

Annual Report to Synod: 2022

Our Context

There are one hundred and ninety-three Church of England schools in the Diocese of Salisbury, located across five Local Authority areas: Dorset, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, Wiltshire, Devon and Hampshire. More than 42,000 children and young people attend a Church of England school in the diocese. Serving one million people, Salisbury Diocese is the twenty eighth largest diocese in terms of its total population, but it is the fifth largest diocese in terms of its church schools.

In total, the church school estate includes one hundred and seventy-eight primary and first schools, five middle schools and ten secondary schools. By 1st January 2023, one hundred and seven church schools had converted to academy status, of which twenty-four schools had joined The Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT); it is anticipated that this number will significantly increase in the next five years

Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) is an incorporated company, limited by guarantee. The SDBE receives funding from the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) for around twenty five percent of its annual operating costs. The other seventy five percent comes from other sources including grants, commercially generated income and investments.

The eighteen members of staff (15.3 FTE) who deliver the vision of the SDBE have intentionally promoted opportunities to work in partnership with Local Authorities, Trusts and the Regional Delivery Directorate (Government), in order to promote the flourishing of children and young people across the broader school eco-system. With many community multi-academy trusts adopting church school Articles (in order to welcome in church schools), the sphere of influence of the SDBE extends far beyond the traditional reach of Church of England schools. With significant structural change in the educational landscape, there is a moment in time for the wider church to also engage and co-create a positive future for children and young people, across the Diocese for the common good.



Bishop Stephens £10 note inspired Weymouth St Andrew's CE Primary School to sell hearts

Our Ministry

With a desire to 'Live Out God's Transforming Presence', Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) commissioned a review to assess the impact of its five-year strategic plan (2018-2023) to effectively plan for 2023/28. Our annual review for Synod this year provides Members with an opportunity to learn about the key judgements made on the quality of the SDBE's work.

The external review notes

There is a great deal to celebrate in what has been achieved. The work of the SDBE is highly respected by schools and has played a significant part in protecting and developing the Christian character of church schools and in shaping the educational landscape across the Diocese, for the greater good of all schools. The importance of supporting headteachers and senior leaders in their formation as spiritual leaders has become a significant focus, including in the summer of 2022, an exceptionally well evaluated conference for school leaders and clergy reflecting on their shared leadership within their communities.

Induction support for new headteachers and training and ongoing professional development opportunities are strengths of the SDBE's work; the SDBE has appointed 17 school leaders this year. Across the year, 800 school and parish leaders attended courses organised by the SDBE, of particular note is the Trust-wide impact of training, for example, one Trust sending sixteen church and maintained members of staff on a programme to support leaders in the articulation of vision. In addition, the re-imagining of the way that excellence in Religious Education and collective worship is developed has added additional capacity and momentum to the work of the SDBE. The SDBE team with the financial support of Sarum St Michael Trust, has maximised opportunities to bring about system wide improvements in the leadership and delivery of RE and collective worship.



Year 6 Leavers service, Salisbury Cathedral with Bishop Karen, 2022

The SDBE has been bold and courageous in tackling under achievement in schools and 'calling out' complacency and, consequently, has developed strong partnerships with multi-academy trusts, Local Authorities and the Regional Schools' Directorate. As advocate of children and young people the SDBE schools causing concern strategy is evidenced as supporting individual schools causing concern to gain their entitled support from their statutory providers. The SDBE is preventing failure and supporting flourishing.

The SDBE, as the sponsor of DSAT, has realised its ambition and vision to establish a diocesan MAT which is able to provide a strong 'home' for any church school. Bishop Karen is the Chair of Members, the group which holds statutory responsibility for the diocesan trust. It is a delight to celebrate the strength of the trust's work and growing reputation, the spiritual leadership of the CEO and the affirmation of the progress of the trust's schools, in strong inspection judgements.

There are many examples of how the SDBE has successfully worked to improve, secure and support governance in academy trusts and maintained schools, including providing effective support and guidance in relation to managing the church school estate. However, recruitment of suitably skilled and experienced foundation governors and directors remains a challenge. The DBE is deeply grateful to the 471 foundation governors in schools and trusts and acknowledges the vast role played by this community of volunteers. With the continued growth of the academy programme, there is now an opportunity for the SDBE to take a leading role in supporting academy trusts to share learning and thinking regarding effective governance for the future. This will involve the reimagining of local governance in this vital area of ministry.

Despite a legacy of operating with repeated in-year deficits, financial management and budgetary planning is a significant strength of the SDBE's work. Much progress has also been made with the management and consolidation of trust funds and the proactive management of investments, in order to generate income. The Board of Trustees has approved a robust and forward-looking financial plan to secure the long-term operating balance of the Trust through the empowerment of multi academy trusts (MATs). These MATs will undertake key roles currently held by DBE staff, growing their expertise and taking a system-wide role in the development of the Christian character of schools. There will thus be a reduction in DBE staffing over the next five years as the DBE works ever more strategically with around 20 MATs, holding them to account through strong leadership and partnership, for every school's Christian flourishing. There is significant interest from southwest dioceses and the Education Office of the Church of England in this new 'Flourishing in Trust' model; the SDBE is leading the way nationally toward a sustainable and flourishing future.



Year 6 Leavers service, Salisbury Cathedral, 2022

With regard to the Children and Young People's Strategy, the SDBE has, more recently, narrowed its focus almost exclusively on the development of community hubs. Some of this work has been important in helping schools to listen to and respond to the concerns of children and young people in relation to their mental health. To date, several small-scale projects appear to have impacted positively on children and schools and there is an emerging interest in how this work can be developed. However, whilst the voice of children and young people has been central to the early development of community hubs, it is not clear how engagement with children and young people, in all aspects of church life, has been systematically developed or followed through across the Diocese. Currently, there is insufficient evidence of how community hubs have shaped diocesan culture to ensure children and young people are rooted at the heart of mission and ministry.

The DBE and DBF are now maximising the opportunity to reflect on the learning which has emerged from the development of community hubs and together are creating a diocesan-wide strategy for the whole church's engagement with children and young people. This includes deepening and embedding partnership working between schools and parishes and responding boldly and creatively to opportunities to support clergy to grow teams to reach out and meet the needs of young people, schools and families. In April 2023 the Children and Young People's team will move to the employment of the DBF, placing the team at the heart of the mission and ministry team. The DBE and DBF are committed to working in partnership to enable the flourishing of children and young people at the heart of the new diocesan vision.

The SBDE role, in nurturing and developing the Anglican foundation of church schools, is inextricably linked to the wider Diocese's ability to support the development of leadership in its parishes, whether lay or ordained, to confidently engage with children, young people and families. DBE and DBF working together, know that any future strategy must continue to recognise the interdependence and co-dependency of schools and parishes to build vibrant, intergenerational communities where all can truly belong and flourish and fully encounter God's transforming love.

The SDBE looks to the future with optimism. With Bishop Stephen leading and discerning the vision for God's mission and ministry in Salisbury Diocese, a national commitment from the Church of England¹ to become a younger and more diverse church and a wider context in which society is adjusting to meet the demands of a post-pandemic world, we believe that there is a moment in time, here and now, to confidently respond to God's call, to model a new way of being and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ afresh in each generation.

The SDBE is therefore investing significantly in sharing the DBE and DSAT home in Wilton with our DBF colleagues, and in aligning the next SDBE strategic plan (in content and time-frame) to the new diocesan vision to support change in education and the church which will help to deliver the bold outcomes contained within the national vision and strategy of the Church of England.

We are so deeply thankful to God for the opportunity to serve Him, to live out His transforming presence in all we do, for the greater good of children and young people and the communities to which they belong in our diocese.



Bishop Stephen being welcomed by Wimborne Queen Elizabeth's CE VC School & Wilton CE Primary School

¹ The vision and strategy for the Church of England in the 2020s, Church of England website