



**LDDBE**

Lichfield Diocesan  
Board of Education

# CLERGY AS GOVERNORS

Abstract

Guidance for Clergy with a Church of England School in their Parish

## *Introduction*

The provision of church schools is a key ministry of the Church of England and new clergy coming into the Diocese of Lichfield have a chance of being placed in a parish with at least one church school. Such schools have a right to expect their local church to discharge their duty towards them – a duty which includes participation in governance fulfilled by the Incumbent, and others, with the support of the PCC and other church leaders.

This guidance reinforces the Diocese's position on clergy as school governors and offers practical support to those clergy about to take on a governance role as well as to existing incumbents who may be looking for specific support because of changing circumstances or other issues concerning their role. It is set also in the context of local clergy supporting church schools and indeed other state schools of different legal status in their parish in a variety of ways other than governance.

## *The changing church and school landscape*

Nationally, the Church of England and its schools are experiencing unprecedented challenges arising from the increased expectations of school governors. There is now an emphasis on the three core functions of school governance. These are ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction, holding executive leaders to account and overseeing financial performance. The Government requires those involved in governance, including trustees of academies, to have the 'right' skills, knowledge and experience to fulfil these functions effectively. Moreover the demands made by inspecting aspects of governance as part of both Ofsted and SIAMS inspections have implications upon the time and energy of governors.

Additionally, there are on-going changes and challenges to local parish organisation. The impact of such changes on the capacity of clergy and other church leadership, means that it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain effective local church involvement in the governance of all our church schools. This is a particular pressure for small congregations and small schools.

In this changing landscape the governing board (previously known as the 'governing body') of each Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled Church of England School in the Diocese continues to include the post of Ex-officio Foundation Governor. Formally that post is held by the 'Principal Officiating Minister' of the parish in which the school is situated. The term 'Principal Officiating Minister' covers the roles of incumbent, vicar, rector, priest-in-charge or lead minister but for the purposes of this Guidance the term 'Incumbent' is used for brevity. Different arrangements apply to Academies in the Diocese and these are referred to in this Guidance.

## *The Ex-officio Foundation Governor in relation to other governors*

The place of the Ex-officio Foundation Governor in each Voluntary Aided (VA) and Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools in the Diocese of Lichfield is set out in a legal document called the

Instrument of Government which details the number and types of governor to be appointed for the school as well as their terms of office.

For VA primary schools in the Diocese the total number of recommended governors is usually 12 and the foundation governors must outnumber the total number of all other types of governor by two. For VC schools the foundation governors do not have a majority. For both types of Voluntary school the incumbent has, by virtue of the office he or she holds, an automatic place on the school's governing board and his or her role as a governor is the same regardless of whether the school is VA or VC

Other Foundation Governors are appointed either by the Diocesan Board of Education or by the appropriate Parochial Church Council the numbers of which will be defined by the school's Instrument of Government. For both types of Foundation Governor the responsibility for identifying suitable persons with the skills, knowledge and experience needed for a particular governing board rests locally with the church and school leadership teams.

### ***Support for Clergy in preparation for the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role***

The Hind Report, 'Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church' recognises the high expectations that the Church and society have of the training of ordained ministers and that "at times these expectations are unrealistically high." The Report emphasises also the awareness that "the initial and continuing ministerial education of clergy offers an important opportunity to give focus and to give shape to the mission and ministry of the Church under the providence of God." The development of clergy and other ministers specifically as leaders of the Church's mission in educational settings is reinforced in the consultation paper 'Growing Faith: Children, Young People and Families' issued by the Church of England's Chief Education Officer and considered by a wide range of Diocesan Staff in November 2018.

Despite the growing expectations of clergy, coupled with the changes to the local church and church school landscape, referred to later in this guidance, participation in governance offers a vital missional opportunity for clergy. There are ways in which the task can be managed, partly through the ongoing support of clergy already established in the governance role and importantly, through a managed programme of training, development and support for those training for ordination and those serving in their initial curacy.

The Diocesan Education Team is able to offer, in collaboration with the Diocesan Mission and Ministry Team, a variety of forms of support for clergy in embarking on, continuing or developing their role as governors of church schools in this Diocese. Some are 'generic' and others can be 'tailor-made' to suit the context and requirements of individual situations. Additionally, preliminary consideration is being given to offering support to those undergoing pre-ordination theological training on the more general issue of mission and ministry with schools as a means of helping prepare them further for their future placements within local church settings.

From 2020 Diocesan training for all curates on an incumbent path includes a compulsory training module on working with Church schools.

For existing incumbents who are already Ex-officio Foundation Governors the Diocesan Education Department offers training on items specifically for the foundation governor role.

### ***What the School can expect of the Ex-officio Foundation Governor***

The Hind Report also refers to the “rising expectation of ministerial and professional competence in the clergy, an expectation coming both from the church and from society.” This expectation is “further fuelled by the realisation that they [clergy] are a scarce and valuable resource who will increasingly have to exercise an episcopal, as well as priestly and diaconal, ministry.”

One way in which the expectations of local clergy can be managed is through an effective and clear working agreement between the Ex-officio Foundation Governor and the Governing Board of the school concerned. The precise wording of the agreement should be considered and determined locally by both church and school leadership teams but is expected to include reference to the postholder being:

- willing to promote the views and policies of the parish and Diocese (and indeed of the Church of England as a whole in terms of its published *Vision for Education*) as appropriate at meetings of the Governing Board and at other meetings concerning, for example, any change in the future status of the school;
- a link to ensure the school features regularly on PCC and other local church leadership team agenda and vice versa;
- a visible presence in church and in school;
- prepared both to represent the parish during a SIAMS Inspection and to explain to the Inspection Team how parish and school work together;
- prepared to undertake ongoing training as required;
- prepared to set aside time to meet and to pray regularly with the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher about both parish and school.

For clarification, in exceptional situations where the Incumbent is not the Ex-officio Foundation Governor the expectation is still that there will be a working agreement defining his or her relationship with the school.

### ***Should the Ex-officio Foundation Governor be Chair of Governors?***

The Incumbent as Ex-officio Foundation Governor plays a pivotal role in the life of both school and church and to maintain a sense of balance the Diocese does not recommend that the holder takes on the additional demands of being Chair of Governors. Even if, historically and

traditionally, the Incumbent has taken on this additional role and even if the number of other Foundation Governors falls significantly (for example to the extent of them not being a majority over all other types of Governor), it is still not regarded as best practice for the Incumbent to extend an already demanding role by being Chair.

There may be occasions, of course, when the Governing Board needs to establish a committee, project or working group for a specific and time-related issue and for which it decides that the Ex-officio Foundation Governor is best suited to chair. An example might be developing an understanding of Spirituality and/or Christian Distinctiveness in preparation for, or following a recent, SIAMS inspection of the school.

### ***Circumstances in which it may not be possible, or may be difficult, for the position of Ex-officio Foundation Governor to be held by the Incumbent***

The Diocese recognises that there may be certain exceptional circumstances that could make it difficult or impossible for the Incumbent to fulfil effectively or at all the role of Ex-officio Foundation Governor of a church school in his or her own parish. Reasons for not appointing the Incumbent to the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role are set out below with guidance offered for alternative arrangements.

### ***What happens to the Ex-officio role when there is no Incumbent?***

Where there is a vacancy (previously often referred to as 'interregnum') in the position of incumbent it is for the Archdeacon for the Archdeaconry in which the school and local church are situated to make an appointment. The process of identifying a suitable person, not necessarily ordained, to take on the ex-officio foundation governor role, temporarily until the incumbent position is filled, would be the responsibility of both the local church leadership team and the governing board of the school concerned. The Diocesan Board of Education are available to support local leadership teams in undertaking this task.

### ***What if the Incumbent feels that he or she has insufficient time for the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role?***

This could be because of the local demands of the parish or where the person concerned has other roles, temporary or permanent, that are wider than the parish, for example being Area Dean or having a specific Diocesan responsibility. It would be for the Archdeacon to determine the nature of the reason for the Incumbent not taking up his or her Ex-officio role and, if that reason is accepted, to determine for how long. The process for recruiting a 'substitute' Ex-officio Foundation Governor would still be the responsibility of the Incumbent as above. and, as above, the Diocesan Board of Education is available to offer support in the task.

***What if the Incumbent feels that he or she lacks the 'right' skills, experience or knowledge for the governance role?***

The Incumbent should discuss the matter with his or her Archdeacon who will determine, in consultation with a Diocesan Schools Officer, the learning/training/support needed to 'fill the gap' to enable the Incumbent to take up the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role as quickly as possible. If the Archdeacon concludes that there is a justifiable case for the Incumbent not taking on the governance role either permanently or temporarily it will still be the responsibility of the Incumbent to identify a suitable alternative as above. with, as above, appropriate support from a DBE officer.

***What if the incumbent feels that there is a conflict between their role as governor and their pastoral responsibilities to the school and wider parish?***

This could be because of difficult decisions that governors have to take that could be detrimental to staff and the wider school community. The incumbent should discuss the matter with his or her Archdeacon and identify a suitable alternative for the governance role as above. The role of the incumbent could then be to act as a bridge between the school and church as well as supporting the staff and students to feel cared for and safe along with offering opportunities to worship and explore the Christian faith. Again, the Board of Education is available to offer support.

***Managing the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role beyond the 'single parish/single church school' model***

Local church and school organisation beyond the 'single parish/single church school model' can take a variety of forms in the Diocese some of which are reflected in the illustrative list, based on actual scenarios during 2018 where there were vacancies, below:

- A multi-parish benefice with several church schools in the benefice
- A single parish benefice with several churches and several church
- A school in a multi-parish benefice with one church school. The incumbent also oversees another multi-parish benefice with several church schools.
- A multi-parish benefice has several church schools in the benefice
- A school is in a single-parish benefice.
- Several schools all in different parishes and each with its own incumbent are operating as a 'federation' with one governing board with one Ex-officio Foundation Governor position.

Needless to say there is no 'one size fits all' answer but the following approaches are aimed at ensuring local parish commitment to local church schools in situations that do not fit the 'single parish/single church school' model:

- Where there are several church schools either in a single parish or in several parishes served by one Incumbent all the schools involved might consider 'rotating' the Ex-officio Foundation Governor say on a two-year basis and subject to the agreement of the Archdeacon. 'Rotating' the role would ensure that the Incumbent supports all the schools eventually over a period of time, with other members of his or her local church leadership team covering the 'gaps' as necessary and with the agreement of the Archdeacon to ensure compliance with each school's Instrument of Government.
- Incumbents, working with their local church and church school leadership teams, keep workloads under regular review through appropriate monitoring processes and within 'contractual' working agreements as referred to above.
- Appointing Associates to Governing Boards as a means of enhancing the level of appropriate knowledge, skill and experience particularly in cases where it might be difficult for an incumbent to serve several church schools effectively.
- Support is provided by a Diocesan Schools Officer either individually to the Incumbent or to either church or school leadership team or both in order to identify a manageable strategy for fulfilling the Ex-officio Foundation Governor role for each school in the Incumbent's 'patch'.

### ***Clergy appointments to the local governing boards of church academies within the Diocese***

The 'responsible authority' for a church academy, either a single academy or group of academies (known as a Multi Academy Trust) is the Board of Trustees (sometimes referred to as the Board of Directors). The Trustees determine both the membership and powers (through a 'Scheme of Delegation') of the local governing boards of schools or groups of school within their Trust. If a new Incumbent is uncertain about the legal status of a church school in his or her parish or group of parishes or about the local governance arrangements relating to a church academy then the Diocesan Schools Office will be pleased to assist.

Where to go for further help

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this guidance, including the offer of support, please contact **Claire Shaw**, [claire.shaw@lichfield.anglican.org](mailto:claire.shaw@lichfield.anglican.org)