

Notes of the Deanery Synod – 15 October 2019

7.30pm at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine

Attended by 10 clergy and 22 laity

1. Welcome

Rev Phil Williams opened the meeting and welcomed the Bishop of Stepney, as well as Synod members old and new. Phil led prayer, opening with How Marvellous and reading Psalm 17:1-8. The Ven Roger Preece, the new Master of St Katharine's, read a passage from Mark 14.

2. The following school governor appointments were ratified:

Governor	School	Proposed by
Victoria Obaze	Sir John Cass Redcoat School	Angela Hancock (Chair of Governors)
Ceri Durham	Stepney Greencoat CofE Primary School	Robert Scott (Chair of Governors)
Rev Ed Dix	St Luke's Isle od Dogs	Rev Tom Pyke

3. Our Schools and the LDBS – A Panel Discussion

Phil introduced the panel members:

Rev Trevor Critchlow – Elected Synod representative on the London Diocesan Board for Schools
Bob Gilbert – Chair of Governors at St Paul with St Luke Primary School
Elizabeth Figueiredo – Headteacher of St Peter's London Docks CofE Primary School
Fr Jonathan Beswick – Rector of St Peter's London Docks

Panel members were invited to speak about the Church of England and schools in Tower Hamlets.

Rev Trevor Critchlow

Trevor provided an overview of how the LDBS is constituted. It was incorporated in 1924 as a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. It has five objectives around the promotion of education and it also makes loans. Trevor recommended reading the [Church of England Vision for Education](#). With Capital Vision 2020 coming to an end, Bishop Sarah is now leading on a new vision and the LDBS is involved in this work. There are 156 CofE schools in the Diocese of London, some are foundations, some leasehold, some overseen by vicars and only some are owned by the LDBS. Trevor emphasised that all schools are run by the school leadership and not by the LDBS, with challenge provided by the governors and statutory duties carried out by the local authority. The LDBS provide advocacy, training and support; they promote the Christian vision; they appoint governors; they work with both national and local government bodies; they seek out new ways to engage in education. The new SIAMS framework, as well as Ofsted's Section 48, focuses on the character and ethos of schools. Lastly, the [School Buildings Maintenance Scheme](#) provides a fund from which voluntary aided schools can pay their 10% contribution for maintenance and repair of school buildings. Trevor finished with John 10:10, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Bob Gilbert

Bob spoke about his career in school governance, starting as a parent governor and eventually being the Governing Body Chair at two different church schools, St Saviour's and St Luke's. The roles have been, and still are, time demanding, stressful in times of crisis and now, more so than ever, challenging as more

and more data is produced. Governors, who are all amateurs, have a lot of responsibility and little real power. However, all governors feel part of a bigger picture and spending time in school with the children can be a real joy. Bob highlighted four key issues being faced now:

1. The declining financial position which particularly affects single form entries and puts the future of our small primary schools in doubt.
2. The changing demographic which, alongside the growth of free schools and academies, is negatively impacting church schools.
3. The role of church schools in our modern, multi-faith society.
4. How we approach educating the whole child, rather than schools becoming no more than exam factories.

Elizabeth Figueiredo

Elizabeth has been a teacher in Tower Hamlets for 31 years. As Head of St Peter's, she spoke about what is special about a church school. The links to the church and the opportunity to serve the whole community epitomise this. In school, all the children attend Mass, despite many being of different faith. There is a School Prayer, there was recently a pilgrimage to Walsingham and all have just now celebrated Harvest Festival. There are ten Tower Hamlets Deanery schools, nine primaries together with Sir John Cass, and the Headteachers meet each half term. It provides an effective support mechanism and the Heads work together to provide a consistent approach for the children. Elizabeth is looking forward to the Diocese's 2030 Vision.

Fr Jonathan Beswick

Fr Jonathan spoke about his journey to his current role at St Peters, including five years in a monastic setting, then becoming a residential social worker, an ordained minister and then a parish priest for 25 years. Over that time he has held governor roles for 20 years. 70/80% of the people in his current parish are not Christian but there are lots of mandates in scripture to grow Christian hope. The investment in education serves the needs of the parish and provides an opportunity to teach the Christian faith. Children in school are encouraged to read the scriptures and lots of time is devoted to the story of Jesus Christ. By the end of Year 6 it is hoped that the seeds of faith are sown to bear fruit in the future. With some schools in danger of losing their faith tradition, Fr Jonathan is grateful for St Peter's and its tradition of serving families, staff, governors and the local community. We must not be complacent. It is the responsibility of the foundation governor to be the gatekeeper.

Q&A

Rev Brian Ralph thanked the speakers and, before opening up to the floor for questions and comments, invited Rev Chris Newman Day to describe his experiences at Raine's following the decision to close the school. Chris felt that the situation had been dealt with badly and has written to the Bishop of London describing what, in his view, is a pastoral disaster. The failings of the LDBS were discussed but also the actions of the local council and the politics of the decision. The controversies surrounding land ownership were also considered.

Questions were invited from the floor, a summary of the discussions as follows:

- The recommendations from the borough's Primary Review are not yet known. Falling rolls have led to 14 forms of entry too many. The future of St Matthias School is uncertain and there is no direction from the LDBS on opening or moving a school to the Westferry site.
- The LDBS tends to be more effective in primaries, less so with secondary schools. The Bishop of Kensington led a mission to engage with secondaries.
- It was felt there was a lack of pastoral care at the LDBS and more compassionate leadership would be welcome. Those on the ground in parishes needed more support when decisions are made that affect the poor and vulnerable.

- Caution was expressed about closing schools without a long-term plan. What is lacking is a co-ordinated response from the LDBS about their strategic direction.
- An opportunity exists to make the LDBS in a different model, ie more reactive, less secretive and open to more scrutiny. Better governance and management are needed.
- Conflict exists due to there being two appointing bodies, the LDBS and the LA. Better relationships need to exist between these bodies and more transparency is needed for Headteachers.
- The local authority executive can be wary of a CofE education. Again, a better relationship is needed.
- It is difficult to recruit governors and support in identifying local people of any faith is very helpful.
- The presence of a parish priest who knows the local community is invaluable.

4. Conclusion

Final thoughts:

- Elizabeth said her job was tough but loved it and asked that people support Headteachers.
- Bob pointed to the good news that children in the borough share worship and do not exempt themselves. He felt there was a need to be more pro-active and create our own strategic plan for schools in the borough.
- Jonathan, although new in post, felt that there was a need for vigilance in general, but specifically about Sir John Cass, the last secondary school in our Deanery.
- Trevor highlighted the need to find a way forward that takes care of people. How can we do things better?

Phil thanked the panel and those present for a good discussion. The meeting closed with Psalm 147 and a prayer from the Bishop Joanne.

Next Meeting: Thursday 4 July 2019

To be arranged