

**Subject:** Foundation Governors – Ethos and Core Principles

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## FOUNDATION GOVERNORS: ETHOS AND CORE PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS

### The Ethos of the School

The National Society provides a model ethos statement for all Church of England schools, which has been adopted almost universally by dioceses across the country. While the whole governing body will have agreed this ethos statement, it is the foundation governors who have a particular responsibility to ensure that it is reflected in all aspects of school governance and life. Each maintained school's ethos statement can be found within its Instrument of Government. It is a legal requirement for both maintained schools and academies to publish a statement of their ethos and values on the school website.

#### Recommended Ethos Statement

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 service 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.

## What do Core Principles mean to Church School Governors?

The Diocese of St Albans is seeking an understanding that all governors of church schools share a **corporate responsibility for every aspect of the school**, and that good governance requires that all understand and develop the foundation and ethos of the school.

Every school has, or at least had, at some point in its history, a **Trust Deed**. This is a critical document setting out the details of the foundation of the school and the basis on which the buildings and land were originally granted. It sets out appointment of the trustees of the school and what activities are permitted on the premises. Although many of them are very old, a trust deed is a living document that can have a real impact on anything from your admissions policy to the extended services that you wish to provide on your site.

For maintained schools, the other document that informs the ethos of the school is the **Instrument of Government**. This not only sets out the size and composition of your governing body, including who appoints the foundation governors, but it also contains the ethos statement for your school. The Instrument of Government is drawn from statutory guidance on the composition of governing bodies, issued by the Department for Education. Academies are also required to have an ethos statement and to publish this online.

Most voluntary controlled (VC) church schools in the Diocese of St Albans have no more than three foundation governors, many only two. At voluntary aided (VA) schools the foundation governors outnumber by two all other categories of governor combined and so they do not face the same potential burden of responsibility for church school distinctiveness as their counterparts in VC schools. It is important that all church school governors understand the policies on RE, collective worship, spiritual development; and that all governors understand the importance of the school's foundation and ethos and exactly what the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican & Methodist Schools) inspection is looking at and for. Foundation governors are not expected to carry such significant responsibilities alone. Good governance requires the corporate understanding and support for the distinctively Christian ethos of the school and how this underpins and informs every area of activity and every policy.

## What does this mean for the three core principles of governance: strategic overview, critical friend and accountability?

In essence, it adds an additional layer to each of these, reflecting the principles of the foundation and the ethos of the school in every aspect, and measuring its effectiveness in each of the three core areas by these standards.

## The 'Critical Friend' at a Church School

Whilst looking at the broader strategic view is something that governors increasingly have to embrace in order to be effective, it is perhaps the role of critical friend that can be the trickiest. This part of the role of the church school governor must be seen as both supporting and challenging. To achieve the right balance is not easy, but there are principles which can help and questions that can act as guides towards good practice.

The dynamic between the governing body and the head teacher is crucial to achieving good leadership and management, and again this is a question of balance. Governing bodies should not be passive and unquestioningly receive reports from the head teacher, but neither should they be seeking to interfere in the day to day running of the school. The Christian principles enshrined in the ethos statement of the school and the founding principles set out in the Trust Deed can act as good benchmarks for the type of questions that governors should be asking.

The **Christian ethos** of the school should run like a thread through every element of school life, so one of the 'easy' questions for governors when looking at *any* policy is: 'Is our ethos showing?', and, if it isn't, then how can we make changes to ensure that it does? And it really should be a question for every policy and every event, not just those relating directly to RE or to collective worship. To model the distinctively Christian nature of the school in every area of school life is something which all governors sign up to corporately when they take on the role of governor at a church school, and of course the way in which people interact with each other is the cornerstone on which everything else is built.

**Trust, mutual respect and Christian love** should underpin conversations, discussions and debates, and, set within this context, people are able to have a truly robust and constructive discussion without risk of upset or offence. Governors should be asking questions such as:

- 'Why are we doing this?'
- 'Why are we doing it like this?'
- 'Is this reflecting that we are a church school?'
- 'How does this fit into our school development plan?'
- 'Are we being distinctively Christian in how we do/handle this?'

Governors should never seek to question the professional judgement of the head or staff on matters of teaching and learning, but what they can and should be doing is to assess the effectiveness in achieving the targets in the school development plan. At a church school they should be asking whether those targets are being achieved within the Christian context and ethos of the school, whether those values of love, compassion and nurture are at the forefront of the work, or if they are being undermined by the pressures to perform. Most importantly, church school governors can have confidence that a strong **Christian ethos** has been clearly

shown to enhance achievement and that church schools underpin this ethos with explicit Christian values, lived out in the practical day to day life of the school.

The role of the 'critical friend' is one that all governors have as part of their work on the governing body. Governors can help each other to develop the skills and relationships that will make this a vital tool for helping the school to move forward, to meet its targets and aims within its School Development Plan. They will aim to develop the type of positive relationships and lines of communication essential for a school, and most importantly the children in it, to flourish.

The following books can help develop your understanding of the ethos of Church of England schools, and how governors can help promote this:

- *Church governance*: (Mike Simmonds, Grove Books 2017)
- *How to survive as a governor in a church school: a guide for all governors of Church of England and Church in Wales schools* (Alexandra Green, Redemptorist publications 2016)
- *Critical Friend: the work of governors in church schools* (John Cox, Kevin Mayhew 2013)
- *More than caring and sharing: making a church school distinctive* (John Cox, Kevin Mayhew 2011).

## Appendix I

### The Church of England's Involvement in Education

The church was most evident in its drive for the mass provision of Christian education for the poor in the early and middle years of the 19th century. The Church's principal instrument was the National Society, created in 1811. The other key player was the British and Foreign School Society, whose founder opened its first school in 1798. These two movements, the National Society based on Anglican principles, and the BFSS non-sectarian, were key in developing universal free education for children.

By the time of the national census of 1851, the Church had established 17,000 schools. State provision for public education did not come until the Education Act of 1870, and it operated by supplementing rather than replacing voluntary provision. This Act was a significant moment in the development of the practice of partnership between the state and the churches in education.

By 1900 the voluntary sector numbered over 14,000 schools. At the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, after 70 years of state provision, the voluntary sector was still providing schooling for nearly a third of the children of school age. The Church, however, had lacked the capital to match the quality of premises and equipment of state schools, and the quality of education was suffering. The Education Act of 1944 provided a new context in which church schools were offered the option of increased state funding and control as 'Voluntary Controlled schools' or lesser state support and greater independence as 'Voluntary Aided schools'. At the same time, the 1944 Act required *all* schools to have a daily act of collective worship and religious instruction. The 1944 Act extended the school leaving age to 15 and provided for secondary education in separate schools between the ages of 11 and 15.

The Methodist Church continued a pre-existing policy of reducing the number of its schools, and the number of maintained Methodist schools has declined from its 19<sup>th</sup> century maximum of 900 to around 60 today, many of them in partnership with the Church of England. Neither the Anglican nor the Roman Catholic Churches adopted that policy; indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s the Roman Catholic Church expanded its school provision vigorously, especially at the secondary level. By comparison, the expansion in Anglican secondary schools was modest and the number of its primary schools declined.

The historic vision of the Church of England to provide education for all has, in this context, thrived. The Church of England, unlike many other faith groups, does not seek to educate within the tenets of a particular faith but to engage with all. Whilst seeking to serve all in offering a broad balanced curriculum it is also rooted in a firm belief that each person has spiritual needs that should be developed like other skills and gifts. Thus the Church of England, perhaps uniquely among faith education providers, balances the concepts of the *service* of all with opportunities to *nurture* the spirituality of those who wish to develop this area of their lives.

## Appendix 2

### Suggested Prayers before a Governors' Meeting

O God our Father  
we seek your blessing and support  
in all the responsibilities we bear as Governors of this school.  
May we reach our decisions prompted by a desire to serve.  
May your Spirit grant us wisdom and understanding  
to further the spiritual, intellectual and physical development of all pupils entrusted to our  
care  
to revere and appreciate the talents possessed by our teachers and the many forms of  
support provided by our non-teaching staff.  
Keep the pupils and staff and all associated with our school free from every harm,  
so that the purpose of our school may flourish for the good of all,  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

Guide us with your wisdom  
as we seek to take responsibility  
for the education of our young people.  
May each of us  
give generously of our talents,  
growing to know one another.  
Show us how to build a community,  
sharing a deep concern and common purpose.  
May we find together  
the inspiration which is, and always will be,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
**Amen.**