



Ex-Officio Foundation Governors:

Guidance for clergy on their role as a governor in schools

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Context

Nationally, the educational landscape is changing rapidly and schools are experiencing challenges arising from an increased expectation of school governors. There is now an emphasis on those involved in governance, including trustees of academies, to have the right skills, knowledge and experience and there are time and energy implications to inspecting governance as part of the leadership of a school.

Additionally, there are on-going changes and challenges to local parish organisation including, in some cases, the expansion of benefices. The impact of such changes on clergy and other church leadership capacity, as well as of pressure particularly on small churches and small schools, is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain effective local church involvement in the governance of all our church schools.

Despite the growing expectations of clergy, coupled with the changes to the local church and church school landscape, participation in governance offers a vital missional opportunity for clergy. In 2001, General Synod affirmed that church schools are *'at the heart of our mission to the nation.'* In 2010, Going for Growth set out a call to action for the church to work at national, diocesan and parochial level towards *'every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ.'* This was followed in 2016 by a freshly articulated vision for the Church of England's work in education which Synod endorsed, giving clarity to why we think involvement in education is vital as part of our mission, being *'deeply Christian and serving the common good.'* In 2019 the Growing Faith document expressed the need for mission and ministry to look beyond the parish to schools and households.

Background

All Church schools have Foundation Governors. Either the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) or the local PCC or a mix of both normally appoints these. This information is found in the **Instrument of Government**. This is a legal document which sets out the arrangements for the constitution of all governing bodies.

The governing board (previously known as the 'governing body') of each Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled Church of England School in the Diocese continues to include the post of **Ex-Officio Foundation Governor**. Formally the 'Principal Officiating Minister' of the parish in which the school is situated holds that post. The term 'Principal Officiating Minister' covers the roles of **Incumbent**, Vicar, Rector, Priest-in-charge or Lead Minister but *for this guidance, the term 'Incumbent' is used for consistency*. Sometimes where there is a federation of more than one school there may be more than one Ex-Officio Foundation Governor or an arrangement where the Ex-Officio role rotates. The instrument of government will set out what should happen in circumstances where the Incumbent is unable, unwilling or prevented from acting in that role. This usually involves the Archdeacon appointing a temporary Ex-Officio Foundation Governor in consultation with the DBE.

Should you take on the role of Ex-Officio governor you will have to fulfil three roles, the role of governor like everyone else on the board, the role foundation governor and also your special role as Ex-Officio Foundation Governor.



Your Role as a Governor

Governors are the strategic leaders of our schools and have a vital role to play in making sure every child gets the best possible education. This reflects the law, which states that the purpose of governing bodies is to *'conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school'*. In all types of schools, governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school.

Your responsibilities as a school governor are laid out in some detail in the '[Governor's Handbook](#)' but in essence governors hold an overview of the life and work of the school. Governors do not get involved in the day to day running of the school, which is the role of the headteacher. Governors have no individual power as all responsibilities and decisions are shared collectively, the governors are a corporate body.

Your Role as Foundation Governor

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

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

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

These responsibilities are especially monitored through Section 48 SIAMS inspections (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools).

Note: It is not the role of foundation governors to solely take on responsibility for the 'church school' aspects of governance, all governors are governors of a church school.

We have a more detailed guidance document on [The Role of Foundation Governor](#) available on our website.



Your Role as Ex-Officio Governor

In addition to the above roles, By virtue of being the Incumbent, the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor has a key part to play in the following areas:

- Developing the framework within which the school and church will work together in the community as a whole, not just on the governing board. They will be responsible for developing the parish's relationship with its school and helping both groups towards a fuller understanding of how church and school can form a powerful Christian partnership.
- Planning a clear pattern of visits, perhaps based around times of leading collective worship, this could also include a conversation with staff/ the Head and classroom visits so this is both pastoral and monitoring from a governance perspective.
- Monitoring and supporting the school's distinctive Christian ethos. Encouraging fellow foundation governors to also visit and involve themselves with the school.
- Opening each meeting of the Governing Board with prayer, this sets the tone for the meeting and reminds others of the Christian ethos of the school as a whole.
- Endeavouring to build a positive relationship with the Head Teacher. This is vital to the school's development as a Christian community and supporting the Head Teacher in leading a Church of England school.
- Staff appointments, the appointment of a new Headteacher will be a time of particular importance for the future of the school and the links between school and parish.
- Areas where pastoral support is unexpectedly required in school e.g. bereavement; personal crisis; controversy; accident; celebration.
- Ensuring that the Headteacher and fellow governors understand the importance of the priest's pastoral role as part of the parish commitment to the school.
- Engaging other members of the ministry team, and of other denominations, with school whilst retaining the unique identity of the parish and the school.
- Maintaining a link with the Diocesan Education Team to ensure maximum support for you and school.



Note: that for some of these areas the Incumbent will utilise the support and involvement of other members of the parish community

Questions to Consider- before taking up the role

Do I have the time to commit to being an effective governor? Remember that this isn't just attending full governing board meetings, you have to be prepared and do all the necessary pre-reading of documents sent by the school. To be a full and effective governor the Ex-Officio needs to commit to committees, where these are used by governing bodies, which can be the equivalent commitment of one hour per week.

How many schools can I commit to? Try to avoid sitting on more than one governing board although it is acknowledged this can be challenging where you have more than one school (both church and community) within your benefice.

Is being a governor the best way to support the school? You will undoubtedly want to develop a special relationship with and commit to the school and you may have the time and skills to be an excellent governor. However, some Incumbents feel that they will better serve the school in a more pastoral role and feel that they can provide other effective foundation governors from within their congregation.

Frequently Asked Questions

I have decided to take on my role as Ex-Officio Foundation Governor, what do I do now?

You must discuss this with the school. The DBE has a simple form for you to complete to confirm that you wish to take up your role. Training is offered by the Diocese and each of our schools has a named adviser who can be a useful point of contact. Please note that the school will require safeguarding checks and those completed for your role as Incumbent will not suffice.

What if I decide not to take on my role as Ex-Officio Foundation Governor?

You should discuss this matter with your Archdeacon and the school. It is important that Ex-Officio Foundation Governor places on governing boards are filled by an Archdeacon's appointment, so as not to leave a school unsupported. The DBE has a simple form for you to complete to confirm that you do not wish to take up your role and we can then advise on who to look for as a replacement.

I would like to take up my role but I feel that I lack the 'right' skills, experience or knowledge for the governance role?

You should discuss this matter with your Archdeacon who will determine, in consultation with a Diocesan Education Team, the learning/training/support needed to 'fill the gap' to enable you to take up the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor role as quickly as possible. If the Archdeacon concludes that there is a justifiable cause for you to not take on the governance role either permanently or temporarily it will still be your responsibility, alongside the school, to identify a suitable alternative.

I am a busy person – how much time commitment will be required as a governor?

All governing bodies are legally required to hold at least three meetings per school year, but some meet up to six times. You may also be asked to join a committee, which will involve attendance at extra meetings. The National Governance Association states that the average time commitment to be a governor is five to eight hours per month.

I have more than one church school in my Benefice; I cannot be Ex-Officio Foundation Governor for all of them, what can I do?

Under the Constitution Regulations and Instrument of Government, it is the responsibility of the Archdeacons to appoint a substitute Ex-Officio Foundation Governor at a school. Initially, this situation needs to be brought to the Archdeacon's attention. It is acceptable for you or the school to suggest a suitable person to the Archdeacon who is willing to fulfil this role. Where there are several church schools either in a single parish or in several parishes served by one Incumbent you might consider 'rotating' the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor role, say on a two-year basis. This would have to be subject to the agreement of the Archdeacon and all the schools involved.

Is it the usual practice for the Ex-Officio to be the Chair of Governors?

As Ex-Officio Foundation Governor, you play a pivotal role in the life of both school and church and to maintain a sense of balance the Diocese does not recommend that the holder takes on the additional demands of being Chair of Governors. Even if, historically and traditionally, the Incumbent has taken on this additional role and even if the number of other foundation governors falls significantly. It is not regarded as best practice for the Incumbent to extend an already demanding role by being Chair.

Am I expected to spend more time in school than my fellow governors because I am the local priest?

You will not be expected to put in any more time than your fellow governors. However, the school will undoubtedly have expectations of you, which you will need to discuss with the headteacher.

How can I manage the school's expectations of me and my time?

One way in which the expectations of local clergy can be managed is through an effective and clear working agreement between the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor and the Governing Board of the school concerned. The precise wording of the agreement should be considered and determined locally by both church and school leadership teams but is expected to include a reference to the post holder being:

- willing to promote the views and policies of the parish and Diocese (and indeed of the Church of England as a whole in terms of its published Vision for Education) as appropriate at meetings of the Governing Board and other meetings concerning, for example, any change in the future status of the school;
- a link to ensure the school features regularly on PCC and other local church leadership team agenda and vice versa;
- a visible presence in the church and school;
- prepared to represent the church and school during a SIAMS Inspection and to explain to the Inspection Team how parish and school work together for mutual benefit;
- prepared to undertake ongoing training as required;
- prepared to set aside time to meet and to pray regularly with the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher about both parish and school.

Am I responsible for appointing Foundation Governors at my school?

The appointing body will be named in the instrument of government, this is usually the DBE or PCC. It is your responsibility to work with the PCC to find and nominate suitable people to the Board who are willing to become foundation governors. The DBE must ensure foundation governors have the skills to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school, as well as be willing and able to preserve and develop the Christian foundation. All nominees, whether new or continuing, must complete and submit an application form, the appointment process as well as support and advice on recruiting governors is available on the website [here](#).

Is it appropriate for me to have a good relationship with my headteacher?

It is both appropriate and good practice to develop a good professional relationship with your headteacher and indeed all who work in the school.

Can I tell my school how to conduct RE lessons and Collective Worship?

You cannot tell your school how to conduct RE lessons and Collective Worship, as this is to do with the day-to-day running of the school. However, in line with your duties as a foundation governor, you will be able to influence your school's 'distinctiveness' in these areas by taking a keen interest in policies, and in your capacity as Ex-Officio Foundation Governor by offering to take part. Also, you might encourage school leaders and governors to engage with the Diocesan Education Team to support the school further.

Is there a financial implication from my church to the school?

When they undertake Capital Building projects governing boards at Voluntary Aided schools are required to make a 10% contribution to costs. Governors obtain their funding from a number of sources to pay the contributions. These include PCC contributions, trust funds, income from the hire of the school premises, PTA contributions, and of course fundraising but there is no obligation on the PCC to provide funds.

I am a Trustee for my school too; are these responsibilities different?

Trustees and governors have separate roles and responsibilities. The trustees as a board meet infrequently usually to consider a request, from governors or the Local Authority (LA), to extend or modify the school buildings. The trustees would usually support any request to improve facilities but could request

modifications to the design of a project, or proposed building materials, if they consider the proposals to be detrimental or inappropriate to their building. Governors and the LA often forget that trustees' permission must be obtained prior to any building works being undertaken. As Ex-Officio Foundation Governor, you can be pro-active to prevent this problem from occurring. When a school closes or transfers to a replacement site the trustees have to determine the future of the premises in accordance with legislation and guidance from the Charity Commission.

How many foundation governors should there be?

In a Voluntary Aided school, the foundation governors have to outnumber all other governors by a majority of two. In a Voluntary Controlled School, the foundation governors are in a minority and cannot form more than 25% of the governing board. In academies the overriding board of governors are often also called directors or trustees and whilst there may not be a formal Ex-Officio role at this level it is likely that the Incumbent will have a place on the local governing committee for the school, along with others appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education and/or PCC.

What happens to the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor role when there is no Incumbent?

Where there is a vacancy (previously often referred to as 'interregnum') in the position of Incumbent it is for the Archdeacon to make a temporary appointment until the Incumbent position is filled. The process of identifying a suitable person, not necessarily ordained, to take on the Ex-Officio Foundation Governor role, would be the responsibility of both the local church leadership team and the governing board of the school concerned. The Diocesan Education Team are available to support local leadership teams in undertaking this task.

Where can I access support?

The Diocesan Education Team is able to offer support for clergy in embarking on, continuing or developing their role as governors of church schools in this Diocese. Each school has a named adviser from the Education Team as well as the opportunity to work with the team through the Enhanced Service Plan. Training opportunities for governors are available, some are 'generic' and others can be 'tailor-made' to suit the context and requirements of individual situations. If you would like a meeting one to one to support you in your role as governor contact the named adviser for the school or email the office.



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