

## **National Standards for Headteachers in focus**

### **Schools with a religious foundation**

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## Introduction

A group of headteachers from schools with a religious foundation<sup>1</sup> met to create this focus piece on the National Standards for Headteachers. What follows is a composite of their experiences and of how they perceive their role in relation to the opportunities and challenges of working in school with a religious foundation. Through what others might see, and through their feelings, school leaders give expression to personal and professional values, national standards and the foundation of the school.

In a school with a religious foundation, the National Standards for Headteachers will be enhanced through consideration of the school's foundation. For example, account needs to be taken of the school's ethos statement<sup>2</sup> in arriving at a vision for the school. The contract of employment shapes the headteacher's role within the school and may well be broader in scope than the standards for headship.

## Shaping the future

Critical to the role of headship is working with the governing body and others to create a shared vision and strategic plan which inspires and motivates pupils, staff and all other members of the school community. This vision should express core educational values and moral purpose and be inclusive of stakeholders' values and beliefs. The strategic planning process is critical to sustaining school improvement and ensuring that the school moves forward for the benefit of its pupils. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 6)

*[Not explicitly referred to in the standards.]* A headteacher of a religious foundation school was committed to the centrality of worship within the school. The Section 23<sup>3</sup> report identified the spiritual life of the school as a real strength, particularly in creating an inclusive environment through engagement of different faith traditions. In an online debate, the headteacher came across research on religious foundation schools that had successfully raised standards. It referred to worship as a fulcrum. She mentally rejected the mechanistic application of worship as a leadership tool, but reflected on actions that had shaped the school's approach to worship. She made a note to begin conversations with the chair of governors and senior management team to re-evaluate the place of worship in school.

### **Ensures the vision for the school is clearly articulated, shared and understood and acted on effectively by all**

The governors of a voluntary aided school warmly received the recommendation of the headteacher that they establish an ethos committee chaired by a foundation governor<sup>4</sup>. The chair of governors suggested that the group might wish to consider the ethos statement in the daily life of the school and its contribution to strategic planning. She suggested that the group might initially wish to focus on the section of the standards addressing professional qualities.

### **Ensures that strategic planning takes account of the diversity, values and experience of the school and community at large**

Following attendance at a meeting of the faith community that was considering issues of social justice, a member of the leadership group undertook further reading in the area. She felt that her reading had helped her identify ways in which the school improvement plan could be modified to better reflect the values of the school's foundation and its responsibilities to wider society. Drawing on the knowledge she had acquired, with the agreement of the headteacher she initiated a review of the school improvement plan against key criteria drawn from social teaching.

## Leading learning and teaching

Headteachers have a central responsibility for raising the quality of teaching and learning and for pupils' achievement. This implies setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. A successful learning culture will enable pupils to become effective, enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to life-long learning. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 7)

### **Ensures a consistent and continuous school-wide focus on pupils' achievement, using data and benchmarks to monitor progress in every child's learning**

**Example 1:** Having attended a continuing professional development (CPD) event on developing a personalised learning culture, the headteacher returned to statements of principle made by the school's religious foundation. She reviewed approaches to recording pupil attainment and progress against a touchstone statement:

"the aim of offering to all, and especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation, it can and must find in the context of the old and new forms of poverty that original synthesis of ardor and fervent dedication" (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 1997).

She looked for ways in which pupil profiles appropriately addressed the range of opportunities across all subject areas. Within each subject area, opportunities were balanced against the nature of the subject. Pupils were invited to identify successes against opportunities. Teachers were invited to make a note of the impact of new and old barriers to learning.

**Example 2:** A primary school was beginning to extend records of pupil progress by considering dimensions of personal, social and spiritual development. As a first step, the headteacher collected together examples of existing booklets produced for pupils in each year group to make a personal record of their achievements over the school year. Intuitive practice formed a sound basis for more systematic recording against all dimensions of learning in a religious foundation school.

### **Establishes creative, responsive and effective approaches to learning and teaching**

In order to foster relationships between subject areas and explore opportunities for creative approaches to teaching and learning, the normal timetable was suspended for a week for a project led by staff from Christian Aid. Principles of social teaching were mapped against activities developed for each year group. Teachers were provided with an over-arching curriculum framework with details of the learning methodology chosen for each activity. Activities were drawn together in a celebration that invited individuals to reflect on actions for justice and peace. Teacher and pupil learning were both evaluated.

### **Demonstrates and articulates high expectations and sets stretching target for the whole school community**

The school was developing an improvement strategy with challenging behaviour and curriculum targets derived from strategies shown by research to be effective. Informal soundings of parents and teachers suggested the need to address misconceptions about approaches to learning and pupil behaviour arising from their previous experience of schooling.

The headteacher developed an action plan culminating in a training day with parents and teachers working together on the new approaches. She had experience of a similar action plan that helped address misconceptions in relationships and sex education where the advice of the sponsoring body appeared to parents to be different from their own experiences.

Initially she worked with teachers, teasing out what parent expectations and experiences might be. She then explored alternative ways of expressing the principles of the religious tradition. Teachers explored changes they might need to make to their practice to fully match improvement strategies and the expectations of the tradition. Together they reviewed the activity before designing a workshop for parents on positive behaviour management.

The final programme for the training day drew on these experiences and on the combined work between parents, the headteacher and a senior colleague.

### **Implements strategies that secure high standards of behaviour and attendance**

The headteacher requested a private conversation with the chair of governors to share her feelings following a pupil exclusion. School procedures for exclusion had been updated in the light of the school's foundation to include explicit reference to the importance of reconciliation, forgiveness and amendment conveyed with conviction.

The headteacher was satisfied that the procedure had been properly followed and that the exclusion was in the interest of both the school and the pupil. A member of the pastoral team had supported the head and the pupil through the process by focusing on positive aspects of behaviour. In conversation with the chair of governors, the headteacher recognised as a major source of tension the appropriateness of exclusion in the light of the school's professed values.

The chair supported the head in her action by drawing attention to the teaching of the foundation on the responsibilities of the leader to have regard to the order of the whole school community. The chair reminded the head that the school chaplain's role during the process led to the active involvement of a children's charity to support the child and its parents through the exclusion. They agreed the importance of strategies to ensure that exclusion from the school did not involve exclusion from the wider community.

### **Monitors, evaluates and reviews classroom practice and promotes improvement strategies**

The classroom monitoring policy in a religious foundation school encourages those observing lessons – and those teaching them – to make a note of occasions where specific practices or examples of dialogue or pupil work capture the spirit of what the school is trying to achieve. This helps provide a bank of examples of practice for dissemination, especially the induction of teachers new to the school. It also helps ensure that the school's values and mission inform the monitoring process and evaluation criteria by building in 'bottom-up' as well as 'top-down' purposes of monitoring

*[Not explicitly referred to in the standards.]* A parent of a child from a different religious tradition read in the school prospectus that he had a right in law to withdraw his child from Religious Education (RE). He approached the headteacher, as he wanted to reassure himself that by participating in RE, his child would not be expected to reject the family's beliefs and take on board those of the school.

The headteacher explained that RE was not just treated as a separate subject but influenced the whole curriculum and met the expectations of the sponsoring body. The parent said that he supported the values underpinning the whole curriculum, but was unclear about the rationale behind timetabled RE. The headteacher referred to the clear commitment to a religious perspective in the school's mission statement. The headteacher said that he felt that RE provided opportunities to explore foundations for and consequences of living a life in the service of God and others.

For the headteacher, personal witness involved respecting other traditions. Towards the end of the conversation the parent checked his understanding with a key question; "Do you mean that Religious Education is not really intended to convert people but rather to help them understand how a religious perspective informs how people think and act?".

## **Developing self and working with others**

Effective relationships and communication are important in headship as headteachers work with and through others. Effective headteachers manage themselves and their relationships well. Headship is about building a professional learning community which enables others to achieve. Through performance management and effective continuing professional development practice, the headteacher supports all staff to achieve high standards. To equip themselves with the capacity to deal with the complexity of the role and the range of leadership skills and actions required of them, headteachers should be committed to their own continuing professional development. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 8)

Within the context of a religious foundation school, there is an expectation that the values underpinning the headteacher's relationships and communications are fully compatible with those of the foundation.

## **Treats people fairly, equitably and with dignity and respect to create and maintain a positive school culture**

Visitors regularly commented on the quality of welcome, reassurance and affirmation at the school. In preparing for a review of the school mission statement, the headteacher noted that witness to the values of the school's foundation was expressed only in terms of the experience offered to pupils. She created opportunities for all adults to share experiences of acting as role models for pupils. They explored ways in which reconciliation and forgiveness were systematically built into assemblies and class reflections as well as when disagreements occurred. They shared examples of occasions when both pupils and adults explicitly mentioned links to a religious basis for action. A concluding reflection focused on the experiences of all members of the school community and ways in which all adults might serve as witnesses through their work.

## **Develops and maintains effective strategies and procedures for staff induction, professional development and performance review**

An informal network of headteachers from voluntary aided schools agreed to share expertise on policies for staffing issues. They were aware of the responsibilities of governors as employers and wished to provide them with advice on best employment practice consistent with the school's religious foundation. They were particularly concerned that staff for whom governors were not the direct employer should understand their positive contribution to the ethos of the school and not be disadvantaged through failure to consider all working practices. They developed an overall staffing policy and guidelines for induction, performance management and pay progression that explicitly addressed contributions to the distinctive character of the school.

## **Ensures effective planning, allocation, support and evaluation of work undertaken by teams and individuals and ensures clear delegation of tasks and devolution of responsibilities**

As part of team-building activities within the senior management team, the deputy headteacher drew on a resource she found on talk2learn to share perceptions of spiritual leadership. The team was soon able to make connections with concepts of servant leadership and responsibility for each other. They had already begun thinking about distributed leadership and were able to make explicit links between the teaching of the foundation and responsibilities of members of a community.

When the headteacher used imagery from the religious tradition to describe principles underpinning teamwork, members of the team were able to see links between the principles of the foundation and the work of the school. Drawing on these experiences that activated resonance with their personal values, they encouraged teams to create protocols and build opportunities for reflection into their schedule.

## **Regularly reviews own practice, sets personal targets and takes responsibility for own personal development**

A recently appointed headteacher began the term by exploring her understanding of links between the school's mission statement, her personal faith and the school's continuing direction under her leadership. She shared some of her own development needs and led a reflection with her staff inviting them to explore in private their own needs. She had created an opportunity during the meeting for review. Blank post-it notes were used to express concerns or needs they wished to pursue individually. While collating needs they wished to explore together and developing an action plan, they decided to include in the next review a period of reflection on progress against individual needs.

## **Managing the organisation**

Headteachers need to provide effective organisation and management of the school and seek ways of improving organisational structures and functions based on rigorous self-evaluation. Headteachers should ensure that the school and the people and the resources within it are organised and managed to provide an efficient, effective and safe learning environment. These management responsibilities imply the re-examination of the roles and responsibilities of those adults working in the school to build capacity across the workforce and ensure resources are deployed to achieve value for money. Headteachers should also seek to build successful organisations through effective collaborations with others. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 9)

## **Models of organisations and principles of organisational development**

**Example 1:** The foundation governors<sup>4</sup> requested a meeting with the headteacher as they were unclear how their legal responsibilities set down in the ethos statement were different from those of other schools. The headteacher reassured them that as part of the maintained sector all aspects of the school needed to be fully compliant with national educational legislation and meet commitments of the trust deed. Locally, the school works in partnership with the founding body and the local education authority (LEA). The recent Ofsted Section 10<sup>5</sup> report had referred to the role of the mission statement<sup>6</sup> in ensuring the values of the school informed all policies and procedures.

The headteacher explained that she was undertaking a review of the school mission statement to clarify its relationship with the ethos statement. She invited the involvement of foundation governors so that they could help ensure clear lines of

accountability back to the fundamental purposes of the school as expressed in the ethos statement.

**Example 2:** During a review of the leadership contributions of all staff, the headteacher became increasingly aware of the range of practice involving teachers, learning mentors and teaching assistants in activities focused on pupil learning. However, in areas such as worship, members of the senior management team or class teachers almost invariably took the lead. The review was extended to invite all staff to consider ways in which they would wish to be involved in leading worship and prayer with pupils.

### **Ensures that, within an autonomous culture, policies and practices take account of national and local circumstances, policies and initiatives**

A deputy in a school with a religious foundation chaired a meeting of subject and pastoral leaders to consider the whole school curriculum in the light of their departmental reviews. At the beginning of the cycle, they had agreed to expand national statements on the scope of each subject to include reference to the school mission statement and the local context.

Part way through the year, one department noticed that the mission statement referred to the uniqueness of each individual. They felt that there had been subtle changes in classroom atmosphere as a result of consulting each student about ways in which their individual needs had been addressed.

The group responsible for student service had been working on a charitable project with the local community. With this review in mind, they had approached representatives from across the school community to describe the values and attitudes they wanted the school to promote. There was a remarkable unanimity across all groups and recognition that the expectations were rooted in the expectation of the religious foundation. The student service group had involved this ready audience of experts in assessing their success.

During the course of the meeting, themes emerged from the full range of groups represented; they echoed the principles and values of the school's foundation. The deputy agreed to develop a map for each key stage as part of the way forward. Recognising potential linkages to the work of other schools on similar national initiatives, the headteacher agreed to share progress so far with his regional network.

### **Manages the school's financial and human resources effectively and efficiently to achieve the school's educational goals and priorities**

In a meeting of the governors' finance committee, the headteacher identified tensions between competing demands for resources in the light of the vision for the school. All available resources had already been allocated against activities for raising attainment in whole class groups. Mentors and teaching assistants were increasingly working with small groups, creating a pressure on space.

Through the curriculum review cycle, the need for quiet and reflection had been identified, particularly in RE, together with a need for a multi-faith prayer space in order to implement the commitment of the school's foundation to providing for the spiritual needs of all members of the school community. Funding had been provided for each child with a statement of special educational needs.

The committee accepted the recommendation of the headteacher that funding provided for the individual pupil be protected to secure equality of opportunity, and that the existing allocation of resources for raising attainment be revisited. In making decisions, priority should be given to the dignity of each individual pupil and member of staff irrespective of status or religious tradition.

## **Recruits, retains and deploys staff appropriately and manages their workload to achieve the vision and goals of the school**

During the final stage in making an appointment to a subject department, a foundation governor expressed the view that membership of the faith tradition should be given higher priority than subject expertise as demonstrated in the classroom. The headteacher distinguished between categories of post within the school and identified those posts for which the religious foundation gave specific advice.

On the basis of the strengths candidates demonstrated at interview she outlined the nature of the induction programme that she would recommend for each candidate.

Irrespective of religious background, she would implement a programme to enable all teachers to see explicitly ways in which they might make a contribution to the distinctive character of the school. Where specific needs in terms of subject knowledge had been identified, coaching and release time was notionally costed, with reviews undertaken according to the achievement of targets.

## **Implements successful performance management processes with all staff**

In reviewing the performance management policy for a religious foundation school, the headteacher consulted advice published by national advisers to the foundation and articles in professional journals on objectives in religious foundation schools. The school policy was expanded to encourage all staff to extend their understanding of objectives relevant to the development of the school ethos to include areas that had previously not been addressed.

## **Securing accountability**

With values at the heart of their leadership, headteachers have a responsibility to the whole school community. In carrying out this responsibility, headteachers are accountable to a wide range of groups, particularly pupils, parents, carers, governors and the LEA. They are accountable for ensuring that pupils enjoy and benefit from a high quality education, for promoting collective responsibility within the whole school community and for contributing to the education service more widely. Headteachers are legally and contractually accountable to the governing body for the school, its environment and its work. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 10)

## **Works with the governing body (providing information, objective advice and support) to enable it to meet its responsibilities**

The headteacher and chair of governors of a Christian school recognise that their partnership is pivotal in developing the school. They recognise that the governing body has extended responsibilities because of the character of the school.

The headteacher supports governors in addressing their accountability to the school's sponsoring community, but is aware that on occasions her personal vision needs to be set in the context of the values and traditions of the foundation. The partnership enables them to respect the boundaries of their responsibilities. On occasion, they engage in a period of joint reflection to seek guidance and affirm their equal status before God.

Because the headteacher and chair of governors share a commitment to a common vision of education that stems from their understanding of the expectations of the school's foundation, they work together to ensure that all actions in the areas of securing accountability are undertaken in the spirit of mutual respect and service to others.



## **Strengthening community**

Schools exist in a distinctive social context, which has a direct impact on what happens inside the school. School leadership should commit to engaging with the internal and external community to ensure equity and entitlement. Headteachers should collaborate with other schools in order to share expertise and bring positive benefits to their own and other schools. They should work collaboratively at both strategic and operational levels with parents and carers and across multiple agencies for the well-being of all children. Headteachers share responsibility for leadership of the wider educational system and should be aware that school improvement and community development are interdependent. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 11)

### **Builds a school culture and curriculum that takes account of the richness and diversity of the school's communities**

The headteacher of a religious foundation school appeared before an Admissions Appeal Panel<sup>7</sup>. The parents of a child from a different religious and cultural tradition appealed against a decision not to admit her. Both of the child's sisters were already at the school. The parents made a positive contribution to the life of the school by taking part in assemblies and explaining the meaning of their own religious practices and sharing some of their characteristics in high quality challenging RE lessons.

The headteacher felt torn because full involvement of the family in the community of the school enriches the curriculum and is a positive sign of religious tolerance. However, the admissions criteria were clear and governors applied them correctly in the changed circumstances of the school. The Admissions Appeal Panel listened to the strong case made by the parent and admitted the pupil.

### **Creates and promotes positive strategies for challenging racial and other prejudice and deals with racial harassment; ensures learning experiences for pupils are linked into and integrated with the wider community**

A member of the senior management team had been asked to explore further opportunities for multiagency working that supported the school's religious character. She provided the following extracts from *Faith and Young People* (DfES 2004) on the Connexions website as a starter for discussion.

A chaplain in a school with a religious foundation provides information to students – particularly those for whom faith and a sense of service are important – about gap year opportunities in church organisations. He also invites speakers to share experiences of living within a community that recognises the importance of single and married vocations as well as the religious.

In an urban school with a religious foundation a fully trained counsellor has developed programmes to develop self-esteem among groups of students. Her programmes involve students in identifying their own strengths and qualities. In building self-esteem in this way, they are encouraged to recognise and develop their strengths, thereby reinforcing a deeper sense of their own self worth. They are then invited to consider how their individual strengths can be used in the wider world.

Her work shows how individual growth and service to others are mutually reinforcing. Her approach acknowledges the personal spiritual journey of each individual, but does not explicitly name it, as it would be inappropriate to do so.

### **Ensures a range of community-based learning experiences**

Headteachers of schools from the same religious tradition were discussing their personal contribution to parish life. One talked about her contribution to her own parish and the deepened understanding it gave her of her role as headteacher in building relationships with another parish community. The second talked about her

work within the parish school that was also her own parish. The third shared her emotional commitment to her own parish and to her school. She was particularly sensitive to her own divided loyalties and contrasting perceptions of parishioners when she supported the parish of the school.

### **Collaborates with other agencies in providing for the academic, spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural well-being of pupils and their families**

A religious foundation school in a deprived area has built strong relationships with a care agency sponsored by the same religious foundation. Different staff from the care agency contribute to the curriculum, and provide support for parents and pupils at times of difficulty. The school also provides a drop-in centre for parents where their own learning can be developed to support their children's progress.

### **Cooperates and works with relevant agencies to protect children**

Two schools from different religious traditions worked together to enable their students to collaborate in charitable activities and share their experiences of the impact of their religious belief on their daily lives. Following dissemination of the benefits of such work, a school with an explicit religious foundation established links with a school with a high percentage of pupils from different religious traditions as a means of building understanding within the wider community.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> School with a religious foundation: to determine whether a foundation or voluntary school has a religious character and the particular religion or religious denomination concerned, this is set out in the Designation of Schools Having a Religious Character (England) Order 1999 (SI 1999 No 2432) (governors legal guide).

<sup>2</sup> Several terms have wide currency in religious foundation schools, deriving largely from the legislative framework. A glossary of terms is provided, drawing on the governors' legal guide. Terms marked \* may be interpreted in different ways. In this document, their meaning is the one in the glossary.

Ethos statement\*: the ethos statement is included in the instrument of government of religious foundation schools. Statutory Instrument 2003 No 348 School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003 refers to it in the following terms:

(j) where the school is a foundation or a voluntary school that has a religious character, a description of the religious ethos of the school.

Most schools belonging to a particular religious tradition share common wording of the ethos statement as it sets down the fundamental purposes and goals of the school.

<sup>3</sup> Section 23: the governing body of a voluntary aided school that has been designated by the Secretary of State as having a religious character is responsible for securing the regular inspection of the content of the school's act of collective worship and the denominational RE that is provided for pupils (a 'Section 23 inspection'). These aspects of the school's provision will not be included in the inspection arranged by Ofsted. The governing body *may* arrange for the Section 23 inspection also to cover the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school (implying some overlap with the Section 10 inspection). The choice of inspector for the Section 23 inspection is, in voluntary aided schools, made by the governing body.

<sup>4</sup> Foundation governor: foundation governors are appointed by the school's founding body, church or other organisation named in the school's instrument of government or may hold the governorship ex officio, as the holder of an office specified in the instrument of government. If the school has a religious character the foundation governors must preserve and develop this. They must also ensure compliance with the trust deed, if there is one (governors legal guide).

<sup>5</sup> Section 10: the law requires that every maintained school is inspected at least once in six years. In implementing the statutory inspection programme ('Section 10 inspections'), Ofsted will tell a school when it is due for inspection.

<sup>6</sup> Mission statement\*: the mission statement is unique to individual schools. It helps secure ownership and commitment in setting down guidelines for living out the school's religious ethos throughout all of its activities.

<sup>7</sup> Admissions Appeal Panel: in foundation and voluntary aided schools, the governing body is responsible for school admissions. Admission authorities are required to establish appeal panels to which parents can appeal against refusal of admission to a school or refusal of entry to sixth form (this applies to both internal and external candidates). In the case of foundation and voluntary aided schools, this duty falls on the governing body as the admission authority. Where a panel finds in favour of the parent, the decision is binding on the admission authority.

## **References**

DfES, 2004, *National Standards for Headteachers*, DfES, London