

# The ecclesiastical framework for Church schools: the local and national Church

The General Synod and the Archbishops' Council have identified Church schools as standing at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation. Our work over the last eighteen months has confirmed the crucial importance of Church schools to the whole mission of the Church to children and young people, and indeed to the long-term well-being of the Church of England.

*The Way Ahead*, Executive Summary, paragraph 1

In the previous chapter some of the framework of central and local government was outlined insofar as it affects the work of Church schools. Church schools not only relate to central and local government, they also have an important relationship with the Church by which they were established and whose practice and traditions of education they have a duty to reflect.

## The Church locally

The support for education in the Church of England and the Church in Wales is organized locally at three distinct but complementary levels.

### The local parish

The Anglican Church is based on a parochial system that covers the entire country. Each parish has a distinctive geographical boundary and the parish priest is given responsibility by the bishop

for the population within that boundary. The parish priest also has a number of responsibilities with regard to arrangements for Anglican worship and the supervision of the use of Anglican buildings within the parish. These responsibilities include a responsibility for the collective worship in a Church school, as this will reflect the Anglican tradition. This is normally exercised through the priest's membership of the governing body, where policy on school worship will be discussed. It is particularly important in those schools that celebrate the Eucharist as part of their pattern of worship, that the policy of the school makes it clear what restrictions, if any, are required on who may be invited to be the celebrant at the Eucharist. The only exceptions to this general oversight exercised by the parish priest are where the school has been specifically licensed by the bishop. In every parish there are a Parochial Church Council and a number of churchwardens. Should there be a vacancy for an incumbent (interregnum), the churchwardens automatically take over a number of the parish priest's responsibilities but not those related to the Church school. Historically, when Anglican schools were founded, the trustees of the building were often the vicar and churchwardens of the parish in which the school was situated. Many of the more modern schools now have trust deeds in which the diocese is the trustee of the school, but where the school was founded in the nineteenth century the trustees were either named individuals, in which case the trust deed may need re-establishing, or, more usually, the holders of the major parochial offices.

Where there is a Church school in the parish, the Parochial Church Council may have been given responsibility for nominating a proportion of the foundation governors on the governing body by the Instrument of Government. The PCC may decide to include the headteacher of the school in its own membership. This can only be achieved by co-option and such a co-option would depend on the headteacher's being an actual communicant of the Anglican Church. Where such arrangements have been

established, it can be a sign of good mutual collaboration and confidence between the school and the parish in which it is set. Sometimes, as a result of historic agreements possibly deriving from school reorganization or the closure of neighbouring schools, other local Parochial Church Councils may also be given the responsibility of nominating governors on to the governing body of a Church school.

## **The deanery**

The next level of organization beyond the parish is the deanery. The deanery is led by a rural or area dean, who is one of the senior parochial clergy in the area, chosen by the bishop after consultation with the other clergy of the area. The deanery also brings together elected members representing each of the Anglican churches in the deanery to a meeting known as a deanery synod in England and a deanery conference in Wales. Because of the wide area that they serve, a few Anglican secondary schools in England are closely related to the deanery and the deanery synod for the area. In such cases the deanery synod is likely to have the responsibility for nominating some of the foundation governors.

## **The diocese in England**

Beyond the deanery is the diocese, which is led by the diocesan bishop. There is also a body of elected representatives of the Church called the diocesan synod, which exists to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their diocese, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matter of religious or public interest; to advise the bishop of any matters upon which he may consult the synod; and to consider and express their opinion on any matter referred to them by the General Synod. Responsibility for diocesan finances is held by the Diocesan Board of Finance. Under the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991, every diocese in

England is required to have a Diocesan Board of Education with a diocesan director of education as its principal officer. This committee has a number of responsibilities in respect of the Church's involvement in statutory education and in particular its support for Anglican schools and for religious education and school worship in all schools. The Diocesan Board of Education may well employ specialist staff, as well as the diocesan director of education, to support and help Church schools in matters of building, curriculum and school management. This team of people provides a very important source of support for Church schools in addition to that available from the Local Education Authority. Normally, very close working relationships exist between the Local Education Authority and the Diocesan Board of Education. The diocesan director of education and other members of the diocesan education team are responsible to the Diocesan Board of Education for the work that they do on its behalf. The Diocesan Board of Education must make a report to the diocesan synod of the work it has undertaken on behalf of the diocese. For the most part the relationship between the diocesan director of education, the Diocesan Board of Education and individual Church schools is a matter of advice and cooperation. Under certain limited circumstances the Diocesan Board of Education can give direction to a particular governing body if it believes the governing body is acting against the interests of its own Church school or all Church schools in general. There are clearly defined circumstances in which this power can be used and if the Diocesan Board of Education decides to use it, it must report what it has done to the diocesan synod. In other cases, before making a final decision, the governing body may have to seek the advice of the Diocesan Board of Education, and have regard to that advice when making its decisions. The Education Act 2002 extends this duty for a voluntary aided school to the consideration of its admissions policy.

Every Diocesan Board of Education sets its own priorities and responds to the needs of the schools in its area in ways that most

closely reflect their needs and the limits of the resources that are available. Many Diocesan Boards of Education provide training for governors and senior staff of Church schools and for RE and worship coordinators in all schools. Some Diocesan Boards of Education provide religious education centres open to all interested teachers. The responsibilities of Diocesan Boards of Education are usually not limited to schools; they often include the Church's work in further and higher education and may extend to the Church's educational work in the parishes. This last area of work may fall under one of the other boards, councils or committees of the diocesan synod, if it has not been felt appropriate to include it within the brief of the Diocesan Board of Education.

## **The diocese in Wales**

In Wales, the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991 does not apply. Nevertheless, each diocese has a diocesan director of education who reports to the diocesan bishop through a board or similar body. Their teams offer support to schools in much the same way as their counterparts in England.

The diocesan bishop is responsible for Church schools in the diocese and he delegates the discharge of that responsibility to the diocesan director of education.

## **General**

It is important for all Church schools to seek to maintain good relationships with the diocesan director of education and the diocesan education team and it would be very surprising if there were an Anglican school that did not have a well-established pattern of contact with its local diocese. If issues about the nature of worship in Anglican schools or of religious education in Anglican voluntary aided schools arise within the school's staff,

governing body or parents, the source of advice and guidance and the person to whom appeals can be made and who can decide on complaints related to these issues is the diocesan bishop. In most dioceses, however, the bishop would expect the issues to be referred to the diocesan director of education in the first instance. The diocesan director will ensure that there is a sufficient level of support material in these particular areas of Anglican school work to provide a clear basis for guidance to schools. The endorsement of this guidance by the diocesan bishop is a strong indication of the view that he is likely to take, if appealed to for a decision on any issue in the above areas.

## **The Church nationally**

Beyond the diocese the Church is organized in provinces, which are groups of dioceses under the leadership of an archbishop. There is, therefore, a province of Wales and, in England, provinces of York and Canterbury. In England much of the national work is carried out by the General Synod, which brings together representatives of both English provinces, and by the Archbishops' Council, which has responsibility for the direction of the Church's national work. Reporting to the Archbishops' Council is the Church of England Board of Education, which has the responsibility for representing the Church at national level in matters of education. One of its principal tasks on behalf of Church schools is to represent their interests nationally, particularly with the Department for Education and Skills at times of education legislation. The Church of England Board of Education is responsible for developing policy that has been approved by the Archbishops' Council and the General Synod. The education policy of the Church in Wales is developed in consultation between the diocesan directors of education and the bench of bishops.

## The National Society

The educational work of the Anglican Church in the provinces of England and Wales benefits from the support of the National Society. This Anglican charity was founded in 1811 for the purpose of promoting Church schools. Its full name, according to the most recent of its royal charters, is the National Society (Church of England) for Promoting Religious Education. As it was the first national society for any purpose to be granted a royal charter, it has the privilege of being able to be known simply as The National Society. The Society works very closely with the Church of England Board of Education and the Church in Wales to support the work of Church schools and religious education, school worship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in all schools. It does this through courses offered in collaboration with the Church Colleges of Higher Education, through managing the section 23 inspection process in Anglican schools and through providing a religious education centre of national standing in London. Many of the senior officers of the National Society are joint appointments with the Church of England Board of Education. The National Society in support of Church schools maintains a specialist web site for Church school governance and management to which this book is an introduction.



More details of all the issues raised in this chapter can be found on [www.churchschools.co.uk](http://www.churchschools.co.uk).