

THINKING OF BECOMING A FOUNDATION GOVERNOR?

Why do you think we have Church Schools?
Would you be willing to serve your community as a Foundation Governor?
Could you give some of your time and talents to become part of a team committed to securing quality education for children in a Christian context?

'The purpose of education is to fulfil human potential, meet the needs of society and transmit knowledge and culture.'

Foundation Governors represent the historic link with the original establishment of the school and its distinctive religious ethos.

The exact composition of a school's governing body is determined by its Instrument of Government. These are usually the Headteacher, local incumbent and, occasionally, representatives of trusts or other bodies.

In Voluntary Aided (VA) schools, Foundation Governors are in the majority and in Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, Foundation Governors are in the minority. This puts a great responsibility on 'Church' governors in trying to ensure the continuation of the ethos and character of the school.

Most Foundation Governors are appointed by either the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) or the Parochial Church Council (PCC). This is in recognition of the fact that the PCC is the voice of the church in the locality and the DBE has responsibility for formulating policies which affect all Church schools in the diocese.

In many ways Foundation Governors are the same as other governors. Like other governors, they serve a four year term of office which may be renewable. Governors have a general responsibility for the conduct of the school, in promoting high standards of education achievement, by setting the strategic direction of the school, ensuring accountability, and monitoring and evaluating school performance. All governors are entrusted with the responsibility for formulating policies which produce a well managed school. They are a 'critical friend'.

The Church's interest in education stems from a philosophy that education is far more than acquiring knowledge and academic success. It begins from a position that this is God's world and everything in it has value and that every child has a right to a spiritual and moral education.

Foundation Governors should be visible and vocal in playing their part to make sure that everyone in their school feels valued. Church Schools do not have a monopoly on caring, but in the Church School community no one, regardless of role, should be undervalued. Relationships between governors and staff are very important in this context. Particular attention needs to be given to policy development to ensure that the school is reflecting God's love for the whole world to see – and for the world itself.

Church Schools should provide worship which is in accordance with the custom and practice of the Church of England (C of E). We cannot 'make' anyone worship, but we can lead them to it, enrich school with it and make it central to the life and work of the school.

In both VA and VC schools the teaching of Religious Education is generally in accordance with the LEA Agreed Syllabus and the Diocese is part of the team that determines this. Whichever syllabus is used, and whether the RE teaching is cross curricular or separate, Foundation Governors can give a lead in ensuring that it does have sufficient time and money allocated to it. There is a danger that, not being part of a National Curriculum, RE may be 'squeezed' in every direction.

Another role Foundation Governors should develop is to be a link between the faith community (or communities) which support the school. This can be done through reporting back to PCCs or other church organisations, trying to ensure that the school is kept in the cycle of prayer used in the parish, promoting the interests of the school to parishioners and trying to ensure that the parish gives regular financial support to the governing body. Although the school might be labelled C of E, other local denominations may regard the school as a Church School in the broadest sense and may wish to be kept in regular contact.

If governors are asked 'what is the most important task they do', most will say the appointment of staff, especially heads and deputies. The right leadership can make such a difference in maintaining the distinctive ethos of a Church School. The Diocesan Director of Education will usually be represented at headship interviews. In VA schools, it is possible to question candidates about their personal religious beliefs and practice. Explicit questioning about religion is not permissible in VC school interviews, but it is possible to establish candidates' attitudes to the school's religious foundation and its significance for the pattern of worship in the school. The DBE Team are keen to assist governing bodies by leading training sessions on recruitment and retention in a Church School.

In whatever way Foundation Governors interpret their role, it is a valuable and most important part of the ministry of the Church. As for any ministry to which people are called, there will be a need for in-service training and updating to know of changes and developments affecting schools and to deepen understanding on any number of issues which they face. Each Local Authority (LA) provides a variety of general courses for all school governors, and in addition the DBE Team also holds sessions for headteachers and governors of Church Schools.

To be a Governor

No qualification is needed.

The following qualities are not essential, but desirable:

- Interest in education
- Enthusiasm
- Commitment
- Willingness to give of time

Also helpful:

- An appreciation of children
- Enjoying their company and conversation
- Sharing their stories and successes
- Their interests and views of the school

A Church School should be a place of gratitude – a place where saying thank you is not just a matter of good manners but a way of life.

John Cox: More than Caring and Sharing

One of the hallmarks of a Church School is belonging to a particular educational family and the wider family of the church. Its roots do not just anchor a school; they nourish and enable it to flourish.

Tim Elbourne: Understanding Church Schools (Grove)

Key Accountabilities of a Foundation Governor

Working with the Headteacher to:

- Uphold the Trust Deed of the school
- Strive to preserve and develop the religious character of the school ensuring that the school is distinctively Christian
- Ensure Christian values, principles and beliefs
- Behave and relate to children and adults in school, as an exemplar of the Christian faith in action
- Have a particular concern for the welfare of everyone in the school community and relationships with the wider community
- Monitor Religious Education, Collective Worship, values, SIAMS, and the Christian ethos of the school
- Be responsible for the provision and content of RE and Collective Worship (in a VA school)
- Promote links between the Church and the school reporting regularly on the school's life
- Promote and support joint school and church activities
- Develop and strengthen links with the DBE
- Pray regularly for the school, and encourage the church to do so

Governor Duties:

- Setting the strategic direction
- Participating in the writing of policies and planning
- Approving the budget
- Assisting in formulating the school's development plan and setting objectives
- Reviewing progress against the budget and objectives
- Supporting and challenging senior staff
- Participating in the appointment of staff

Accountable for:

- The use of public funds
- The quality of education provided
- The wider involvement of school in the community