

Education Report

The Secretary of State for Education made a new Order during the year which led to 2016 being the last year of the Chester Diocesan Board of Education as it has been constituted since 1993. Under its chair, the Bishop of Stockport, the smaller DBE will seek to be more responsive to the changes facing education and ensure proper accountability of the officers of the DBE. With work amongst children and youth moving to the new Mission Department, it is schools work which now is the area of responsibility of the DBE.

The constant change which schools face has continued during the year and support has been provided to school governors, headteachers and school trustees in the following ways:

- Administering and advising on building work, particularly in aided schools;
- Advising and supporting governing boards in aspects of their role such as appointments, admissions and ethos;
- Supporting and promoting quality religious education and worship in church schools and occasionally non-church schools;
- Arranging for and supporting staff and governors through denominational inspection procedures;
- Providing training opportunities for staff and governors;
- Providing pastoral and other support to schools experiencing difficulties;
- Advising and supporting schools converting to academy status;
- Working with other Diocesan Boards of Education in the DBE Services group to provide high quality services to schools;
- Advising and supporting the trustees of church educational endowment held in connection with any current or former church school.

Particular areas of note during the year are:

- 98% of church schools in the Diocese have been assessed as outstanding or good in their denominational inspection and 92% have been judged outstanding or good in their Ofsted inspection. Schools are to be congratulated on these outcomes both of which are above national averages;
- Interest in academy status has grown with many schools expressing an interest in joining the Diocesan multi-academy trust, Chester Diocesan Academies Trust which has been restructured in preparation for its growth. While at the year-end one school is in the trust, three will be joining in early 2017 with other applications pending. The agreement of the Diocesan Board of Education is required before any church school can become an academy. Acton CofE School is now part of a multi-academy trust with Calveley School and St Oswald's Worleston, Bunbury Aldersey and Warmingham CofE Schools are forming another multi-academy trust;
- Ellesmere Port Christ Church CofE School moved into new buildings provided under the Priority Schools' Building Programme and ten aided schools had building projects valued at over £100,000. Hartford CofE High School and Upton Heath CofE School should soon see work on their much needed major building projects begin. However, the reduction in grant generally available for capital work in schools continues to have an increasingly serious effect on our ability to provide necessary building work;
- Courses for teachers and governors have again been well-received and the Church House venue has continued to prove popular. The very successful training course for Christian leaders in schools has again been provided in conjunction with colleagues from other dioceses culminating in a celebration service in Manchester Cathedral;
- A new RE syllabus, produced by advisers and teachers from our schools, was launched and it was agreed this syllabus should be on-line and freely available to any school. The national 'Understanding Christianity' resource was also launched in the Diocese and the new RE syllabus links in to this project;

- The reduction in Local Authority funding to support schools has continued and church schools continue to look to the Diocese for increased support. Officers of the Regional Schools Commissioners and Ofsted question Diocesan officers if church schools are perceived not to have appropriate standards. We use a team of consultants to provide necessary support and in some schools this needs to be intensive;
- The annual Key Stage 2 Leavers' Services were again a great success, with two held in Chester Cathedral and one in Astbury church;
- Many of our schools, particularly in rural communities are very small and changes in the way schools are funded is causing many governors to have concerns about the viability of their school. It was hoped that the proposed National Funding Formula would alleviate some concerns, but most schools in the Diocese are likely to face reductions on the scheme being consulted upon. Officers encourage schools to work in collaborative ways to try and overcome such difficulties;
- We are seeing increased concern across many schools about the mental health and well-being of both pupils and staff and will provide conferences on the issue in the coming year;
- Half-termly newsletters are distributed by email to all church schools and other interested parties and also the website has been successful in communicating the DBE's work and supporting school staff and governors in their respective roles;
- The chaplains of secondary schools are supported through regular meetings;
- The initiative to assist parish churches to work effectively with their local schools has continued;
- Mrs Charlotte Somers joined the staff as Administrator during the year.

Canon Jeff Turnbull who has been the Diocesan Director of Education since January 1991 will retire in 2017 and the process to appoint his successor is underway.

More details can be found in the DBE annual report.