

**Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop of Liverpool, appointed to be read at all Masses celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

Dear friends,

There are many ways in which you can be of service to the wider mission of the Church. Prominent amongst these is offering to be of service to a school as a foundation governor.

School governors are the largest voluntary body in the country. They provide a vital service to the community and help shape the work of schools and the future of our young people.

The Church has a special duty to provide schools as the principal means of assisting all to achieve the fullness of Christian life. Catholic schools share with all schools the duty to educate our young people and help them achieve their full potential, but additionally, our Catholic schools are charged with the tasks of providing religious education and religious worship in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The duty of ensuring this happens to the highest possible standard and is upheld and developed falls to the governing body of the school.

Some governors are elected by parents and staff at the school. Others may be nominated by the local authority. All governors have a duty to uphold the Catholic ethos of the school but foundation governors have a further particular responsibility to represent me in my role as leader and first teacher of the diocese.

For this reason, it is essential that all foundation governors are practising Catholics committed to upholding the teaching of the Church.

Traditionally, foundation governors have served the school in their own parish or locality. However, as the role of governor has become more exacting, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit sufficient foundation governors with the right skills and aptitudes to fill all the vacancies in some localities. There are currently more than 100 foundation governor vacancies in schools in the diocese. Given there are over 1600 positions in total, a vacancy rate of around 7% cannot fairly be described as a crisis. Nevertheless, some schools have three or even four vacancies out of the normal quota of seven, which they are very keen to fill.

The Church is constantly on the lookout for people who may be willing and able to serve in our Church schools in this important ministry and who bring with them skills and experience from many different walks of life. In particular, I would like to encourage people to step forward who are prepared to serve in a school outside their own locality

The role may be challenging. It does not involve the passive reception and uncritical endorsement of the ideas put forward by the staff of the school but equally it does not require involvement in the day to day operation of the school. Governors must be able to take a long-term, strategic view.

Foundation governors must have the ability to understand the work of the school in sufficient detail to be able to challenge and support the school's senior leaders and make constructive suggestions. The abilities to engage in debate, to listen, to work as part of a team and to be discrete are the essential personal characteristics. Training is available and Governors can have a diverse range of skills and backgrounds.

A leaflet providing more information and contact details for further advice is available and I do urge you to take one and consider whether you are able to serve the Catholic community in this way

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families for the year ahead

**Most Rev Malcolm McMahon OP, Archbishop of Liverpool**