

**DEPARTMENT FOR FORMATION  
SCHOOLS OFFICE**

**FOUNDATION GOVERNORS'  
HANDBOOK**

**February 2008**

Dear Foundation Governor

First of all, may I thank you on behalf of the Bishop for giving your time and efforts so generously to the work of governance in our Catholic schools? Your role is pivotal to the provision of Catholic Education in our Diocese. You represent the Bishop in a very special way. The detailed work that you undertake in co-operation with others in your school, with our Diocesan Education Service, and your Local Authority is what enables teachers to have the resources to teach and what gives pupils the environment in which to prosper.

However, your vocation as a Foundation Governor (and vocation it surely is!) involves you in more than just the mechanics of running the school. It makes you a partner, with the Bishop, priests, teachers, officers, advisors and catechists of the Diocese in the proclamation of the Gospel message within the whole school community and beyond. This is a wonderful Christian vocation which continually proclaims Jesus Christ as the 'keystone' and centre of all we do and are. It is a truly apostolic work with the awesome purpose of inspiring young people to follow Christ and to be his witnesses in their everyday lives. Since we 'cannot give what we have not got', it is also a challenging endeavour for all of us, but the end result; that we may 'have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10), is always worth the discomforts of the journey.

This publication, for which we are indebted to our Diocesan team of dedicated officers and advisors, is meant to help you fulfil your role as a Foundation Governor. May the Lord of the harvest continue to bless your endeavours and give you joy and fulfilment in working with others for the good of all who learn and teach in the educational establishments of the Salford Diocese.



**Canon T. A. McBride**  
**Episcopal Vicar for Formation**

We acknowledge the contribution from the Birmingham Archdiocese in creating this document.

## DUTIES OF THE GOVERNING BODY

- All governing bodies are under a legal duty to conduct their school with a view to promoting high educational standards. As Section 38(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 puts it:

‘The governing body shall conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school’.

- There is an additional duty on the governing bodies of Catholic voluntary aided schools, which is to ensure that the school is conducted in accordance with the Diocesan Trust Deed and its Instrument of Government, a legal document issued by your LEA.
- The Instrument, a copy of which should be available in your school, sets out the size and composition of the governing body and stipulates that foundation governors ‘are appointed and may be removed by the Bishop of Salford or any other person exercising Ordinary jurisdiction on his behalf’. In practice, this tends to be the Director of the Department for Formation.
- The Instrument contains a very important clause, which specifies how the school must be run. It reads as follows:

**‘The school was founded by and is part of the Catholic Church. The school is to be conducted as a Catholic school in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Catholic Church, and in accordance with the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Salford, and in particular:**

- **religious education is to be in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, discipline and general and particular norms of the Catholic Church;**
  - **religious worship is to be in accordance with the rites, practices, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic church; and at all times the school is to serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ’.**
- This is a very clear statement to governors about the way in which they must conduct their school, and your particular attention is drawn to the last two lines, which prescribe that, in everything it does and in all aspects of its work, the school must serve as a witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, a Catholic school is not one which merely follows the secular national curriculum with a bit of religious education and liturgical worship bolted on, but rather an institution where Gospel values and the Catholic faith are at the heart of everything and permeate every facet of its work. These, then, are your twin prime responsibilities in law:
  - To promote high educational standards;
  - To ensure that your school is constantly seen to bear witness to the faith in every aspect of its work.

## THE LEGAL POWERS TO SUPPORT THE CATHOLIC ETHOS

- The state gives you various powers to help you meet your legal responsibility to conduct your school as a Catholic institution. These include, for example:
  - The Instrument of Government;
  - Staff Appointments;
  - Pupil Admissions;
  - Religious Education;
  - Collective Worship;
  - Sex Education;
  - Control of Premises;
  - Term/Holiday Dates.

- **The Instrument of Government**

We have already looked at the Instrument. It should be a source of comfort to governors that their duty to conduct the school in accordance with the teachings of the church is so clearly and unambiguously enshrined in a legal document. The Instrument also gives foundation governors, ie those appointed by or on behalf of the Bishop, an overall majority on the governing body.

- **Staff Appointments**

Please see page 7.

- **Pupil Admissions**

Even though LAs now have a duty to co-ordinate arrangements for the admission of pupils to schools, governing bodies of our Catholic schools determine the criteria, in accordance with Department for Formation guidance and Diocesan policy, to be used to decide which pupils will be admitted. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available, it is perfectly lawful for a governing body to give Catholic children priority.

We have produced guidance, which is to be found on the Diocesan website. The new Code of Practice advises that the governing body of an RC school should consult with the Diocese before determining the admission policy.

Diocesan guidance on Admission policies urges governors to use as the first criteria 'baptised RC children from the home parish of .....'. Governors are strongly discouraged from using a test of practice.

- **Religious Education**

The Instrument of Government states that religious education must be given in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Your school does not, therefore, have to follow the RE syllabus produced by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education established by each LA, nor indeed would it be lawful for it to do so.

The Instrument also states that your school must be conducted in accordance with the Diocesan Trust Deed, which empowers the Bishop to give directions on the conduct of schools. Schools in this Diocese are expected to devote 10% of total teaching time to RE (5% at Key Stage 5).

- **Community Cohesion**

Following an amendment to the Education Act 2002 – The Education and Inspection Act 2006 has introduced the duty on the governing bodies of all maintained schools in England to promote community cohesion. This came into force in September 2007 and will be part of future OfSTED inspections, Section 48 inspections and reflected in the school's self-evaluation. This is linked to the existing requirements, based on the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters' to look to the well being of all pupils and to support their spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development and prepare them for adult life within a diverse society, within the UK and globally.

This agenda is not a new one for Catholic schools. This has always been part of our original mission and is reiterated in many Church documents; 'Education and the Common Good', 'Catholic Schools and other Faiths' and 'Christ at the Centre' to name but a few. However, given the many voices contributing to the present debate on the future of FAITH SCHOOLS it is necessary to make more explicit that which had always been implicit in our mission.

Further guidance for schools is being produced and will be sent out with examples of good practice.

- **Section 48 Inspections**

Section 48 (RE) Inspections are organised through the Diocese (Mr Peter Foley) and conducted by a team of experienced Diocesan advisers. It is not usually possible to hold both Section 48 and Section 5 (OfSTED) inspections concurrently.

- **Collective Worship**

Legislation states that all schools must hold a daily act of collective worship. This requirement applies equally to Catholic schools. The Instrument of Government stipulates that, in our schools, all religious worship must be in accordance with the rites and liturgies of the Church. This enables you to cement your school's Catholic ethos through your practice in these fundamental areas of prayer and worship of Almighty God. Remember that the daily act of collective worship does not count as 'teaching time'. It is, therefore, additional to the 10% (5% at Key Stage 5) of total teaching time that should be devoted to RE.

- **Sex Education**

You decide whether sex education should be given in your school and, if so, how. There are many pressures on schools generally from various quarters to offer a liberal programme of sex education. The fact that the law gives us absolute control in this matter enables you to ensure that any sex education given in your school will, to quote the Instrument yet again, be 'in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Catholic Church'.

- **Control of Premises**

As Diocesan school buildings are in the ownership of the Diocese rather than the LA, governing bodies have the opportunity to create chapels or quiet areas for prayer and spiritual reflection on site. This again helps to reinforce the Catholicity of the school by reminding pupils of the value of prayer. Any alteration to the school buildings requires the permission of the Trustees through the Department for Formation (Mr John Corrigan).

Page 14 deals with the governing body's financial responsibilities for premises.

- **Term/Holiday Dates**

The law allows governing bodies of voluntary aided schools to set their own term and holiday dates. This would, therefore, permit a governing body to vary an LA's calendar for religious purposes. For example, a Catholic school may wish to remain open during Holy Week when all other schools are closed. While it is good that the law gives Catholic schools this freedom, we would advise you to think carefully before departing significantly from LA dates. Life can become difficult for families where the school attended by one child is closed, and the school attended by another is open.

In this chapter we have seen how the state's civil law gives our governing bodies legal powers to help them run their schools in accordance with the Diocesan Trust Deed and the Instrument of Government, with its requirement that the school is to be conducted in accordance with the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church. Our governing bodies enjoy a further very important power to assist them in this regard, in their role as employers. This forms our next chapter.

## EMPLOYMENT AND THE APPOINTMENT OF STAFF

- Unlike most schools, where the LA is the legal employer, even though governing bodies make most day-to-day decisions, it is the governing body which is the employer in our Catholic schools. While this helps governing bodies to conduct their schools in accordance with the Instrument of Government, it also places employer responsibilities on them.
- Staff, whether teaching or non-teaching, are arguably the most valuable and precious resource in any school. Obviously, you will want to appoint people with the necessary skills to do the job, and you cannot disregard your duty under the School Standards and Framework Act to 'conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school'. But, as governors of a Catholic school, you must also pay regard to your Instrument of Government, which requires you to conduct the school in accordance with Canon Law and the teachings of the Catholic Church, and to ensure that 'at all times the school is to serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ'. The selection of staff is, therefore, critical in a Catholic school, as you will need to satisfy yourself that any persons you appoint will help you to build a school that does just that. In short, whenever you appoint staff, ask yourself the question 'How will this person contribute to building the community which is our Catholic school?'

Whoever you appoint, whether they are a Catholic or not, you must satisfy yourself that the person will uphold and subscribe to the Catholic ethos of your school.

- The law gives you the right to discriminate in favour of Catholics when making teacher appointments, as is set out in Section 60 (5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998:

### **'Staff at foundation or voluntary schools with religious character**

(5) If the school is a voluntary aided school:

- a) Preference may be given, in connection with the appointment, remuneration or promotion of teachers at the school, to persons:
  - whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the religion or religious denomination specified in relation to the school under section 69(4) or;
  - who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets or;
  - who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets and;
- b) Regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school, to any conduct on his part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified".

In short, this enables you to give preference in appointments and promotions to practising Catholics. It also enables you to dismiss teachers whose conduct, even in their private life, is not compatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is yet another example of the law helping you to conduct your school in accordance with its Instrument of Government.

- Recent new legislation has caused some people, including some LAs, to argue that Section 60 no longer applies. That is absolutely not the case. If anyone challenges your legal right to take action under the sections above, you should contact the Department for Formation at once. It is essential also that you contact the Department if you are ever contemplating dismissing a teacher under 60 (5) (b) above.
- The law does not allow you, however, to discriminate on religious grounds with regard to non-teaching staff, as is stated quite clearly by Section 60 (6) of the Act:

‘If the school is a voluntary aided school, no person shall be disqualified by reason of his religious opinions, or of his attending or omitting to attend religious worship, from being employed for the purposes of the school otherwise than as a teacher’.

- The governing body of a voluntary aided school is the legal employer of staff, and from time to time problems can arise over employment issues. Do not try to resolve these difficulties yourselves. If not handled correctly, they can result in industrial tribunals or legal proceedings or financial penalties. Make use, therefore, of the expertise which is available to you at the Department for Formation or in your LA Personnel/Human Resources Department.
- Recent legislation (2007) determines a duty of employers to eliminate sex discrimination on the grounds of gender and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

Please note and act on the following:

- Application forms and contracts are available from the CES website. Please see links on the Diocese website. It is essential that all staff including the headteacher sign the CES contracts when appointed.
- The law now allows headteachers to appoint most staff without any governor involvement. Because the governing body is the employer in a voluntary aided school, we strongly recommend that at least one governor is present at all appointments.
- Formally adopt at your first governing body meeting in the school year the disciplinary/grievance/capability procedures recommended by the Department for Formation. These are recognised by both LAs and trade unions, and are geared for use in Catholic schools. The Department for Formation will be pleased to give advice on their use.

## THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

- To carry out your duty under Section 38 (2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 'to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school', you need to have an effective school.
- What are the characteristics of an effective school? We suggest the following. Are they evident in your school?
  - Leadership is strong and well developed throughout the school;
  - A shared vision, with staff working to a common goal;
  - Teaching and learning the focus of all activities;
  - Good pupil progress and high achievement;
  - High expectations of pupils and staff;
  - Good teaching, recognising that pupils learn in different ways;
  - Progress regularly monitored;
  - A learning organisation, both for pupils and staff;
  - The school runs smoothly as a learning organisation, with an orderly atmosphere and sense of purpose;
  - Pupils relate well to each other and to staff, and are keen to learn and behave well;
  - Effective inclusion strategies;
  - Effective home/school links and high parental confidence.

The core purpose of a school is teaching and learning, be this related to the general curriculum or, in a Catholic school, education about the faith. Make sure, therefore, that every governing body and committee meeting focuses on this. Everything that happens in a school must contribute to effective teaching and learning. If governors do not gear their work towards this end, they are not performing properly. Some governing bodies unfortunately allow themselves to get so absorbed in trivia at their meetings that they lose sight of this crucial role. Do not let this happen to your governing body.

## **DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

- To carry out your duty of ensuring that your school is conducted as a Catholic school, you need to know what is the essence of Catholic education. The Catholic Education Service published in 1996 a pamphlet entitled 'Education in Catholic Schools and Colleges: Principles, Practices and Concerns: A Statement from the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales', which included the following summary. Do you recognise your school from this description?
- Catholic schools and colleges are established to support Catholic parents in their responsibility for the academic, physical, spiritual, moral and religious education of their children in accordance with the teachings of the Church. This means that they are committed to promoting:

- **The Search for Excellence**

The search for excellence is seen as an integral part of the spiritual quest. Christians are called to seek perfection in all aspects of their lives. In Catholic education, pupils and students are, therefore, given every opportunity to develop their talent to the full.

- **The Uniqueness of the Individual**

Within Catholic schools and colleges, each individual is seen as made in God's image and loved by Him. All students are, therefore, valued and respected as individuals so that they may be helped to fulfill their unique role in creation.

- **The Education of the Whole Person**

Catholic education is based on the belief that the human and the divine are inseparable. In Catholic schools and colleges, management, organisation, academic and pastoral work, prayer and worship, all aim to prepare young people for their life as Christians in the community.

- **The Education of All**

Their belief in the value of each individual leads Catholic schools and colleges to have the duty to care for the poor and to educate those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged.

- **Moral Principles**

Catholic education aims to offer young people the experience of life in a community founded on Gospel values. In religious education in particular, the Church aims to transmit to them the Catholic faith. Both through religious education and in the general life of the school, young people are prepared to serve as witnesses to moral and spiritual values in the wider world.

Why not ask your headteacher to lead a discussion among the governing body on the way your school displays these characteristics?

## **THE GOVERNING BODY'S CORE FUNCTION THEIR STRATEGIC ROLE**

- The headteacher has the task of managing the school and is responsible for its day to day functioning, much in the manner of a chief executive. The governing body is more akin to the Board of Directors and has a strategic role, shaping the character of the school and formulating its general direction. To do this effectively, governors will need to work closely with the headteacher, their senior professional adviser.
- This strategic role of the governing body is set out in the Education (School Government) (Terms of Reference) (England) Regulations 2002 which carry the force of law:
  - The governing body shall exercise their functions with a view to fulfilling a largely strategic role in the running of the school.
  - The governing body shall establish a strategic framework for the school by:
    - Setting aims and objectives for the school;
    - Setting policies for achieving those aims and objectives;
    - Setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives.
  - The governing body shall monitor and evaluate progress in the school towards achievement of the aims and objectives set and regularly review the strategic framework for the school in the light of that progress.
  - In exercising the functions in paragraphs 2 and 3 above, the governing body shall:
    - (subject to any other statutory provision) comply with any Trust Deed relating to the school; and
    - Consider any advice given by the headteacher under regulation 5 (2) below.
  - The governing body shall act as 'critical friend' to the headteacher, which is to say, they shall support the headteacher in the performance of his functions and give him constructive criticism'.
- Note that these regulations also make reference to the Trust Deed. The strategic role of the governing body is not confined therefore to the pursuit of high standards of educational achievement but also embraces the school's functioning as a Catholic institution.
- Essentially, therefore, the governing body has to set aims and objectives, establish policies whereby these will be achieved, set targets to check whether those aims and objectives are being achieved, and monitor and evaluate the progress of the school towards the aims which they have set. Put another way, the governing body should become involved, together with the headteacher, in a process of continuous improvement, analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the school and coming up with policies for improvement and/or change as necessary.

- The use of the term 'critical friend' in section 5 of the regulations is interesting. It does not mean that you should be constantly criticising the headteacher or being antagonistic. That would be counter-productive, as you are expected to form a good working relationship with your headteacher who was, of course, appointed by the governing body.

What it means rather is that the governing body will take a healthy interest in the state of the school, will know what the targets are, and will want to know whether those targets are being met. This will entail putting questions to the headteacher, which may be challenging, and satisfying themselves that they are receiving adequate responses. This is an area where governors often feel least comfortable, since it appears they are challenging the professional.

But remember you have a job to do and statutory duties to perform: you are also the body that is accountable to the parents, the Diocese and the wider community. So try not to shrink from this task. Bear this in mind. You are first and foremost a 'friend' of the school: otherwise you would not have agreed to serve as a governor. And in everyday life, it is often our close friends who will raise with us issues about our conduct or behaviour, not to hurt us or cause distress, but rather in a supportive manner to help us move forward.

Try to see 'the critical friend' role in this light.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- How, then, can you monitor and evaluate progress in your school, as is required by the Regulations we looked at in the previous chapter? There is a lot of data available, including:
  - SATs/GCSE/'A' Level/GNVQ etc results;
  - LA performance data;
  - Attendance rates;
  - Exclusions;
  - Staff turnover;
  - Destination of leavers.
- There is also published data which will enable you to compare your school's progress with that of others throughout the country or within your LA. A particularly helpful tool is the RAISE online. This provides accurate statistical data on individual schools.
- It is useful to consider whether pupils perform better in some subjects than others, and, if so, why; whether the current year's results show an improvement on the previous year and, if not, why; whether boys are outperforming girls and vice-versa; how pupils from different ethnic backgrounds or socio-economic groups are achieving, and so on. It is proper for governors to ask these types of questions, and this will enable you to judge whether the school is moving forward and meeting its targets. Your LEA will be able to help you in your monitoring role.
- It is perhaps a little more difficult for governors to monitor the Catholic ethos of the school, as published performance data is not so readily available. You may nevertheless wish to consider asking some of the questions below to help you form a view as to whether the school is really being run as a truly Catholic institution.
  - What is the distinctive nature of the school?
  - Where is this specifically stated?
  - Is it manifest in all aspects of the school's life? How?
  - If not, how can we overcome the obstacles?
  - Are we welcoming to all? How?
  - Does display work reflect Gospel values, eg love, justice, care and peace?
  - How does the prospectus express the school's distinctive character?
  - Is there a chapel/prayer room?
  - How do we help staff and pupils develop their faith?
  - What prayer opportunities do we offer pupils and staff?
  - Are our assemblies prayerful occasions?
  - What liturgies are celebrated in school?
  - Do those who attend play an active part?
  - What links do we have with parents?
  - Do we always recognise their genuine concerns?
  - What links do we have with our parish(es)?
  - How could they be strengthened?
  - How do we identify the gifts and needs of each person in the school community?
  - How do we demonstrate healing and reconciliation?
  - What are the roles of school/parish/parents in sacramental preparation?
  - When do you as a governing body monitor and evaluate the Catholicity of your school?

## THE GOVERNING BODY'S FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PREMISES

- We have seen how parliamentary legislation gives governors of voluntary aided schools powers to ensure that their school is conducted in accordance with the Trust Deed and its Instrument of Government. In broad terms, the price we pay for this is a 10% contribution to the cost of new schools and the refurbishment and expansion of existing schools. The remaining 90% is funded by Central Government.
- Capital funding for voluntary aided schools is a complex issue which cannot be covered in full detail in a booklet like this, it changes both significantly and frequently. You are advised, therefore, to take advantage of the specialist seminars arranged by the Department for Formation and to familiarise yourself with the DCSF publication "Funding for Premises-related Work at Voluntary Aided Schools in England". This book should be available in your school or can be found on [www.teachernet.gov.uk/vaotherusefulinfo](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/vaotherusefulinfo)
- The governing body and the LEA share responsibility for work to school buildings. Funding for some repairs and maintenance is included in the schools' budgets under the Fair Funding scheme. The governing body is responsible for all capital work to school buildings and playgrounds, eg extensions and improvements, and the LA has responsibility for capital work in connection with playing fields.
- Every voluntary aided school is awarded each year a sum by DCSF for capital work under the Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) scheme. DFC money can only be used for capital projects costing in excess of £2,000.00. Governing bodies have to find the 10% contribution to this fund and need to be aware that this fund includes elements for fees and VAT. There is a Diocesan scheme to support Governors with this fund and the person to contact is Sue Banks at the Department for Formation offices. There is a requirement for the Trustees to approve the spending of this fund and again the forms are available from the Department for Formation office.
- For larger projects you may bid for funding under the LA-Co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme (LCVAP), whereby LAs are allocated an amount of money by DCSF to fund condition, suitability, sufficiency and access projects in voluntary aided schools. The number of projects which can be funded through this process varies from year to year. All bids for Catholic schools have to be processed through the Department for Formation (John Corrigan) who will then liaise with the LA and other voluntary aided partners.
- All schools must have an Asset Management Plan, prepared by their LA, which gives a detailed description of their premises in terms of condition, suitability and sufficiency. The plan will indicate what building work needs to be done and the order of priority in which it should be addressed. The Asset Management Plan should inform all bids and proposals for capital work, and governing bodies or their finance/building committees should make themselves familiar with its contents.
- The school should also have an Asbestos Register.
- The Government has introduced a capital programme for secondary schools called Building Schools for the Future and a programme for the primary sector called Primary Renewal Programme.

- It is important that schools have a clear development plan which takes into account all the funding streams.
- The 10% issue is going to become more and more demanding and schools need to ensure that they have a regular way of raising money so that you will be able to fund your share of the costs.

## SO MUCH TO DO – HOW CAN WE DO IT ALL?

- There is no doubt that the list of governors' duties is formidable. These are some of them:
  - Conducting the school in accordance with the Trust Deed and the Instrument of Government;
  - Promoting high standards;
  - Setting targets for pupils as required by legislation;
  - Strategic planning and monitoring the implementation of the school improvement plan;
  - Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum;
  - Formulating and keeping under review the school budget;
  - Appointing staff and discharging the responsibilities of the employer;
  - Looking after, and securing improvements to, the premises;
  - Performance management policy;
  - Curriculum policy;
  - Sex education policy;
  - Special Educational Needs policy;
  - Admission policy;
  - Health and safety policy;
  - Discipline/complaints/grievance policies;
  - Preparing the prospectus and annual report, and holding the annual parents meeting when required, and so on.
- How can governors manage all this? The key is effective time management, an effective committee structure and effectively conducted meetings. The work cannot all be done at meetings of the full governing body: these should in any event focus on strategy. Much of the routine business should be handled by committees, who must report on their activities to the full governing body. In addition to the statutory committees for dealing with staff and pupil discipline, you are advised to have:
  - a curriculum and pupils committee;
  - a finance and buildings committee;
  - a staffing/personnel committee;
  - an ethos committee;
  - an admissions committee.
- The full governing body will determine the composition and terms of reference of these committees. The Department for Education and the LA can provide you with any further guidance you may need, including examples of terms of reference.
- It is essential that governors work as a team and take collective responsibility for their decisions as members of a corporate body. It is becoming increasingly common for governing bodies to adopt a code of conduct which shapes the way in which they operate. Such codes typically stipulate, for example, that all governors should treat each other, the staff and the wider community with courtesy; accept the validity of democratically reached decisions; observe the need for confidentiality on certain issues; respect the views of others, and conduct their business without rancour etc.
- It is good practice for individual governors to take a particular interest in a subject area and to visit the school to observe, or discuss with the teacher, how it is being taught and what difficulties there may be. Such visits must not be threatening nor purporting to be inspectorial. They need to be agreed both with the headteacher

and appropriate staff, and planned in advance so that time will not be wasted and the purpose of the visit is clearly defined.

- It is vital that meetings of both the full governing body and the committees are conducted efficiently. This is not always the case. How do your meetings mirror the following characteristics of an effective meeting?
  - Newcomers welcomed/inducted;
  - Start on time;
  - Apologies sent;
  - A proper agenda;
  - Decisions accurately minuted;
  - Information shared among all;
  - Presentations clear and to the point;
  - Focused discussion and debate;
  - Participation encouraged;
  - Preparation, e.g. papers will have been read in advance;
  - Shared purpose;
  - Rules are known and kept;
  - Views listened to;
  - Papers not tabled but circulated before the meeting;
  - Decisions made democratically;
  - Reasonable duration;
  - No unfinished business - i.e. arrange another meeting or delegate action to chair, committee or headteacher;
  - Sense of achievement;
  - Chair empowers others;
  - Chair summarises discussions;
  - Chair clarifies and confirms decisions made.

Clear outcome - who will do what by when

- Time is precious. Make sure that your meetings are productive and conducted in a businesslike way. The role of the chair is critical, and you also need a well organised clerk who will prepare the agenda in consultation with the chair and headteacher, ensure the distribution of relevant papers, and record and minute the deliberations of the governing body.

## THE OPERATION OF YOUR GOVERNING BODY

Here are some questions you may wish to ask yourself about the way your school is being governed. The list is not intended to be comprehensive, and you may wish to add some more.

- **How do governors shape the Catholic ethos of the school?**
  - How do they monitor that it is being maintained?
  - Is the school really run according to Gospel values? How do you know?
- **What arrangements are made for the teaching of religious education?**
  - What syllabus is used? Were the governors involved in its selection?
  - How do governors keep informed of the effectiveness of RE teaching?
  - How is the teaching of RE resourced?
- **What arrangements are made for sacramental preparation, celebration of Mass, assemblies, parish links?**
- **What are the admissions criteria?**
  - Do they reflect the models produced by the Department for Formation?
  - Who makes the decisions?
  - How many of the pupils are Catholics?
- **How have the governors tried to maintain a Catholic staff when making appointments?**
- **How do the governors organise their business?**
  - Do they have committees?
  - If so, do the committees have proper terms of reference?
  - How effective are the committees? Do they report regularly to the full governing body?
- **Do the governors focus on their strategic role?**
  - Do they act as 'a critical friend'?
  - Do they know the strengths and weaknesses of the school?
  - Have the governors initiated anything to improve teaching and learning in the school?

- **What involvement did the governors have in defining the aims and objectives of the school? Are these written down?**
  - Were the governors involved in drawing up and approving school policies?
  - How do you know if the School Improvement Plan is being implemented? Is it achieving what was intended?
  
- **How far are the governors involved in drawing up the school budget?**
  - Are budget decisions linked to the School Improvement Plan?
  - How do governors monitor the way in which the budget is spent during the year?
  
- **How do governors monitor the progress of the school?**
  - Do they rely on the headteacher reporting on whatever he/she wishes, or do the governors call for a systematic series of reports?
  - Do the governors analyse SATs and public examination results?
  - Do they annually examine their school's Raise on Line and compare it with the previous year's?
  - Does the school have high expectations of the pupils? How do you know?
  - Does the school strongly recruit pupils and staff? If not, why?
  
- Is your governing body really effective? Does it actually influence what happens in the school? Or is it merely a passive body which meets from time to time but has little impact on the life of the school and makes no real attempt to evaluate how it is progressing? How do the governors try to ensure that the school is giving value for money by spending their budget in a way which results in improved standards of teaching and learning for pupils?

## THE CHAIR

We reproduce below our response to a national secular organisation seeking our views on skills training for chairs of governing bodies:

‘There is much commonality in the skills required of a chair of governors, whether in a community, voluntary or foundation school. All chairs, for example, will need to know how to develop the strategic role of the governing body, how to ensure that it operates as a critical friend, how to conduct meetings efficiently, how to establish effective working relationships with professional staff and other governors, and how to promote the school in the community etc.

All chairs too should have an understanding not just of the role of the governing body but of the purpose of the school, why it is there, what it is trying to achieve, what is its role in society: in short, to be truly effective, a chair must have some philosophy of education which provides the values that will drive the work of the governing body. And it is because Catholic schools have, or should have, a distinctive character which is rooted in Gospel values and the teachings of the church that we believe there is a need for a module to meet the particular needs of Catholic chairs.

A Catholic school is not merely a learning institution, though we subscribe to the drive to raise educational standards since we believe that all children should be developed to their maximum potential and recognise that the education system has to play its part in contributing to the national good. But the Catholic school is more than this: it is a key part of the church and an essential element in the church’s mission. It educates children towards love of God in an environment rooted firmly in Gospel values where teachers are expected to act effectively as ministers of the Gospel through the way they lead their daily lives and the example they give. It is because the entire work of the school is based on fundamental religious principles that it is often referred to as a community of faith.

The Catholic school therefore has a wider degree of accountability than other schools, since it must not only comply with national legislation common to all schools, but must also satisfy the church community that it is complying with its Instrument of Government by ‘serving at all times as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ’. This in turn requires an additional competency on the part of the governing body if they are to fulfill their role of monitoring and helping to shape the work of the school in its entirety, and calls for a wider range of skills from the chair who may be required from time to time to engage in such sensitive issues as relationships between school and parish and even on occasions to enquire into a teacher’s private life when it may appear not to be conforming to the teachings of the church.

We believe that any course which failed to make specific provision for the particular needs of Catholic chairs arising from the distinctive nature of Catholic education would be incomplete and of limited benefit to them’.

It is because the Chair needs an understanding of the role and mission of the Catholic school that we strongly recommend that he/she should be a foundation governor.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, into which of the following four categories does your governing body fall?

- **‘We leave it to the professionals’**
  - These governors claim to be busy people, not able to get into school as often as they would like. They believe they have a good headteacher and should leave it to him or her. - **The Abdicators**
- **‘We keep our headteacher up to the mark’**
  - These governors visit the school, often without warning, and keep a close eye on all aspects of its work. They are frequently critical of all they see and seek to make all decisions about running of the school. - **The Adversaries**
- **‘We’re here to support the headteacher’**
  - These governors have delegated control to the headteacher who makes all the decisions. They see their role as offering guidance and support. They spend a lot of time talking about the school environment and scrutinising the budget. They don’t know the teachers very well. - **The Supporters Club**
- **‘We share everything - good or bad’**
  - These governors work in partnership with the headteacher and staff, and all have a clear understanding of their respective roles. - **The Partners**
- If your governing body doesn’t fall into the fourth one, what can you do to change things?

## OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

There is a wealth of documentation on school governance available from DCSF, LAs and other sources. We draw your attention in particular to the following:

- **A Guide to the Law for School Governors June 2007** This DCSF publication contains valuable information on the governance of voluntary aided schools. A copy should be available in your school or can be downloaded from [www.governorline.co.uk](http://www.governorline.co.uk)
- **Admissions and Admission Appeals Handbook** This Department for Education publication tells you all you need to know about arrangements for the admission of pupils and appeals.
- **Web-links include: -**
  - [www.governorline.co.uk](http://www.governorline.co.uk)
  - [www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)
  - [www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk)
  - [www.parents.gov.uk](http://www.parents.gov.uk)

## GLOSSARY

- **Catholic Education Service (CES)**

The national education agency of the Bishops' Conference for England and Wales, which promotes the cause of Catholic education nationally, liaising with central government and other national bodies, and offering support and guidance to Dioceses and schools.

- **Critical friend**

The role of the governing body in supporting the headteacher and giving him/her constructive criticism in the exercise of their strategic role.

- **Devolved Capital Formula (DFC)**

An amount allocated by central government by formula to each school to fund work on school buildings.

- **Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF)**

The central government department responsible for education.

- **Department for Formation (Schools Department)**

The Diocesan department responsible for the supply of school places and for supporting Catholic schools and governing bodies.

- **Fair Funding**

The process whereby funding is devolved to schools.

- **Foundation Governors**

Those governors with a particular responsibility to ensure that the school is conducted in accordance with the Diocesan Trust Deed and its Instrument of Government. They are always in the majority on a voluntary aided school governing body and, in this Diocese, are appointed by, or on behalf of, the Bishop.

- **General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)**

The examination sat normally by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4.

- **General National Vocation Qualification (GNVQ)**

Courses with a vocational bias followed by students at Key Stages 4 and 5, due to be replaced by vocational GCSE's and 'A' Levels by 2007.

- **Instrument of Government**

A legal document which stipulates the size and composition of the governing body, and defines the character of the school and how it shall be conducted.

- **Key Stages**

Phases of the National Curriculum:

- Foundation Stage - for pupils of Nursery and Reception age;
- Key Stage 1 - for pupils aged 5 – 7;
- Key Stage 2 - for pupils aged 7 – 11;
- Key Stage 3 - for pupils aged 11 – 14;
- Key Stage 4 - for pupils aged 14 – 16;
- Studies after the age of 16 are sometimes referred to as Key Stage 5.

- **LA-Coordinated Voluntary Aided Programme (LCVAP)**

A scheme whereby central government allocates funding to LAs to finance capital projects in voluntary aided schools. Schools have to make their bids through their Diocesan authority.

- **Local Authority (LA)**

Your local council exercising its responsibilities for education.

- **Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)**

Examinations in Maths, English and Science taken by all pupils at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

- **Trust Deed**

The document which defines a charity's purpose.

- **Voluntary Aided (VA) School**

A school, usually denominational in character, whose building is provided and owned by the Trustees and whose governing body enjoys certain legal rights to ensure that the school is conducted in accordance with the Trust Deed and Instrument of Government. Its revenue budget is provided by the LA, and major capital costs are funded 90% by central government, the balance of 10% being met by the governing body or Diocese.