

Staff Appointments: Christian Leadership

A Church School is a Christian institution. The Governing Body is charged with maintaining the character of the school as set out in the school's Trust Deed and Ethos Statement. The development of the *day to day* Christian ethos of the school is a senior management responsibility. Governors will want to consider carefully the way in which this responsibility has a bearing on staff recruitment, especially at a senior management level.

The Law

Voluntary Aided Schools

"If the school is a voluntary aided school-

(a) preference may be given, in connection with the appointment, remuneration or promotion of teachers at the school, to persons-

- (i) whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the religion or religious denomination specified in relation to the school under section 69(4), or
- (ii) who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets, or
- (iii) who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets; and

(b) regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school, to any conduct on his part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified.

(School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Pt II Ch V 60 (v a))

These provisions apply to *all* teaching staff (they may not apply to any non-teaching staff). The Governors have discretion over whether they exercise religious preference, but it is likely that the more senior the post the more desirable a strong Christian connection will be. It is quite proper for governors to specify indications of a faith commitment for all teaching posts. Most voluntary aided schools will seek such indication from candidates for headship and deputy-headship. Governors will need to be clear how they define the faith commitment sought (see below)

Voluntary Controlled Schools

"In connection with the appointment of a person to be head teacher of the school regard may be had to that person's ability and fitness to preserve and develop the religious character of the school."

(School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Pt II Ch V 60 (iv))

How do you assess "*ability to develop the religious character of the school*"? What will this mean in practice at your school? Although it is not appropriate at a VC school to ask candidates directly what their *personal* 'religious opinions' are, it is entirely appropriate to ask candidates what experience, ability and energetic commitment they will bring to the task of developing the religious character of the school and to make it clear in your advert and Person Specification that this is an important priority. The school's Ethos Statement provides a succinct summary of the school's character and it may be prominent in the information pack and referred in the Person Specification.

In a Voluntary Controlled school '*ability and fitness to preserve and develop the religious character of the school*' applies directly as a criterion *only* in the

appointment of the headteacher. However, all candidates for all posts may be reasonably expected to have sympathy for what the school seeks to be..

What 'faith commitment' is sought in a VA school?

Governors should be very clear about how they define any faith commitment sought in a VA school. *"They must have the confidence to demand the type and level of commitment which they consider necessary to promote the Christian foundation of the school and carry out its trust deed and mission."*¹

- If the Governing Body decides it requires a practising communicant Anglican what degree of 'practise' is being sought?
- If a 'practising Christian' is sought , what does this mean? Perhaps the simplest definition is that a candidate is a member of a church in membership of the "Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland" which includes "mainstream" churches. A possible alternative is to require membership of a church confessing the Trinity.
- Many schools advertise for a '*practising Christian, communicant Anglican preferred*'. It would follow that if no Anglican can be appointed, applicants from any other church in membership of CCBI are equally acceptable on faith grounds.
- Governors must state the level of commitment required in the information they publish for candidates, preferably, briefly also in the advertisement. It is also possible for the governing body to require candidates to name a person as a faith referee who can vouch for their commitment (usually a minister of religion)

Other Factors

Clearly Christian commitment is not itself a qualification for senior management of a school! Professional and personal qualities remain paramount and the right balance is crucial.

- In some circumstances the Christian ethos of the school may be secured by ways other than through the personal faith commitment of the headteacher. Other colleagues can lead collective worship; foundation governors and clergy can play a more active part in the life of the school. Governors should also remember that for all human beings faith commitment is a personal matter subject to growth and change. In a VC school, though rarely formally invoked, there is a legal provision for the GB to designate up to 20% of teaching posts as 'reserved' for a people "fit and competent" to teach denominational RE (as judged by the foundation governors). The Headteacher may not be a 'reserved teacher'.
- Governors should never be intimidated to advertise for or consider candidates with less than the Christian credentials they seek on the grounds that there may be fewer suitably qualified candidates.

¹Some material in this section is drawn from 'Church School Staffing', p.32ff (Louden and Irwin 1995: National Society)