



## Diocesan Board of Education Annual Report to Synod November 2021

It is humbling to write of the work of our school and parish leaders throughout this complex year and of the way the DBE team has worked to progress our core vision – to live out God’s transforming presence. Our diocese has the 5<sup>th</sup> largest population of schools in the country, 194 schools with 43,000 children – a remarkable opportunity for our diocese as we seek to build a Christian presence, serving God in every community.

Throughout the difficulties of 2020/21 school leaders have noted the DBE as the ‘steady voice beside them’ – and their trust and confidence in our work has continued to be expressed. Especially valued is how we have supported the virtual appointment of headteachers; developed on-line CPD programmes for staff, school leaders and governors; developed materials for schools for worship and crucially for bereavement. We have also maximised the role of the Hub Lead Practitioners for RE and collective worship, meaning schools despite repeated lockdowns have been able to access strong support. We have also launched the online foundation governance appointment process, which has meant that foundation governor appointments have successfully continued – this system has attracted national interest from other dioceses whose processes have stalled. Key elements of our work have also included our strategy for small schools; a re-imagining of our self-evaluation processes and performance management and development of our work for Net Zero 2030 – for example gaining government funding for a school’s ground source heat pump. Direct support to individual schools through the partnership service agreement has continued through on-line meetings, and when it has been possible, through actual visits. We are now thrilled to be returning to schools as the new academic year gets underway – headteachers warmly welcoming our on-site support for their work in developing the Christian character of their schools.

The DBE knew how important it would be to hold key strategic roles across the year, working with a range of partners. This has seen us further build our relationship with the national Education Office of the Church of England, for example taking a leading role in the innovative Rural Teaching Partnership project which has brought ten gifted teachers to our diocese this September, committed to working in schools where it is often hard to recruit – and vitally wanting to begin their careers in church schools.



Walk and Talk Mentoring Project at St Mary’s Church of England Primary School, Bridport \*

\*Young people walk together, experience nature and have chance to talk about big issues. They follow a route card with reflective activities and questions and take this home to encourage them to have a go with their families – opening opportunity for reflection.

We have also continued to lead with confidence on the development of the multi-academy trust (MAT) system, exercising careful judgement to further enable the growth in system capacity through Trust mergers and school conversions to academies within multi-academy trusts. We are therefore well placed as a diocese as the government advance its plans to see every school move into a Trust; our foresight has secured the opportunity for schools to join a MAT in their own locality – remaining a part of their community and within a MAT which will protect and progress the school's Anglican foundation. We have worked tirelessly to support and when appropriate challenge Local Authorities, Regional Schools Commissioner and Department for Education to secure decision making for the common good, around individual schools and in two instances, MATs, causing concern. Our strategy and courage in leadership has been noted by school, MAT and regional leaders.

As a DBE we support our own MAT - the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT), through Trusteeship and through the Members' group; Bishop Karen is the Chair of the Member Board. We are proud of DSAT's growth to 22 schools and of the leadership of the CEO and Trust Board; the Chair of the Trust has been awarded the St Aldhelms Cross for his service. We have seen the influence of the Trust grow across our diocese and also the South West; crucially throughout the year we have seen the depth of the Diocesan MAT's practical support of church schools and the development of the Trust's spiritual leadership.

We have worked to develop our partnership with the Diocesan Board of Finance as our sister organisation; through the national Growing Faith programme, supporting church and school partnership, with a focus on the spiritual development of young people within the home and school. Our partnership is particularly seen in the on-going development of community hubs and the engagement of the DBE in shaping the Mission and Pastoral Plan. We are excited to receive the All Churches Trust grant for our community hub work and ambitious for the impact this can have. Small steps but a beginning that is setting strong foundations for a re-imagined future with children and young people at the heart of diocesan decision making.



DBE/DBF joint staff lunch – building a bug hotel

We step into the next triennium with confidence, having laid the foundations of our work in this year to ensure the long-term financial security of the DBE. A re-imagining of our work, will see the reduction of the organisation from a staff of 16.3 FTE to a staff of 9 FTE by 2027 – eliminating the operational deficit, and seeing the DBE role become highly strategic. In so doing the role of MATs in sustaining the Christian character and vitally the Anglican foundation of the 194 schools becomes essential and a plan is being implemented to enable the MATs to step fully into this responsibility. It is important to note the crucial nature of the funding of the diocese for DBE work; the diocese unreservedly supports the work of the DBE in schools parishes and their young people through annual funding, £329k in 2020, representing 32% of our annual budget. By 2027 and the completion of the staff reduction, reaching a balanced operating budget, this gift will represent 44% of the DBE budget – the DBE could not exist without this funding.

Finally, as a staff team, in this most complex of years, we are thankful to God for each other and our spiritual and professional growth. We give thanks to God for the 43,000 children within church schools in our diocese and the gift He has given to us of enabling their spiritual development and flourishing.

