



# The Role of Foundation Governor

v.Feb 24



## Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to become a governor. You are joining a family of 300,000 other volunteers throughout England who serve their local school in this capacity. Governors are people from different walks of life, bringing a range of perspectives to the school, so don't be worried if you feel you aren't an expert yet.



I was a governor and found working as part of a team, towards a common goal, was something that I found to be very satisfying and rewarding.

I am hugely grateful to the large number of our parishioners who devote considerable time and energy to the governance of our schools and acknowledge the goodwill of a large number of people who help support our schools which are at the centre of the Church of England's mission.

This booklet is designed to clarify your role, identify some next steps and give some pointers to understanding some of the background to being a foundation governor at a Church of England school, but this is just the beginning. You will learn a great deal more from your fellow governors, the Headteacher and staff at the school and training sessions organised by the Diocese, other providers and of course from just doing the job.

God's blessings for your work, the school and the community you serve.

Simone Bennett  
Director of Education

*'A strong, well-led governing board, supportive of the school, its teachers and its mission makes an important contribution to the school's wellbeing and effectiveness. The foundation governors will have an especial care for the school's Christian character.'*  
(National Society 2013)

## Introduction: The Diocese of Leeds

The Anglican Diocese of Leeds is the largest in England by area, comprising much of western Yorkshire: almost the whole of West Yorkshire, the western part of North Yorkshire, the town of Barnsley in South Yorkshire, and most of the parts of County Durham, Cumbria and Lancashire which lie within the historic boundaries of Yorkshire. It includes the cities of Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield and Ripon.

The diocese is led by the Anglican Bishop of Leeds and has three cathedrals of equal status: Ripon, Wakefield, and Bradford. There are five episcopal areas within the diocese, each led by an area bishop: Leeds, Ripon, Wakefield, Bradford and Huddersfield.

*Called by God, we aim to nurture Christian hope and high expectations in everyone who is involved in education across our Diocese.*

### Diocese of Leeds Board of Education

The Diocesan Board of Education plays a vital role in helping to fulfil the vision of the Diocese of Leeds: Loving. Living. Learning. Everything we do is also shaped by the Church of England's Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good. There are 242 schools within the Diocese of Leeds, serving 64,000 children, within nine local authorities and including 11 multi-academy trusts.

Our ambitions:

- To inspire children, young people and adults with Jesus' promise of "life in all its fullness" (John 10.10).
- To support those who work in schools, colleges and universities in nurturing the whole human person, through encouraging spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical, moral and social development.
- To offer a deeply Christian vision of human flourishing for all in which schools and other institutions serve the common good, setting high expectations of achievement within a holistic and whole-life framework.

### Diocesan Education Team

A team of advisers and administrators make up the Education Team who provide bespoke support for all our schools through the 'Enhanced Service Plan' and also provide training and professional development for school leaders including governors. Each school has a named adviser from the team who is the first point of contact. All of our advisers were successful church school headteachers and are serving church school inspectors so are well placed to offer support.

In the academic year 23/24, 99% of our schools signed up for the Enhanced Service Plan (ESP) with the Diocese of Leeds. This is a service-level agreement between church schools and the Diocese. By being a part of this service, schools receive up to three half days of support a year plus access to free networks and briefings and a 40% reduction in the cost of training.

One of the important roles our foundation governors serve across the Diocese is ensuring that the link between schools and the Diocesan Education Team remains strong and productive.

## Expectations

As a governor, you will be expected to:

- take a full and active role in the work of the governing board;
- attend all full governing board meetings and committee meetings as necessary;
- attend Diocesan and Local Authority training to develop governor skills and knowledge; and maintain confidentiality.
- act as one part of a corporate body;

Further details of what will be expected of you in the role of a governor will be found in the Code of Conduct that you will be expected to sign when you begin your role.

## What is my role as a Governor?

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. All boards, no matter what type of schools or how many schools they govern, have three core statutory functions. In the Diocese of Leeds we believe that governing boards of all our church schools have a fourth core function:

### 1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

Governing boards are the key strategic decision-making body in every school. It is their job to set the school's strategic framework. This includes ensuring the school has a clear vision. Church schools are expected to have a distinctive Christian vision which is rooted theologically. The governing board should agree on the strategic priorities, aims and objectives for the school and sign off policies, plans and targets for how to achieve them. They should check on progress and review regularly their strategic framework for the school in light of that progress, including the impact of the distinctive Christian vision of the school.

### 2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff

Governing boards should support and strengthen the school's leadership in the day-to-day running of the school, including the performance management of teachers. Governing boards should play a strategic role, focusing strongly on holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of its pupils, whilst avoiding being drawn into direct involvement in operational matters. It is essential to have skilled governors, but equally important to emphasise that the skills required are those to create robust accountability, not to do the school's job for it.

They do this by:

- Asking the right questions
- Understanding the importance of objective data
- Using different sources of data – Ofsted Data dashboard, Performance Tables, IDSR, school's internal pupil data
- Visiting the school

### 3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Governing boards are responsible for making sure their school's money is well spent.

They should do this by making sure they have at least one governor with specific skills and experience in financial matters, and by asking questions such as:

- Are we allocating our resources in line with our strategic priorities?
- Are we making full use of all our assets and efficient use of all our financial resources?
- Are other schools buying things cheaper or getting better results with less spending per pupil?
- How can we get better value for money from our budget?
- Are the financial decisions we make ethical and do they align with our vision?

### 4. Preserving and enhancing the distinctive Christian foundation of the school.

Foundation governors are an important part of the wider team of governors. As such their main role is to work with other members of the governing board to fulfil all of the functions required of all school governors (see above), undertaking training as required. However, a foundation governor has a specific role.

**The role of the Foundation Governor is to ensure that the full governing board nurtures, encourages and challenges the school in living out its Christian foundation.**

This is achieved through:

- Developing the distinctive Christian vision and character of the school;
- Ensuring high-quality Collective Worship and Religious Education are regularly monitored and evaluated;
- Securing positive links between the school, the parish and the Diocesan Board of Education;
- Promoting the Christian vision and values through the way in which the governing board conducts its business;
- Ensuring that development as a church school is embedded in the school improvement plan and a regular part of the governing board self-evaluation;
- Ensuring that points for development following Section 48 (SIAMS) inspection are addressed and taking an active role in the SIAMS process;
- Being involved in the recruitment process for a new Head Teacher;
- Reporting to the Parochial Church Council or the Diocesan Board of Education as appropriate.

**It is not the role of foundation governors to solely take on responsibility for the 'church school' aspects of governance, all governors are governors of a church school. It is the role of foundation governors to ensure the whole board plays its role in preserving and enhancing the distinctive ethos of the school.**

### Safeguarding

You will be expected to undertake all safeguarding checks and training required by the school itself. All governors including ex-officio/clergy must undertake an enhanced DBS check as governors on appointment, any existing DBS through the Diocese or other body is insufficient.

### Standards of behaviour

When performing their duties as a Governor, members of a governing board need to be mindful of the standards of behaviour expected of them. The ['Seven Principles of Public Life'](#), known as the 'Nolan



Principles' offer clear guidance on the standards of behaviour that individuals are expected to demonstrate.

## How are Church schools different?

The history of church school education pre-dates universal state education. Most church schools were created as a result of the direction of the National Society in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stated aim was to build a school in every parish in the country to meet the educational needs of the poor in the parish. As such, church schools have always had a call to the marginalised in society. Approximately 1 million children attend Church of England schools every day, a quarter of all primary schools and 228 secondary schools are Church of England. It is estimated that about 15 million people alive today went to a Church of England school. Around 280 Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) hold what are called Church of England Articles, this makes The Church of England the biggest provider of academies in England.

Archbishop Runcie said that the purpose of Church schools is to '*nourish those of the faith, encourage those of other faiths and challenge those who have no faith.*' They do not provide education for the faithful but instead offer faithful education for all. Church of England schools have a vision which is distinctive and theologically rooted. The distinctiveness of a church school was well described by Dr Rowan Williams:

*"A Christian school is one in which the atmosphere has that kind of openness about it, that sense that people are worth spending time with, that people need time to grow, need loving attention. The Christian Gospel says that every person has a unique task to do, with God, and for God, whether they know it or not. It doesn't necessarily mean that everyone involved has to share the same theology or philosophy. It doesn't mean that everyone knows that they have this relationship with God, and is consciously working at it. But a Christian school is one in which the entire atmosphere is pervaded by the conviction that there is something mysterious, and potentially wonderful, in everybody."*

## What do I need to do first?

### Induction Period

The DBE know that foundation governors play a key role in leading, supporting and improving schools, and becoming one can be a rewarding experience. The DBE is committed to ensuring that every foundation governor makes a positive contribution to the life of the school and is committed to providing every new foundation governor with specific support during their first six months in post.

There is a [Foundation Governor Induction](#) self-study course available through our online training platform [ESP Online](#).

**It is an expectation that all new foundation governors will have received some training relating to church school distinctiveness within the first six months of being in post. Evidence will be required. This does not include general governor induction training from local authorities or the NGA. The DBE reserves the right to remove the appointment of any foundation governor who hasn't received the appropriate training.**

## Next steps:

Once you have read this document we advise that you do the following:

1. All good governing boards have a clear induction process for new governors. Ask your chair/clerk for a copy of the process. The Diocese can offer an example induction checklist if the board do not have one in place.
2. Read and sign the agreed Code of Conduct for Governors that your board uses and hand a copy to the chair/clerk of the board. There is a Church School Governor Code of Conduct document available through the Diocese if your school does not have one in place.
3. Ask your chair/clerk if you need to complete a skills audit to add to the broader picture of the skill set of the board.
4. Complete the Foundation Governor Induction course mentioned above.
5. Start your Training Record (see below) and place this in a training folder.
6. Look at the training program offered by the diocese (through [ESP Online](#)) and other providers.

## Reappointment at the end of a term of office

Most foundation governors have a term of office that lasts four years. Check with your clerk if you are unsure about the length of your term of office. At the end of that term of office foundation governors have the opportunity to apply for reappointment if they wish to continue. Foundation governors appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) must reapply for their positions using the appropriate forms, which can be accessed by emailing [info.ed@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:info.ed@leeds.anglican.org). We advise doing this three months before your term of office ends. Please note that the DBE expect all foundation governors to attend induction, training, networks and briefings that relate to church school distinctiveness. Reappointment will be subject to proven attendance at such training.

## Finishing as a Foundation Governor

We hope that you will be happy and effective in your role for the whole of your term of office (normally four years). If you decide to tender your resignation this information must be sent to [info.ed@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:info.ed@leeds.anglican.org) so that our records are kept up to date. Foundation governors are essential to a Church School. It is therefore imperative that there are no foundation governor vacancies.

In exceptional circumstances, it is occasionally necessary to ask an individual to step down as a foundation governor. Such instances are rare, but the DBE reserves the right to remove from office any foundation governor whom they have appointed whose conduct in their judgement does not fulfil the role in accordance with DBE expectations, as laid down in this document, the agreed code of conduct, or whose conduct is not in keeping with the Christian character of the school.

In the case of PCC appointments, the DBE reserves the right to recommend removal to the PCC as the appointing body.

If you require more advice about this document or related matters contact the office at [info.ed@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:info.ed@leeds.anglican.org).

The Governor Competency Framework states that every governor should recognise their strengths and areas for development and seek support and training to improve their knowledge and skills where necessary. This table is to keep track of the training you have attended, you can also use it to record the ongoing training you may have through a mentor or work with school leaders. This could be used as an overview sheet which sits at the front of a file or portfolio where you keep records, certificates and notes of training

Date	Title of course/ Activity/ Subject matter	Provider	Notes on Impact



Welcome to our Church school family.



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