

The Roles and Responsibilities of Church School Foundation Governors

This document is issued by the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education (HDBE) to advise people who are considering becoming Foundation Governors on the Full Governing Body (FGB) of a maintained (VA or VC Church School).

Introduction

School Governors form the largest voluntary body in the UK. The importance of effective Christian governors in our church schools cannot be underestimated. The duties of a Church of England Foundation Governor are wide ranging and, in addition to having the responsibilities of other governors, they are the formal Christian presence and link between school and church.

Foundation Governors have a responsibility to ensure the preservation and development of the religious foundation of the school. This means ensuring that the church school is a place with a distinctive character where the Christian faith is alive and practised.

We believe in the Diocese of Hereford that within our Church Community there are people who have valuable skills to offer. One of the skills any church school Governing Body needs is to understand the Christian character of the school and to safeguard its foundation.

A Church of England school's Governing Body is responsible for clarity of vision and strategic direction, ensuring that the school has identified what its Christian ethos means.

Being a Governor is:

- *a great opportunity*
- *a considerable responsibility*
- *a huge privilege.*

Expectations of Governors

As a governor, you will share management responsibility equally with other members of the governing body. The core role of a school's governing board is set out in the Department for Education's online manual '[Maintained schools governance guide](#)' and in essence are:

- setting the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction
- holding the Headteacher to account for teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety, and challenging and strengthening their leadership
- ensuring finances are managed well leading to probity, solvency and effective use of resources.

These will include (but not limited to) the following core activities:

- regularly attend Full Governing Body meetings and willingness to serve on committees. Where some meetings may be held virtually to support modern practices and encourage a more diverse governor community.
- conduct all school related business in a professional manner and in line with the school, and HDBE codes of conduct

- act as a “critical friend” offering support and appropriate challenge to the Headteacher and school leaders
- be both supportive and challenging the work of the school and the staff within it
- adopt policies to achieve aims and objectives of the school
- have time to visit the school and get to know staff and pupils
- preserve, develop and safeguard the Christian Ethos and religious character of the school and uphold the principles of the Trust Deed
- understand and consider the issues facing the school without bias
- observe confidentiality and act professionally with integrity, objectivity and honesty.

The Full Governing Body may identify specific skills, (such as financial or personnel management ability) which they are currently lacking and need to address through new appointments. A skills audit is helpful in showing any additional knowledge, skills and experience that would be beneficial.

Governance is about more than attending meetings – governors need to be able to dedicate enough time to get to know the school and its staff, along with taking up appropriate training opportunities on appointment and as they arise through their term of office. Many are asked to take an overview of a specific curriculum area, year group or key stage and make reports to the Full Governing Body.

The responsibility of the Full Governing Body is collective. Governors do not have the authority to act individually, unless instructed by the whole governing body. All governors have equal rights and responsibilities and are not expected to be ‘experts’. However, each governor will bring to bear their own skills and experience of life on the many issues presented to them.

Additional Expectations of Foundation Governors

As a Foundation Governor, you will also have the special additional responsibilities. You are appointed to ensure *‘so far as is practicable, that the character of the school as a voluntary (Church of England) school is preserved and developed’* (Section 78 of the Education Act 1996).

The inclusion of foundation governors on the governing boards of both Voluntary Aided (VA) and Voluntary Controlled (VC) church schools is one of the distinguishing characteristics of church school education. Foundation governors represent the historic link with the original church establishment (the ‘founding’ establishment, hence the term ‘foundation’) of the school. As such, you are the custodians of its distinctive Christian ethos.

In addition to their generic role as governors, foundation governors should undertake the following activities:

- fully support, cherish, preserve and develop the distinctive Christian ethos of the school, ensuring that the school has a distinctive Christian vision and values which lead to effective practice and outcomes
- be committed to the Christian pastoral support and wellbeing of the school community
- ensure that the School Development Plan includes strategy for the development areas in respect of the school’s church school status and take an active role in the school’s self-evaluations of progress against the [Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools \(SIAMS\) Framework 2024](#). When SIAMS inspections take place foundation governors will be interviewed by the inspector to ensure that they are fulfilling their role as a ‘critical friend’,

- be prepared to offer challenge and support to the school and parish as they strengthen their links between church, school and diocese
- ensure the school is regularly promoted in the parish magazine/newsletter
- undertake appropriate training e.g. Diocesan training for foundation governors
- if being nominated by the Parochial Church Council (PCC), report back to the PCC regularly on the work of the school with particular regard to the development of its Christian foundation
- inform the HDBE if the school leader's post becomes vacant and, in partnership with the Chair of Governors, invite a representative of the HDBE to advise, support and attend the appointment procedure.

Foundation Governors should be familiar with two important legal documents:

1. The Instrument of Government

This sets out the composition of the school's Governing Body. The Governance Professional (Clerk) and the Diocesan Department for Education will have copies. It includes an ethos statement, recommended by the National Society and adopted by the majority of C of E schools.

2. The Trust Deed

This sets out the founder's intentions. The school should be able to provide a copy of this.

All applications for Foundation Governors are scrutinised and approved by the HDBE. Please refer to the [Hereford Diocesan Board of Education Policy for Foundation Governors in VA and VC Schools June 2022](#).