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# **Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust**

# **Policy on Foundation Members of Local Boards**

**Level: 1**

**Date Adopted: October 2017**

**History of most recent Policy changes (must be completed)**

Date	Page	Change	Origin of Change e.g. TU request, Change in legislation
Oct 17	Whole document	Drafted from DBE policy	DBE

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## Introduction

As part of the wider family of schools in the Diocese of Bristol, DBAT takes its lead from the Diocesan Policy on Foundation Governors. The role of the foundation member of a DBAT Local Board is broadly similar to the role of a foundation governor in a maintained CE school, with applications from practising Christians being particularly welcome. However, DBAT also makes provision for those who are not Christians to become foundation members, as long as they are able to demonstrate their willingness to promote DBAT's Objects and support the Christian Distinctiveness of the academy. However such applications still require a supporting reference from a minister of religion.

The Church of England has a long and successful history in providing schools in England, stretching back over 200 years in some cases. In common with all schools, each school or Academy has a Governing Board. Within DBAT, responsibility for governance sits with the Board of Directors (the Main Board), but Academies have been established with separate committees of the Main Board (known as Local Boards) who carry out the governance function locally. Their specific responsibilities are laid out in their Decision Table. The composition of the Local Board in DBAT Church Schools varies but the Church is always represented by at least two 'Foundation' Local Board members.

Like foundation Governors, foundation members of DBAT Local Boards have a particular responsibility within Church Schools to preserve and develop the Christian character and ethos of the school. The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 state that foundation governors are '*appointed for the purpose of securing that the character of the school including, where the school has a particular religious character such religious character is preserved and developed*'. The Diocese of Bristol expects that anyone offering to support its schools in this way will show a clear commitment to the Christian ethos underpinning Church schools. The Diocese greatly values the work of foundation governors and aims to support and encourage all governors in their work, and to ensure that each board upholds, promotes and develops the Christian ethos which underpins the education within Church of England schools. DBAT academies are established primarily for the communities they are located in and the Trust is aware of the differences that emerge from an academy's unique context. Therefore within this policy allowance is made for foundation governors to support an academy in a multi-faith context to serve its community and to help the Principal and senior leaders to develop its Christian distinctiveness in a way appropriate to its context.

The following should be noted:

- School staff cannot be appointed as DBAT foundation members for the school in which they work.
- Spouses and partners should not be appointed to the same Local Board
- Local Board members should not be appointed to more than two Local Boards at any one time

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## Local Board Members in DBAT Church Schools

DBAT Church schools need foundation members to represent the local Christian community and to help nurture a distinctive Christian ethos within the school.

The skills of Local Board members vary hugely but foundation members must have a passion for education, a concern for school improvement and a commitment to Christian distinctiveness. Being a Local Board member is a major piece of service - no one should undertake the role lightly. It involves time, energy and a willingness to become involved in the life of the school on a regular basis, not least the commitment to serve by attendance at termly meetings.

Churches, which pray for God's governance 'on earth as it is in heaven' should recognise and support all those who undertake the ministry of school governance whether or not this is in a Church school.

## Background

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, through its Diocesan Boards of Education, and in line with a tradition that stretches back 200 years, the Church of England has invested in schools and in the teaching profession to achieve the raising of standards and the renewal of Christian values throughout society. Although there have been challenges, such as: frequent reorganisation, the highest national expectations of educational outcomes for every child, and a cultural shift that threatens an accepted place for the Church in education; the Church of England now has even greater opportunities to play a significant part in education of our nation's children.

Church, state and the education profession have taken many steps in recent years to:

- create new schools (Academies);
- improve local leadership,
- deliver good outcomes for children,
- establish new terms and conditions for staff,
- facilitate imaginative educational partnerships,
- write new curriculum content,
- add new resources for collective worship,
- promote campaigns for better RE,
- encourage Church-school and community links, and
- hold conversations about what is a distinctively Christian ethos for education.

But the potential of school governance is still understated in education and church alike. The call to school governance, as a key form of Christian service, has not yet been made, either nationally, or in diocesan strategies. Regardless of their foundation, primary and secondary schools in England hold an unrivalled status as places of community endeavour, dedication, virtue, transformation, aspiration, compassion, justice and of course learning. These education communities act as the rarest of social hubs in a time of dizzying change and dislocation in society at large.

The work of transformation in schools is made possible by the collaboration of government, staff, parents, children and many volunteers, not only board members. Such endeavour is dented by the

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lack of governors or poor quality governance as surely as it is by inadequate teaching or a lack of government funding. As much as any other contribution to a healthy education, a governor's contribution is needed as a service to others, as the faithfulness of a critical friend, and in Church schools, as an expression of the love of God in Christ and with all spiritual wisdom.

### **The Role of a Local Board**

Every member, including foundation members, whether appointed, elected or ex officio, has the same duties and responsibilities.

**ALL** Local Board members share a corporate responsibility for every aspect of the school. As a corporate body, the Local Board is an integral part of the school leadership team and is responsible for:

- setting, understanding and supporting the distinctively Christian foundation and ethos of the school
- developing the school improvement plan
- making decisions about expenditure of the school budget
- challenging and holding the headteacher to account
- admission of pupils and buildings and maintenance
- monitoring the implementation of DBAT policies and the policies developed in consultation with the school leadership team.

Just as importantly **ALL church school board members** also share responsibility for:

- the policies on RE, collective worship, safeguarding and spiritual development;
- the importance of the school's foundation and ethos,
- accountability and school leadership in areas that the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican & Methodist Schools) and OFSTED inspections look at.

### **Governance in Church Schools**

The Christian principles enshrined in the ethos statement of the school, and the founding principles set out in the Trust Deed can act as good benchmarks for the type of questions that Local Board members should be asking. They should never seek to question the professional judgement of the head or staff on matters of teaching and learning, but what they can and should be doing is to assess the school's effectiveness in achieving the outcomes of the school development plan. In a Church school they should be asking whether those targets are being achieved within the Christian context and ethos of the school, whether the school's values of love, compassion and nurture are at the forefront of the school's life, or whether they are being undermined by the pressures to perform.

Sometimes the Local Board is referred to as the 'critical friend' of the school - this is a strategic role which is both supporting and challenging. The dynamic between the Local Board and the headteacher is crucial to achieving good leadership and management, and this is a question of balance. Local Boards should not be passive and only receive reports from the headteacher unquestioningly; but nor should they be seeking to get involved in the day to day running of the school, which is the headteacher's responsibility. Local Boards' specific obligations include:

- Responsibility for safeguarding, and thus enhanced DBS clearance

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- Completion of a declaration of interests
  - Compliance with the DBAT code of conduct

### **The unique position of a DBAT Foundation Member**

As well as the responsibilities shared by the whole Local Board, foundation members will have particular care for the school's Christian character, ensuring "the presence of Christ" in that school. Most foundation members in DBAT Academies are appointed by the DBAT Main Board of Directors. However, the incumbent of the parish will also often be a member of the Local Board, by virtue of his/her office, as an ex-officio foundation member. All foundation members have a special responsibility to ensure that the founding ethos of the school is incorporated into all aspects of the school's life.

Whilst having regard for the unique community in which the school is set, as considered above, Foundation members should:

- Have a commitment to the distinctive ethos of the school and its mission and role as a member of the Diocesan family.
- Have an interest in and commitment to the school's Religious Education.
- Have an awareness of and commitment to the school's provision for the daily act of collective worship.
- Encourage the school to develop in a way that is consistent with its Church of England foundation, taking into account the needs and circumstances of its pupils and their particular and diverse backgrounds
- Emphasise the need to ensure that the school is meeting staff training needs for the leadership of collective worship and the teaching of RE.
- Ensure that the school's Christian value system is taught and lived within the school on a daily basis and that there are, where appropriate, signs and symbols of Christianity displayed at key locations throughout the school.
- Secure (with the headteacher) a formal structure for monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness as a Church school to include all stakeholders.
- Emphasise the need to ensure that the school's Christian foundation is made clear in all its public communications.
- Ensure that the school is inclusive, hospitable and welcoming to people of all faiths and fosters relationships between people of difference and builds a sense of belonging within its community.

### **Selection Processes**

In order to become a foundation member, applicants need to be nominated by the Parochial Church Council. Their application form is referred to the headteacher and finally approved by the DBAT Main Board. The DBAT Central Team will then confirm the appointment.

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## **The Call to Governance as Christian discipleship**

Governance expresses Jesus' own models of discipleship, such as: *as salt, light, yeast, even faith sown as small as a mustard seed*. In a school setting, the hidden work of governance develops a whole community that shelters and nourishes children from disadvantaged situations, and bringing to bear many Christian values in their flourishing.

Effective education that encourages personal learning and transformation rarely happens without intentional decisions, accompaniment and resources. This requires the best of school communities, not only explicit values, but the leadership and will to hold people to a journey of faith in all its attendant risks and rewards. The way that the Local Board helps a school to fulfil its calling, enabling their headteacher and staff to fulfil their God-given potential, holds out a Christian hope of God's creativity, redemption, discipleship and growth in community. Such goals can be met if skilled and faithful Local Board members are available both to support and challenge headteachers and their senior staff. There may be lots of meetings, as well as observations to be made from walks around a school to focus on teaching and learning.

More than in almost any other Christian endeavour, involvement in a school's journey offers frequent evidence of God's activity such as to prompt praise or prayer for more of God's governance to be as clear on earth as it is in heaven. How can Christians not wish to participate on the inside of life in a Church school?

## **Support for a Church School Local Board**

**Induction** - It is recommended that schools follow an induction procedure for all new Local Board members, which not only benefits the new member but refreshes the knowledge of existing members. The DBAT Induction of Local Board Members Policy gives guidance on induction processes.

**Support** - Support for the Local Board is available from a variety of sources: the Chair, clerk, headteacher and staff of the school, policy guidance and staff at the DBAT Central Team, school clusters or partnerships, the Local Authority, and Regional and National Governors Associations. Specific support for foundation members is provided by the Diocese of Bristol through Schools Officer Clare Stansfield and other members of the Education Team. Please see the end of this document for a list of useful websites.

**Ongoing development** - It is important that all Local Board members take responsibility for their own development by attending relevant training to expand their skills and understanding.

## **Church School Ethos**

Foundation members should have a particular concern for the school's ethos, religious education and collective worship in order to foster the spirituality of every child. Religious education

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expresses the school's distinctiveness and deserves the best resources. They should also seek to maintain and develop links with the local church. Foundation members also have a special responsibility for ensuring that the character of the school as a Church of England school is preserved and developed, and that school business is conducted in accordance with the provisions of the school's ethos statement. This relates to the school's Christian foundation and for Church schools sets the context in which the Local Board carries out its responsibilities. The Foundation Statement which has been adopted by a majority of Church of England schools is:

*'Recognising its historic foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church of England and in partnership with the Church at parish and diocesan level. The school aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to all its pupils.'*

All schools will also develop their own ethos and in broader terms it may be defined as the prevailing character, tone and spirit of an institution. Ethos is created and influenced by factors both inside and outside the school community. As these factors change, so the ethos of a school must be dynamic and open to review and appraisal. Schools exist in a changing society and are required to respond appropriately to its needs and expectations. The response of Church schools will reflect their Christian foundation, but at the same time they will be mindful of the diversity of culture and faith which exists in society. All schools should draw upon this diversity creatively and take the opportunity to celebrate the richness that it brings. The principles which govern the school's response to society's changing face are those which make for a loving, caring, accepting community that acknowledges the unique value of each individual both within the school community and society at large. Church schools do not have the monopoly on loving and caring relationships; nevertheless the Church school is institutionally rooted in the Christian faith and is thus draws from a particularly rich source of ideas, values and experience that can establish distinct identity and ethos. In seeking to preserve this character in their schools, Foundation members will need to sustain and refresh, develop and nurture a lively ethos.

The Christian ethos of the school should run like a thread through every element of school life, so one of the questions for Local Board members when looking at any policy is: *'Is our ethos showing?'*, and if it isn't then how can we make changes to ensure that it does? This should be a question for every policy and every event, not just those relating directly to RE or to collective worship. To give shape to the distinctively Christian nature of the school in every area of school life is something which all Local Board members sign up to corporately when they take on the role of Local Board member at a DBAT Church school.

Trust, mutual respect and Christian love should underpin conversations, discussions and debates, and set within this context people are able to have a truly robust and constructive discussion without risk of upset or offence. The Local Board should be asking questions:

- 'Why are we doing this?'
- 'Why are we doing it like this?'
- 'Is this reflecting that we are a Church school?'
- 'How does this fit into our school development plan?'
- 'Are we being distinctively Christian in how we do/handle this?'



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A school's ethos of love, care and appropriate theological understanding needs to find expression in other aims such as: educating its pupils to make their proper contribution to society.

### **Key relationships**

- **School Community**  
Foundation members should remember that all members of the school community should feel valued, respected and special, regardless of their cultural or religious background.
- **Church Community**  
Foundation members should encourage mutual awareness between the life of the school and the Parish / Deanery (and its special occasions throughout the year, such as Education Sunday or Christingle services). The foundation member will also be able to bring to the school a strategic relationship to local, diocesan and ecumenical/inter-faith communities.
- **Wider Community**  
Foundation members should foster an openness between all members of the school and its wider community, such as the political community and other local schools, based on mutual respect and tolerance.
- **Diocesan Community**  
Foundation members are a link between the Diocese and the school. They should therefore attempt to foster good relations between the two organisations, in order to improve communication and the broadest outcomes for pupils (See Diocesan policy on Church-School links).

### **Some of the Governing Body Responsibilities to the Diocese:**

- To advise if there is an impending vacancy for a headteacher or a deputy headteacher so that a representative of the DBAT Central Team can be invited to give advice concerning new appointments. This representative will also be involved in the short listing and interviewing process.
- To advise of proposed alterations to buildings.
- To advise if there is any major issue affecting the school.
- To advise if a foundation member resigns.
- To consult with the Diocese on the Admissions Policy.

### **Useful websites:**

- [www.bristol.anglican.org](http://www.bristol.anglican.org)
  - The Diocese of Bristol website's Resources for Schools section hosts loads of useful material as well as news for schools and from the Diocese.
- <http://dbat.org.uk/>
  - The Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust website which contains a great deal of policy and other useful information.
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/education.aspx>

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- The Church of England Education Office is Church of England's National Education Department. It has a website with lots of helpful information for governors and Local Board members. Of particular value are the sections devoted to SIAMS – the Statutory Inspection of Anglican & Methodist Schools. There is also other information and resources on collective worship.
  
  - <http://www.nga.org.uk/Home.aspx>
    - The National Governors Association provides a great deal of useful information on governance
  
  - <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/governors>
    - Bristol LA governors' information
  
  - <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/schoolseducationandlearning/schoolsandcolleges/schoolgovernors.htm>
    - Wiltshire LA governors' information
  
  - <https://www.sgsts.org.uk/governor/SitePages/Home.aspx>
    - South Gloucestershire LA governors' information
  
  - <http://schoolsonline.swindon.gov.uk/sm/governors/Pages/support.aspx>
    - Swindon LA governors' information
  
  - [www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk)
    - A special website for governors which is full of up-to-date help for governors of all schools with current legislation and other developments made clear.

**Contact us:**

**For help with governance matters, please contact**

**Clare Stansfield,**

**Schools Officer (Governor Development and Admissions)**

[clare.stansfield@bristoldiocese.org](mailto:clare.stansfield@bristoldiocese.org)

0117 906 0100