

A review of the Salisbury Diocesan
Board of Education

by LBMW

REPORT

BACKGROUND

There are 194 Church Schools in the Diocese of Salisbury, of which 11 are secondary schools, six are middle schools and one is a new school opening in September 2018. In total, 85 schools are academies either within a multi-academy trust or they are stand-alone academies. Twelve of the academies have joined the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT), which was established in 2012.

The senior leadership team (SLT) comprises the Director of Education, the Deputy Director of Education, the Assistant Director of Education, the Lead School Improvement Adviser and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DSAT.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

The review over four days was led by Tricia Pritchard, Education Consultant for LBMW. It comprised a pre-review scrutiny of documentation, which included Board and Committee minutes and terms of reference, a range of policies, the strategic plan and the Board's self evaluation of progress towards meeting the aims of the strategic plan. This was followed by an on-site visit in week beginning the 16th October when discussions were held with:

- the Director of Education and senior leadership team
- the school support team
- a group of headteachers
- the Chair and members of the Schools and Academies Leadership and Governance Committee
- a group representing the DBE's work with children and young people
- the Bishop of Salisbury
- the Diocesan Secretary
- staff with responsibility for Religious Education and Collective Worship
- the Chair of the DBE
- the Chair and members of the Children and Young People's Committee
- a group of school governors
- the Chair and members of the Buildings and School Estate Committee
- the Chair and members of the Finance and Staffing Committee
- the Chair and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of two mixed multi-academy trusts in the Diocese
- the Chair, CEO and board member from DSAT and a headteacher of a school within DSAT
- the DBE's SIAMS consultant.
- A visit to a Church of England school

In total, discussions were held with over fifty people. Oral feedback was given at the end of the site visit.

MAIN FINDINGS

Key Strengths

- The inspirational leadership of the Diocesan Director of Education.
- The strong sense of teamwork, support for one another and commitment to promoting a 'can do' culture.
- The strong focus on ensuring that actions to meet agreed priorities are well timed and staged.
- The investment in people, which incorporates well-targeted professional development for all staff and time for spiritual nourishment.
- The very clear vision for the DBE of the future which is shared with and well understood by headteachers, staff and governors.
- The enthusiasm and commitment for raising aspirations and promoting ambition within every Church School in the Diocese.
- The rigour and inclusiveness of self-evaluation; everyone participates in evaluating the areas in the strategic plan for which they are responsible or contribute to.
- The investment in training for schools to ensure that Religious Education and Collective worship are of the highest quality.
- Steps taken to improve the rigour of SIAMS inspections.
- The extensive range of services available to schools that subscribe to the Partnership Service Agreement (PSA); the PSA provides very good value for money.
- Communication and relationships with schools, the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT), other multi-academy trusts (MATS), the Diocesan Office and the Cathedral's Education Department.
- The strategy to encourage a mixed landscape of MATS with Church School membership.
- Links with the Department for Education (DFE) and the national agenda through the Diocesan Director being a member of the Regional Commissioner's Headteacher Board.
- The clear leadership and direction provided by the DBE Board, which is an outward looking body.
- The attention paid by Members to promoting strong governance and Church school representation in mixed multi-academy trusts and in DSAT.
- The enthusiasm, energy and focus of the Children and Young People's Committee whose members demonstrate a clear vision and strategy for taking this work forward.
- Financial management and budgetary planning.
- The work of the Buildings and Estates Committee and particularly the approach to prioritising bids for funding.
- The DBE's response to change and its potential to influence national policy.
- The warm welcome from everyone who works in the building, including the conference manager and the reception and hospitality team.

Points for Consideration

- Exploring further with schools, parishes and the Diocese what it means and what it should look like for Church Schools to lie at the heart of the mission of the Church.
- Finding ways of changing the culture outside of the DBE and overcoming barriers with clergy who are not engaging with or lack confidence in working with children and young people in their parishes and in schools.
- Exploring with the Cathedral Chapter the implications for the DBE and schools of the current charges to use the cathedral for special services.
- Increasing the capacity of the staff team by appointing additional staff to meet the challenges of the national agenda and of opening new schools.
- Ensuring that the DBE consults widely when setting the vision for the next five years and drawing up the strategic plan.
- Holding discussions on the role of chaplaincy in schools prior to drawing up the next strategic plan.
- Incorporating a small school strategy into the next strategic plan.
- Conducting an assessment of the educational and financial risks of stand-alone academies and schools under 200 pupils, and using the evidence to inform a future strategy for stand alone academies.
- How to develop more regional hubs of schools, including working out the governance implications.
- Undertaking a full evaluation of the Confirmation Project.
- Finding ways of strengthening governance further at school level.
- Establishing a network of secondary lead professionals in order to share good practice.
- Opening the debate on where wisdom fits into the curriculum.
- Producing an overview report with case studies of good practice in RE and Collective Worship.
- Exploring whether Church Schools have a role to play in promoting better social mobility in some areas of the Diocese.
- Exploring whether the Diocese, in collaboration with teaching schools, might engage further in initial teacher training and in the provision of support for RE and collective worship.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Leadership and Management

The Board of Education is exceptionally well led by the Diocesan Director of Education who is ably supported by a skilled and experienced senior leadership team, and a skilled support and wider staff team. Collectively, they promote a strong 'can do' culture and exhibit high levels of trust. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, well understood and constantly under review to reflect changing needs. The development of the middle manager role is resulting in increased delegation of responsibility within the wider staff team. During a year when there has been illness and staff absence, everyone has supported one another. There is a strong sense of teamwork at all levels in the DBE and this is a key strength.

It is clear that although the whole team is working at capacity, staff are nevertheless highly effective at focusing their work on agreed priorities. They are very good at staging actions and initiatives, and making a conscious decision not to tackle everything at once. Time is devoted to developing the team, and to providing opportunities to reflect upon what is going well and next steps. Performance management procedures are well embedded and the outcomes have been fed into the new continuing professional development (CPD) policy. The policy and the induction policy are continually being monitored and evaluated. This is typical of the attention paid to promoting and achieving excellence.

Staff are interested in learning more about what everyone does and they are enabled to do so. For example, the support team has valued the opportunity to accompany an education adviser on a school visit. Colleagues say that this has enhanced their understanding of the strengths and the challenges faced by schools. This is another good example of the Board investing in people and continuing professional development.

Time is also devoted to providing spiritual nourishment. The recent retreat for all DBE and DSAT staff is a good example of how the Board invests in people. Staff feel valued and comment on how much they enjoy coming to work.

Vision

In the report, *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium (2001)*, Lord Dearing wrote: "Everything in the Group's Report has its origin in the General Synod's resolution stating that 'Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'". During the review, several discussions focused upon what this really means and there was no definitive answer. There was also extensive discussion on what a Church School is and the added value a Church School brings. Responses to the question were remarkably similar. There was general agreement that Church Schools are places where God's love is put into action, where every pupil is valued as a child of God, where every child is welcomed regardless of faith, ability or background.

There is scope for continuing these discussions at parish, school and diocesan level as well as within the central education team.

The leadership team is not apologetic about faith and there is no doubt that the Salisbury DBE possesses a clear vision to guide its work with Church Schools.

In discussion, headteachers commented very positively on the clarity of the DBE's vision for education. The DBE has become an outward looking body through developing external networks. Schools are very supportive of the Diocese and proud to be members of the Diocesan Church schools family. Hence, when setting the vision for the next five years it will be important to consult widely and engage different groups within the DBE and the Diocese. Vision determines strategy, strategy determines priorities and priorities determine action and how to get there. The DBE is very effective at structuring development planning while at the same time being flexible to make revisions in the light of new evidence.

During the review, the question relating to where would you like the DBE to be at the end of the next five years provoked much discussion. It is obvious that there is plenty of enthusiasm and positivity relating to raising aspirations and promoting ambition. The staff with responsibility for RE and collective worship are passionate about wanting every school to deliver creative and inspirational RE teaching to overcome negative perceptions of the subject and enable children to participate in informed conversation. One headteacher, who was supported by others, wants to see the Diocesan Board of Education taking a lead in influencing national policy and changing public opinion about Church Schools. The outcomes of this review reveal that this is not an overambitious objective. There is plenty of good and excellent practice centred on developing the spiritual well being of every child which could be shared and contribute, for example, to addressing the mental health needs of a growing number of primary-age children. Not all who are wise are educated and not all who are educated are wise. There is room for opening the debate on where wisdom fits in. The Diocesan Board of Education and its schools are well placed to take part in that debate.

Recurring messages during the review relate to a desire for a Christian presence in every school, a desire to be more explicit in communicating and articulating the vision and a desire to see chaplaincy as the norm rather than the exception. One group's ambition was to see chaplains in every school. There is argument for chaplaincy to be owned locally. Clearly, this is an area which calls for reflective discussion on what chaplaincy should or might look like, and for the role of parish clergy in providing chaplaincy support to children and staff.

Church Schools were founded to educate the poor in communities. In today's language, they were established to promote equality of opportunity for all pupils. When formulating the vision for the next five years, the DBE might want to consider the role of Church Schools in promoting better social mobility in some areas of the Diocese.

Strategic Planning

Self-evaluation is very well developed and inclusive. Everyone contributes to the process of evaluating what is going well and identifying next steps. There is a remarkable consensus across all teams as to what the strengths and areas for development are. The strategic plan is truly at the

heart of the evaluation process. All five aims are rigorously and continuously evaluated and changes are made as a result. This represents good practice.

Links with Schools

The schools' relationships with the central team are very good. The headteachers who attended a meeting during the review spoke highly of the significant improvements to communication and to the support they receive from the central team.

The vast majority of schools now subscribe to the Partnership Service Level Agreement, which provides very good value for money. The range of services on offer is extensive and has been ably developed by the Assistant Director of Education having taken into account what schools want and request. The Agreement is very well set out so everyone is clear about their entitlement to different services; the administration of the PSA is very good. It has resulted in an escalation of active relationships with schools as advisers conduct regular visits to support, for example, the development of high quality Vision and Values work within schools and the training of foundation governors.

The SLT recognises that brokering school-to-school support is work in progress. However, there are two teaching school alliances where the lead schools are Church schools and so leaders are already exploring the potential of these alliances to model good practice and provide bespoke professional development.

The meeting with heads, one of whom was the headteacher of a secondary school, was positive and constructive. Headteachers speak highly of the visits from the Lead School Improvement Adviser who has oversight of the Schools Causing Concern Strategy. An experienced consultant team also supports this work. The SLT know their schools well. They know where the strengths and challenges lie and deploy resources where improvement is needed most.

Discussions covered how to address the recruitment crisis in some schools and whether the Diocese, in collaboration with teaching schools and/or local universities, might explore running initial teacher training courses or returners to teaching courses. This may be an area the Board might consider in future. Another area to consider is how to create better and stronger networks for secondary schools. A secondary consultant visits secondary schools and there is a key focus on developing collective worship in secondary schools but opportunities to share good practice with one another could be developed further. The leadership team could consider whether there is capacity to facilitate the establishment of such a network rather than run it.

A key message from the headteachers' meeting was that they were all appreciative of the "strong and transformational leadership of the Director of Education." Other groups also echoed this comment during the week of the review. It does, however, highlight the need to focus on succession planning at all levels to ensure that this strong leadership and team working is sustained and built upon.

RE and Collective Worship

In relation to RE, Collective worship and SIAMS, there has been a strong focus on improving RE teaching and on ensuring that there is more rigour to SIAMS Inspections. As a result, there is general agreement that the quality of RE is much better in schools. The leadership of the Assistant Director of Education supports the development of RE; the RE adviser and consultant have undertaken book scrutinies and delivered extensive training on Understanding Christianity, which has received very favourable reviews. In line with good practice, officers and RE subject leaders are identifying where there is really good practice which could be shared with other schools. In time and when there is sufficient evidence of excellent practice, officers might consider producing an overview report with case studies of exemplary practice.

SIAMS

All recent SIAMS inspections have been monitored with the result that quality assurance has been tightened. In response to concerns about possible over inflation of SIAMS inspection grades, action has been taken to strengthen the rigour of the process and the accuracy of judgements. and as a result grades have gone down in some cases. This appears to reflect a more accurate picture than was previously the case. Headteachers who attended a meeting during the review expressed a plea for a SIAMS framework, which is more fit for purpose. As the SIAMS framework is a national framework, this plea calls for the Board to continue to give constructive feedback at national level. Another plea relates to providing more support for preparing for SIAMS in secondary schools. The senior team is aware that this needs addressing.

Small Schools

There are significant areas of rurality within the Diocese and these are where most of the small primary schools are situated. Finances are often tight in small schools and it is not always possible for small schools to sustain a leadership model of a full-time headteacher. The Board would be well advised to consider including a small school strategy as a work strand in the next five-year strategic plan.

Academies

Forty-four percent of schools are now academies. These range from stand alone academies to academies within the Diocese of Salisbury academy trust, VA academies within a small Church School MAT and academies within mixed MATs. The Board has adopted a deliberate policy of encouraging a mixed landscape of MATs to match the individual needs of schools wishing to convert to academies, providing that the MAT supports a Church School education. This does not

inhibit relationships with the Diocesan MAT, which are strong. The strategy of promoting a landscape of several MATS with Church School membership is an indicator of the confidence that the Director of Education and the SLT have in negotiating the best support for every school.

In a meeting with the CEO and Chair of two different mixed multi-academy trusts (MATs), there was a strong sense that these MATS were firmly committed to maintaining and developing the Church School values and ethos of the Church Schools in their MATs. They spoke very highly of the support they receive from the DBE, particularly in structuring the governance. Both MATS are planning to expand and see the relationship with the DBE helping them to do so. The lead school in one of the MATS is a teaching school and Ofsted has rated all the other schools in the MAT as either good or outstanding. Consequently, they are well placed to support schools causing concern.

An area for the Board to consider, however, is the drawing up of a strategy to promote better collaboration and broker partnership working in those academies, which are stand-alone academies. An assessment of future educational and financial risks, and of viability for stand-alone academies under 200 pupils, would be a starting point.

The Diocese of Salisbury Academies Trust (DSAT)

The Diocese of Salisbury Academies Trust is a company limited by guarantee and was set up five years ago. Since then, it has expanded to twelve academies with its own Chief Executive Officer. The governance structure is well conceived with a Trust Board, which is accountable to the Secretary of State, and local governing boards, which are subcommittees of the Trust Board. The Diocesan Deputy Director of Education works half time as Chief Operating Officer for DSAT. Promoting and developing the Christian ethos and striving for excellence lie at the heart of the Trust's vision and operation. Colleagues cite key strengths relating to collaborative working, the drive for school improvement and making the right appointments.

The position of DSAT in relation to the DBE needs to be considered, particularly in terms of the rate of expansion and the need to be financially self-sufficient. The DBE sponsors DSAT and appoints the Members who in turn appoint the Trustees.

Working relationships between DSAT and the DBE are good and are helped by sharing office space. In discussion, a headteacher spoke highly of the school improvement support that his school receives. The CEO commented that the local governing board was developing a good understanding of its role as a subcommittee of the Trust Board. An interesting development, which is worth pursuing, further is the creation of a regional hub of three schools in Weymouth. The Trust wants to expand by 500 pupils a year and attract good schools to join. The question is "Why should schools want to join DSAT?" This is a highly relevant question for all Trusts. What is unique about DSAT? There is room to discuss this further at Board level and at school level. Consideration might also be given to recruiting a trustee with marketing experience.

Work with Children and Young People

There is tremendous energy within the Children and Young People's Committee which is inspirational and should be shared as widely as possible. Over the past two years, the committee has restructured its focus to youth work with the Assistant Director exercising strong leadership. There is a clear rationale underpinning this decision, namely, that children's work has received a lot of support in the recent past and parishes are more self sufficient in supporting children's work than they are in their work with teenagers. Consequently, the Adviser for work with Children and Young People is focusing her energies on facilitating work with teenagers although she is aware that some parishes may still need help with children's work. Officers have a good knowledge and understanding of parishes where children's work is particularly strong so there is scope for exploring whether those parishes might nominate volunteers to form a diocesan children's work support team.

This is the first year of a new Children's and Youth Strategy and therefore the strategy is evolving. The committee is determined to ensure that the strategy takes account of the views of children and young people. However, members acknowledge that this requires a change of culture outside of the DBE and overcoming barriers with clergy. The regular meetings between the Assistant Director of Education, the Children's and Young People's adviser and the Archdeacons is helping to move this forward but clearly this is a priority which unless addressed could limit the impact of the strategy.

The Confirmation Project

A confirmation project to encourage more young people to be confirmed has been running for two years and funding ends in the spring. As with any project, it is wise that the DBE is self evaluating the impact against well-defined success criteria. In the case of the confirmation project, measuring engagement with the project and measuring impact in terms of outcomes are likely to be key indicators of success. This approach will aid future planning; for example, whether to carry on with the project if funding is available, whether to tweak it a little, whether to extend the parameters or whether to stop.

Governance

Strengthening governance at school level has been identified as a priority for further development and so the DBE has recently appointed a foundation governance adviser to support the work of the Diocesan Strategic Lead for Governance. This reflects the importance the DBE places on promoting strong governance within its schools and academies. There are two strands to the work; firstly relating to the recruitment of foundation governors with the skills to be effective governors of a Church School and secondly relating to training. Officers have a good knowledge of where there is exemplary practice and have established a team of ten strong chairs of governors who will support

the induction of new governors and chairs of governors, and will help with training. In response to feedback, the DBE will be offering differentiated training for new and experienced governors and separate training for clergy. All these are good initiatives which will need evaluating. Another very good initiative was the commissioning of action-based research in schools where foundation governance is a real issue. Hence, a lot of energy and commitment is channelled into improving governance but it is still work in progress.

During the review, mention was made of difficulties gaining feedback on the quality of local governance in academy trusts. This aspect is worthy of further discussion within the senior leadership at team and at Board level. It would also appear that some academies need to understand better the accountability function of the Diocesan Board of Education

There is widespread agreement that the Board of Education is well governed with a small Board of 13 members who bring a wide range of appropriate skills and expertise. It is very well chaired by the Archdeacon of Dorset. Terms of reference for the Board and the subcommittees are well defined and understood. The Board is efficient in carrying out its business. Minutes are well written and presented. Board members are linked to a priority in the strategic plan and this works well. An area to consider is linking Board members to staff teams and providing more opportunities for the Board and staff to meet and get to know one another. Staff would appreciate that. Members of the Leadership and Governance Committee are also linked to key personnel and to areas such as SIAMS and In-service training.

Finance

Does strategy drive the budget or the budget drive the strategy? This is a question that was discussed during the review and there was universal agreement that the strategy was the starting point for any budgetary discussions. The current strategic plan is successfully driving the operational management and the business of the DBE. The Board is very effective at linking the outcomes of self-evaluation and performance management to the allocation and deployment of resources. This is not a DBE that stands still and waits. It is a DBE that is constantly refining its practice and responding to change. Bidding for new schools is a key priority and the DBE/DSAT has been successful in winning a bid to open a new school next September. New schools need careful planning and therefore it will be important for the next five year plan to include a focus on ensuring there is sufficient staff capacity to address the challenges of opening new schools without compromising the quality of the current service.

Finances are tight and well managed. The DBE is operating a deficit budget but there are clear plans to eradicate the deficit within the next five years. The big challenge, however, relates to sustaining the momentum and ensuring that schools are well supported or else the DBE might lose them. At the time of the review, the DBE was submitting a bid to the DBF for funds to meet the operating deficit within five years; this does not however enable further DBE growth. The submission was well argued and credible. The Finance and Staffing Committee is very effective at monitoring the finances and deploying resources where improvement is needed most.

Buildings and Estate Management

Very good attention is paid to buildings and school estate management. The School Estate Manager is highly experienced and supported very well by the Deputy Director of Education and the Buildings and School Estate Committee. Committee meetings are well planned and timed carefully to fit in with national funding rounds. The disposal of old schools is a major piece of work and the committee is adopting a staged approach to managing the business. The committee actively encourages feedback from schools on the quality of service and has become entrepreneurial in offering the chance of winning a £50 voucher to those who respond. As a result, there has been an increase in responses, which are carefully analysed in order to inform future planning.

The Website, Documentation and Data Protection

Maintaining the website presents some challenges. Staff are responsible for updating the website in their specific areas but this takes time. Currently, no one has overall responsibility for checking consistency and quality. This might be an area to keep under review.

A key strength is the very high quality documentation, which supports every aspect of the DBE's work. It is well presented, clear and information is easily accessible. As one member of staff said "it reflects the high level of professionalism which permeates the office."

Support staff keep abreast of data protection legislation and are confident that the DBE is meeting statutory requirements.

Links with the Diocese

Relationships with colleagues in the diocesan office are very good. In the past, DBEs often operated at a distance from the rest of the Diocese. At Salisbury, this is no longer the case. The Diocesan Secretary and the Director of Education work closely with one another to align the shared strategies of the DBF and of the Board of the Education, and to explore ways of collaborating further to improve efficiency and effectiveness. There are joint committees, for example for information technology support (IT) and data recording. Strengthening these links, whilst maintaining the autonomy of both the Diocesan Office and the Diocesan Board of Education, is constantly under review and discussion. The Director of Education attends Bishop's Staff meetings four times a year and this provides her with a helpful opportunity to brief senior staff on what is going well and where the challenges lie. She also addresses Diocesan Synod at least once a year so the messages from the Board of Education are widely communicated.

Links with the Cathedral

Links with the cathedral education department are very good. The DBE and the cathedral's education department have collaborated successfully on a number of projects. The leavers' services in the Cathedral in June incorporating drama workshops and performances, and the War and Reconciliation project, which challenged pupils' thinking about a range of complex issues, are good examples of this partnership working. In total, over 3000 pupils attended the services in the cathedral along with their families, and this presents a great mission opportunity for the cathedral as well as for the Diocese and the DBE. These services were such a success and appreciated by so many that the SLT want them to continue. However, they are concerned that costs incurred in hiring the cathedral might limit attendance in future. This scenario is too important to let go without trying to explore with the Cathedral Chapter the financial implications related to using the cathedral for events such as these. Once everyone is aware of the implications from every angle, a solution may be found which is acceptable to all.

Links with Parishes

Aim 2 of the current strategic plan focuses on empowering, enabling and encouraging parish leaders in their ministry of service to children, young people and their families in their churches and local communities. This is the area in the strategic plan where progress has been inconsistent.

During the review, examples were cited of schools receiving excellent support and engagement from parish clergy but this is not universal. The Board of Education might consider conducting a survey to gather evidence on the reasons why some clergy do not actively engage with their schools. Is it because they do not possess the right skills, is it because they lack confidence, is it because their workload is too heavy and they do not prioritise working with children and young people or is it because they have had no training at theological college? Whatever the reason, firm evidence would help officers to plan a training programme to address their needs. The Archdeacon's visitation questions could also be a helpful way of gathering information and evidence at local level, and reminding parishes that schools are an important gift and asset. A balance of open text and multiple-choice questions to aid a quantitative analysis should provide leaders with helpful information to inform future planning. Consideration might also be given to incorporating comments on clergy's engagement with schools as part of the ministry review process. Similarly, when there is a vacancy, the Diocesan Board of Education should be encouraged to be pro-active in ensuring that they contribute to the Parish Profile. There is scope, too, for the team to try to influence the training programmes in theological colleges. Not all clergy have had sufficient preparation for ministering in schools or taking collective worship, particularly with young children, during their training.

Links with Local Authorities and The National Educational Scene

Relationships with the local authorities have changed over time as the role of local authorities has been diminishing. Until a year ago, there was good and frequent communication between the assistant director and with colleagues in Dorset and Wiltshire LAs but now links are mostly restricted to liaising over the appointment of headteachers and schools causing concern. However, the appointment of the Director of Education to the Regional Commissioner's Headteacher Board not only reflects the high esteem in which she is held but it links her with the wider educational landscape across Dorset and Wiltshire. Her engagement with the regional and national scene is bringing great benefits to the Diocese and to her colleagues.

CONCLUSION

One of the headteachers interviewed described the journey of the DBE since the Director of Education took up her post five years ago. She said: "The DBE is now an organisation of rigour, strategy, foresight and inspiration with strong and transformational leadership." These words reflect the DBE that I have got to know during the week of the review and describe in this report.