

Newcastle Diocesan Education Board

THE ROLE OF FOUNDATION GOVERNOR

The inclusion of Foundation Governors on the governing bodies of both Aided and Controlled schools is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a Church school. The Foundation Governors represent the historic link with the original establishment of the school and its distinctive religious ethos.

In most ways Foundation Governors are the same as other governors. All governors are entrusted with the responsibility for formulating policies which produce a well managed school. Their duties cover monitoring the curriculum, finance, personnel and premises to ensure that the school functions efficiently. A minority are in place ex-officio (by right of office). These are usually the local incumbent and, occasionally, representatives of trusts or other bodies

Most Foundation Governors are appointed by either the Diocesan Education Board 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 Diocesan Education Board has responsibility for formulating policies which affect all Church schools in the diocese. The exact composition of a school's governing body is determined by its Instrument of Government. Foundation Governors serve a four year term of office which may be renewable.

In Voluntary Aided schools Foundation Governors form the majority of governors. This reflects the financial contribution made by the Church to the maintenance and improvement of the buildings, and the requirement that Voluntary Aided schools should provide Christian religious education and worship in accordance with the school's Trust Deed.

In Voluntary Controlled schools Foundation Governors are in the minority. This puts a great responsibility on these governors to try to ensure the continuation of the character and ethos of the school.

The Church's interest in education stems from a philosophy that education is not just about acquiring knowledge which will enable children to earn a living in a competitive world. It begins from a position that this is God's world and everything in it has value. Religious education is important, but it is not the only subject which reflects spiritual values. The whole curriculum is given value by being considered in this way. To quote Archbishop William Temple – Education is about fullness of life.

This is why Foundation Governors should be at particular pains to make sure that all people in a school are valued. Church schools do not have a monopoly on caring, but in the Church school community no one, regardless of role, should be undervalued. Particular attention needs to be given to the admission criteria with regard to special needs policies to ensure that the school is reflecting God's love for the whole world. Management policies need to be looked at in this light. Relationships between governors and staff are very important in this context.

For Christians, worshipping together is very important. Because of the nature of their Trust Deeds, Church schools should provide worship which is in accordance with the custom and practice of the Church of England. You cannot make anyone worship, but it seems reasonable to expose children to a variety of forms of worship in a Church school. The aim should be not to produce confirmation candidates or servers for the local church, but to enrich the life of the school and church community.

In Controlled schools the teaching of Religious Education is generally in accordance with the LA Agreed Syllabus. In Aided schools, a diocesan syllabus is used. 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 equal resources of time and money (5% timetable for Aided Schools). There is a danger that, not being part of the National Curriculum, RE may be squeezed out.

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 Parochial Church Councils (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 considers giving regular financial support to the governing body. Although the school might be labelled C of E, please remember that 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 you ask governors 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 Voluntary Aided schools, where it is possible to question candidates about their personal religious beliefs and practice. The Director or a representative may attend such interviews in a Voluntary Controlled school at the invitation of the governors, and Foundation Governors should encourage their governing bodies to extend this invitation. Explicit questioning about religion is not permissible in Controlled 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 Diocesan Education team are happy to assist governing bodies by leading training sessions on making Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher appointments.

However Foundation Governors interpret their role, it is an 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 to enable them to keep abreast of the changes and developments in the education field and to deepen understanding on any number of issues which face a school. Each Local Authority provides a variety of general courses for all school governors, and in addition the Diocesan Education Team holds sessions for Head Teachers and governors of Church schools periodically throughout the year.