or Academies. The proposed Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust would provide the DBE with the means of furthering one of its key aims; the establishment of new church schools within emerging housing developments.

(E) Planning for the Future

It is essential that the Board continues to be “fit for purpose” for this changing and demanding world, not least so that church schools and the Christian contribution to education can be enhanced and extended. Translating vision into policy and practice, whilst responding to an ever-changing national and regional context, requires innovation, creativity and courage. This is a time of challenge but also of opportunity.

There are two implications for the Board:

- (a) There will be more work for the Board and especially its staff. This will cost money. An example of this will be the need for the DBE to establish a Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust, as one of a number of Academy solutions, to maintain the DBF’s interests should a school become inadequate. It is helpful that the former church school property in Loom Lane, Radlett has been sold and our receipts added to our investments. We anticipate progress on the release of the Wormley funds. Dialogue with the Bishop of St Albans and the DBF has already started so that senior clergy and key officers understand this agenda and a separate paper outlining costs has been prepared.
- (b) There is a need to ensure that the Board is structured in such a way that it is able to respond to the current and future agenda. It is proposed that the Board should be more entrepreneurial and business-focused, that members should be appointed and elected because of their particular skills (educational, financial and strategic), that there should be stronger partnership with the wider diocese and DBF, that there should be clear accountability for the work of the Board, and that in order to achieve this the size of the Board should be reduced. This skills-based appointment process mirrors that widely in use in schools and reflects good practice.

The proposal is that the Board in future should consist of:

- Chair (appointed by Diocesan Bishop)
- Diocesan Secretary (or Nominee)
- DBF Chair (or Nominee)
- three co-opted headteachers of CE Schools (two primary, one secondary)
- three appointed for particular skills (including one Archdeacon)
- six elected by Diocesan Synod (ensuring three clergy and three laity)

Any revised structure approved by Diocesan Synod would be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

(F) Finance

In preparing this paper the DBE has been in active discussion with Bishop's Staff Team, Bishop's Council and has valued the support of the General Committee of the DBF. Following financial modelling with the Diocesan Finance Secretary the DBE understands that it will require in the region of, but not exceeding, £70,000 distributed over three years commencing in 2017 to implement its plans.

(G) Draft resolution

The Board of Education proposes that the following resolution be presented to Diocesan Synod at its March 2016 meeting.

This Synod:

- endorses the vision that church schools in the Diocese of St Albans live God's love by being distinctively Christian, community-focussed and by serving the common good
- supports the Board of Education, working in conjunction with the DBF, in promoting a suite of solutions to enable Church of England schools to become part of Multi-Academy Trusts
- encourages the growth of the diocesan family of schools through the establishment of schools in new housing developments, membership of the affiliated schools scheme and by facilitating the membership of community schools within local school-led Church of England Multi-Academy Trusts
- approves the re-constitution of the Board of Education, prior to submission to the Secretary of State

**+Richard Bedford
Chair**

**Church Schools in the Diocese of St Albans
live God's love by being**

**Distinctively Christian
Community-focussed
and by
Serving the common good**

Distinctively Christian

What does it mean to be *distinctively Christian*?

Being a distinctive Christian school impacts on every area of school life. In the Diocese of St Albans this is often worked out through an explicit set of lived Christian values and virtues that are adopted and accepted by the whole school community.

Church schools strive for academic excellence and high standards but are not defined by this alone. Through an enriched curriculum church schools offer an education for all, characterised not only by academic excellence but also by enabling all pupils to flourish as individuals and as members of the wider community.

Community-Focussed

What does it mean to be *community-focussed*?

Church schools are communities based on Christian values and orientated towards the person of Jesus Christ. Church schools aim to be inclusive communities where all are valued and respected. Community-focussed church schools are outward-looking and actively seek to support those who are disadvantaged, whether through their admissions policy, community service or practical support. They value being part of the Church of England family of schools and work in partnership with their local parish and deanery.

Church schools in the Diocese of St Albans serve the community in which they are located, nurturing those from the Christian tradition and serving others. They provide pupils and staff with an understanding of what it means to be part of a living, caring community. Each school, like the community they serve, is unique, and as a result we celebrate the joyful diversity of schools across the diocese.

Serving the Common Good

What does it mean *to serve the common good*?

The majority of church schools were established in the 1800s to educate the poor in each parish, to serve the common good. Today our church schools remain committed to providing a distinctively Christian, community-focussed education. This distinctive educational approach is offered to the community as a gift and as a result church schools in the Diocese of St Albans educate pupils of all faiths or none.

In serving the common good church schools aim to be places of hospitality, grace and love, welcoming and serving all. They actively participate in local, regional and national initiatives, sharing good practice, expertise and pastoral and practical support for schools in difficulties. As part of the Church of England family, church schools take part in local community-focussed initiatives that live God's love in practical ways.