# Introduction to the work of the ODBE

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little History of Church Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diocesan Education Team</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Distinctiveness of the Church School</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church School Governance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In brief... VA and VC</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE)

We serve the Local Authority (LA) areas of Bracknell, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham. There are 284 Church of England schools across the Diocese serving some 58,000 pupils.

The ODBE, like other diocesan boards of education in England, has the following main responsibilities:
- to promote excellent education which is consistent with the practice of the Church of England;
- to promote the development of religious education and collective worship in schools of the Diocese;
- to support church schools and to advise the governors, trustees of church educational endowments and others concerned with matters affecting these church schools;
- to promote co-operation and partnership between the Board and bodies or persons concerned in any respect with education in the Diocese.

The ODBE is committed to the education of the whole person to their fullest potential, to the development of moral and spiritual understanding, to the uniqueness of the individual and to the education of all within the maintained system. It works within statutory education on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford in developing a Christian vision of Education. It fulfils this commitment to all schools through the provision of a range of advice and support.

Through these advisory services ODBE promotes RE, Collective Worship and the spiritual development of pupils. The work of the advisory team also focusses on school improvement in order to support schools in dealing with the requirements of Ofsted inspection and (where appropriate) relationships with HMI. It ensures that Church schools are provided with specialist support for building development and legal matters. Among the churches of the Diocese, the Board promotes Church related education and provides advice for clergy, governors and parishes in support of their schools.

The vision and priorities of the Diocese and the pastoral role of the Church underpin all the work of the ODBE. More about this vision especially ‘Living Faith for the Future’ can be found on the Diocese of Oxford website.

Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST)

The Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust is a not for profit multi-academy trust set up in July 2012 to provide a suitable vehicle for schools in the Oxford Diocese to come together in a multi-academy Trust. Open to both convertor academies and those requiring sponsorship, the Trust’s objects also allow for community schools to join. Already containing a mix of former VA and former VC church schools, we aim to offer a meaningful partnership built on the Christian principles of fellowship, where schools can share best practice, and work in support of one another, with the added benefit of the central resource which the Diocese itself can provide. The Trust is open to both primary and secondary schools across the Diocese.

Mission

At the heart of our vision for the schools in the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust is our belief in educational excellence. We are called to serve our pupils, staff, parents and their local community by providing academies with the highest levels of academic rigour and pastoral care, with opportunities provided for spiritual growth and intellectual enquiry.

We seek to embody the Christian experience of community by being and growing communities where we share our gifts, where the emphasis is on what we can contribute, rather than what we can receive, and
where each is given according to need. All our schools are places where children and young people can learn the value of service and of human endeavour, where they can be sure they are valued for who they are and where they can be supported to be the best they can be.

Working together we are:

- **Dedicated to achieving excellence in education**
- **Inclusive and diverse, open and welcoming**
- **Promoting a rich and creative curriculum**
- **Creating rewarding places to work**
- **Supporting communities**

We are committed to the family of church schools, and especially keen to ensure that small schools flourish. We are also committed to retaining the individual ethos and character of each school in ODST. All our academies have their own headteacher and local governing body.

**A Little History of Church Schools**

Most diocesan church schools were established under trusts to provide education for the ‘poor of the parish’ with teaching according to the Church of England. This was before Parliament allowed, in 1870, the establishment of board, and later county, schools to provide free education. The school managers or governors were responsible for all costs relating to the school buildings. From 1833 the state provided an increasing amount of financial assistance, mainly for the payment of teachers.

From 1811 the ‘National Society for Promoting Religious Education’ was established to support Church of England Schools. This body still exists, though commonly called the 'National Society', and provides extensive resources for schools, dioceses and parishes. More details can be found on the National Society’s own website.

Church schools were established under a Trust Deed. We would encourage new headteachers with governors to reflect on the original aims of the school as expressed in the Trust Deed and how this has been translated into the current ethos statement as exhibited in the school’s Instrument of Government and any aims, mission, values or ethos statement of the school. A copy of the Trust Deed should be in school or at Diocesan Church House.

The national need for the expansion of education beyond the means of many governing bodies was met in the Education Act 1944, which enabled voluntary schools to become either:

- Controlled by the local authority (LA), which meets all the costs of the school, with a minority of church foundation governors and church trustees holding the school site and buildings under educational trusts, or
- Aided, for which the local authority meets most of the running costs, including teachers’ pay, but the governors, of whom a majority are church foundation governors, have responsibility for improvements to the school buildings and maintenance of the exterior fabric.

The Education Reform Act 1988 considerably increased the responsibilities of governors and headteachers, particularly regarding the introduction of local management of schools and the requirement that collective worship and the curriculum, including religious education, (a) ‘promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society’, and (b) ‘prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’. There have, of course, been further developments.
In recent years the National Society has taken an increasingly leading role in church school development. The introduction of Church school inspections (Section 13 and 23) in the 1990s was led by the National Society. These inspections have morphed through SIAS (section 48) to become the current SIAMS inspection. A very significant landmark in the Anglican Church’s involvement in education took place in 2000 with the publication of *The Way Ahead*¹ which explored a great deal of the motivation and mission of Church school education. This was followed by further reports; *The Church School of the Future*² and *The DBE of the Future*³ both of which relate specifically to schools and *Going for Growth*⁴ which focusses more broadly on the needs of young people and children and the mission of the church in this area. All of these publications have important contributions to make in the understanding of what it is to work in and lead church schools, despite its age *The Way Ahead* still forms the basis of how schools are understood by the Anglican Church.

The Academy agenda has been responded to very positively by the Church of England which has become the single largest provider of sponsored academies. Since 2010 ODBE has worked hard to provide support for the growing number of Academy conversions and sponsorships through advice and especially through the establishment of the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust. There are currently six multi academy trusts set up across the diocese catering for a mixture of church and community schools

### The Diocesan Education Team

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE) values each of the schools it serves and offers the services of a professional and supportive team which includes:

- The Director and Deputy Directors (School Effectiveness/Resources);
- School Link Advisers;
- RE Advisers;
- Premises Officers;
- Admissions/Appeals Officer
- School Support Officer

The work of the team is supported by a strong administrative group who also act as advisers to schools on some matters such as the appointment of foundation governors.

Each school has a named School Link Adviser, receives the Bulletin and has open access to our website.

Support offered to church schools is governed by the Service Level Agreement (SLA). As part of this agreement, new headteachers are offered school support visits from their named adviser during their first weeks. The diocesan team also offers regular training and visits for governors and staff. The team provides and facilitates a range of courses over the school year, including and pre- and post- SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) support.

The work of the ODBE team centres on the following tasks;

- improving and developing the distinctiveness and effectiveness of Church Schools;
- supporting schools in developing and confidently communicating their distinctive vision;
- offering an excellent school improvement service, working in partnership with local authorities and their external agencies as appropriate;

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¹ The Way Ahead [www.tinyurl.com/the-way-ahead](http://www.tinyurl.com/the-way-ahead)
² The Church School of the Future [www.tinyurl.com/chadwick-report](http://www.tinyurl.com/chadwick-report)
⁴ Going for Growth [www.tinyurl.com/going-4-growth](http://www.tinyurl.com/going-4-growth)
providing SIAMS training for headteachers and governors to equip them to monitor and evaluate their school as a distinctive church school;

- fulfilling a strategic plan for succession and leadership within the Diocese;
- supporting Governors in their nurture of the Christian Foundation of their schools;
- offering pastoral support for headteachers and staff;
- advising on religious education and its contribution to a schools distinctive character;
- advising on acts and patterns of worship;
- supporting governors in the appointment of headteachers;
- assisting with maintenance and improvement of Aided school’s buildings;
- representing the interests of church schools and liaising with local authorities;
- ensuring the continuing development, status and position of RE through engagement in SACRES throughout the Diocese and involvement in national initiatives;
- administration of the statutory inspection of Church schools (SIAMS).

The significance of the spiritual centre is vital and integral to all aspects of our work. Training and support will always draw from and return to this in order to sustain and develop distinctive leadership in Church schools.

The Distinctiveness of the Church School

The Way Ahead suggests;

‘There will be different interpretations of distinctiveness by governing bodies reflecting the role of the school in its community, its statutory category, the composition of the community, and the traditions of the local church... Although there will be variations between one Church school and another, there will be certain core principles and values that should unite all Church schools within the Christian mission. These will be the gospel values of loving God and one’s neighbour, as well as the practical outworking of these values in how pupils are taught to conduct themselves and relate to one another and to God’s world’ (4.2 and 4.3)

The between partnership parish and school, between headteacher and clergy, is vital to the quality of distinctiveness which the school will demonstrate.

The Church school is also recognised as a major contributor to social cohesion and should not be a cause of social division. The Right Reverend Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford reminds us in The Scandalous Inclusivity of God that:

‘...a [Church] school is able to be both particular (clear about its own Christian faith) and inclusive (welcoming of all because of the Christian understanding of God). It is not a problem for us that people do not share the specific beliefs of Christianity for one of the best ways that we will witness to the reality of our faith is by the way we love and honour God in our neighbour. Indeed, we believe we are better able to be inclusive than other schools because our inclusivity flows from our belief in God. This puts us in a better position to welcome, understand and include people of other faiths.’

It is the quality of distinctiveness created by the Church school’s staff, leaders and community which enables this vision to be realised.
The following traits from *The Church School of the Future* summarise the distinctiveness anticipated by the church:

- ‘the religious education curriculum will include other major world faiths but will ensure that the teaching of Christianity is given appropriate priority;
- the life of the school is developed around an explicit commitment to Christian values and ethos;
- the learning environment, including premises and grounds, will reflect the Church of England foundation and the centrality of spiritual development;
- close working relationships with the Church community, through parish or deanery, will be fostered;
- admission policies form part of this distinctiveness for Aided Schools and have a powerful impact on the character of the school.’

(3.6)

**The Parish and the School** - the majority of Church of England schools are set within the worshipping community of the parish family. The implications of this setting vary, especially between Primary and Secondary schools, but in all cases there should be a commitment to partnership between parish and school which is built upon a common quest for the outworking of shared values and spiritual growth. This partnership sees the Church school working with the parish to engage parents (and indeed the whole community) in education and the broader life of the child.

**Church School Governance**

‘In order to enable the continued development of successful schools, high quality governance is essential ...The governance of our schools cannot be left to chance; schools need governors with the right skills and gifts to provide strategic oversight and direction.’

(The DBE of the Future para. 32)

All Church of England Schools must have Foundation Governors. In Voluntary Aided schools they should outnumber all other categories of governor put together by a majority of at least two. Voluntary Controlled schools have a minority of Foundation Governors, usually 25%. In the Diocese of Oxford we have three types of Foundation Governor:

- those appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education often from the local church community;
- those appointed directly by the Parochial Church Council;
- the ex-officio governor – normally the incumbent unless a substitute has been nominated and agreed by the Archdeacon.

The term of office for all diocesan foundation governors is 4 years. A diocesan foundation governor can resign at any time during those 4 years. The Clerk to the Governors should inform the Schools Support Officer, Tracy Richardson, of any changes to the governing body, including changes to non-foundation governors, eg parent election. Nomination forms are available to down from our website.

**So why do we have Foundation Governors?** - It is a requirement of the Trust under which Church of England Schools were established and endowed with a Church of England Foundation. They are full governors just like any other and must be effective in supporting the strategic vision, financial management and in holding the leadership to account.

They have a special responsibility to ensure:

- that the guiding principles of the founding church are incorporated into all aspects of the governance of the school;
- that the terms of the trust deed governing the school are adhered to.
**The Ethos of the School** - While the whole governing body has agreed to uphold the Christian ethos of the school, it is the foundation governors who have a particular responsibility to ensure that the Christian foundation is reflected in all aspects of school governance and life.

**Governor Training Course Programme** - The Diocese provides a programme of training for governors in its church schools. Whole governing body training can also be provided within schools as a bespoke service, speak to your Link Advisers for details.

**In brief.... VA and VC**

**Governors**
In a Voluntary Aided School, a majority of the governing body is made up of Foundation Governors, who are appointed by the Church with a duty to include maintaining the Church of England character of the school in their overall governance. In Voluntary Controlled Schools, foundation governors are a minority. The Vicar or Priest in Charge of a parish may be an ‘Ex-Officio’ governor, individual Instruments of Governance vary. If clergy are unable to undertake the Ex-Officio role, an ‘Archdeacon’s nominee’ is appointed in their place.

**Staffing**
The Voluntary Aided School governing body are the employers of the staff, the governors are encouraged to use the National Society contracts. In Voluntary Controlled schools the governing body has delegated powers in relation to the staff, but all members of staff are employed by the Local Authority. Staffing in both schools is paid for from the delegated budget under very similar terms and conditions of service.

**Finance**
Capital works in VA schools are the responsibility of the governing body, and grant aided, generally up to 90%, through LCVAP funding via the Diocesan Board of Education. In Controlled Schools, capital work is paid for by the Local Authority, though there may be a requirement for the school to raise some of the money needed. There are different forms of insurance as a result. Both categories of school are financed for revenue and some routine premises costs through the delegated budget.

**Religious Education**
RE in Voluntary Controlled schools must be planned in accordance with the requirements of the local authority’s agreed syllabus for RE.
RE in Voluntary Aided schools is the responsibility of the governors in accordance with the school’s trust deed. It is the strong recommendation of the Diocesan Board of Education that VA schools plan RE courses based upon their local authority’s RE syllabus.

**Christian worship**
All Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Church of England Schools are required by law to conduct worship in accordance with the Christian character of the school. There is no difference in law.

**Admissions**
Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies are their own admissions authority. They decide on their admission arrangements, and consult other admissions authorities (schools), the Local Authority and the Diocesan Director of Education when there are substantial changes. All admission authorities must consult every 7 years even if no changes are made to their policies. However, like all other authorities they are bound by the admissions rules and guidance issued by the Department for Education. The School Admissions Code 2012 permits Voluntary Aided schools and Academies to admit children on faith based criteria, however to aid schools and academies in an inclusive approach, the Diocesan Board of Education recommends that governing bodies consider admission criteria which minimises the use of church affiliation. Voluntary Controlled Schools follow the admission arrangements set by their respective Local Authority.