



PORTSMOUTH & WINCHESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION



DBE overview for Diocesan Synod : March 2026

1. Background :

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) Measure legislation was passed by General Synod and Parliament in 2021. It required all DBEs to become charities. We are the only diocese that shares a DBE (Newcastle & Durham dioceses share an education team, but retain separate DBEs).

As a joint DBE the only option open to us was to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) – this was brought to our Synods at the time with a full explanation and discussion. Backlog and delays at the Charities Commission eventually saw us becoming a CIO in January 2024.

2. The CIO and its embedded nature in the Dioceses:

Although a separate organisation, with its own bank account, governance, employment of staff and other aspects to comply with the DBE Measure and the Charities Commission, we remain firmly integrated, aligned and overseen by our Dioceses.

i. The Measure, the P&WDBE Articles and our diocesan governance and routine ways of working ensures the DBE and its staff are fully embedded and aligned with the Dioceses. Equal numbers of Trustees compose the Board, with a share of ordained and lay trustees, including an Archdeacon from both Dioceses. The Chair and Vice Chair alternate from each diocese.

ii. The Director of Education is a member of the Bishop's Staff Team in both dioceses, and has individual meetings with the Diocesan Bishops and Suffragan bishops. He also meets formally with the Diocesan Secretaries of both dioceses, but is in regular and often daily contact about important and significant matters.

iii. The Finance Team (Portsmouth) oversees the DBE's finances and reporting on behalf of both dioceses; HR provision comes from Kane HR (also used by both dioceses); Safeguarding is not the responsibility of the Dioceses for schools, this rests with the relevant Local Authority (LA) – we work with 5 LAs. However, the Director of Education routinely liaises with each diocesan Safeguarding Team. The DBE is required to be assured that appropriate Safeguarding training and monitoring occurs. Communications and PR support is from the relevant Diocese.

iv. The DBE does not generate income other than designated fees for managing School, Buildings work, and contributions to courses offered to schools (other than those that support our key responsibilities and remit, which are not charged).

v. Our Dioceses fund the work of the DBE and its staff on a proportion based on number of schools :
Winchester 2/3rds Portsmouth 1/3rd

3. Overview of key issues discussed by the DBE 2024 and 2025:

i. The DBE meets 4 times each year, meetings usually lasting two hours- alternating between venues in each diocese. A sub-committee overseeing the work of the School Buildings Team meets to ensure the money passported from the Government's Department for Education (DfE) are properly managed and dispersed for Voluntary Aided Schools. Task Groups are convened to work on specific priorities or Government requirements. The Executive Committee, comprising the Chair, Vice Chair, Diocesan Secretaries and representatives from both dioceses meets between DBE meetings.

ii. The following are Standing Agenda items at every DBE meeting :

DBE Risk Register; Finance (including review of Management Accounts); People & HR; Safeguarding; Review of specific policies (in rotation); Director's update (includes Ofsted and SIAMS overview)

iii. In 2024, substantive agenda items covered:

Academisation Strategy, proposal, events, feasibility.

Safeguarding : CIO responsibilities and Safeguarding Policy ; Academisation Event; Board roles; CIO Insurance; DBE Policies; Flourishing for all; Falling roles in schools; Isle of Wight School consultation on closure

iv. In 2025, substantive agenda items covered:

DBE Website; Safeguarding Policy and practice; IoW School Closures; Academisation ;Net Zero; Multifaith Policy Admissions Criteria; Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) review; Artificial Intelligence and schools – initial discussion; New Ofsted Framework – initial discussion; Relationships and Sex Education updated Government guidance; Net Zero/School buildings; Falling Rolls / Small Schools

4. The work of the Education Team 2024/25

i. In addition to the practical outworking of the above areas discussed by the DBE, the team covers its statutory work related to School Leadership (recruitment, training and support); School Governance (particularly Foundation Governors and ex-officio clergy training and support); School Buildings – insurance and Buildings Projects; Religious Education (monitoring, training and support); School Admissions and Appeals; School organisation and review. The Team represents the Dioceses on various Committees and Boards in the five LAs across our area where the CofE has a named place.

ii. Isle of Wight – disproportionate but necessary work with lawyers and a decision to report the IoW Council to the National Independent Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA). The OSA found in favour of the DBE, overturning the decisions taken by the IoW Council and its processes regarding school closures. This will continue in 2026-27 as there is a need to close schools due to pupil numbers – but we have to ensure this is done properly and following government guidance, which was not the case previously.

iii. School closures : the decline in pupil numbers nationally, and the projected national need for schools is impacting on us. We liaise closely with our 5 LAs as this becomes an increasingly difficult position.

iv. Sweden – organising and delivering a residential conference and visits for 35 church leaders and workers from Stockholm Diocese as part of Portsmouth’s partnership in the PORVU Agreement.

v. Rwanda – meetings with visiting clergy and Bishops, and online links with Schools and Leaders as part of Winchester’s Provincial link with Rwanda.

vi. The CofE’s Growing Faith Foundation : we submitted a proposal for a project to support families and parishes working with schools to normalise and deepen conversations about Faith and God. We were awarded £20,000 and have worked with 24 cohorts with amazing outcomes. Our ‘Growing Faith’ project (focusing on secular children’s books) is now being rolled out across all Dioceses in England!

vii. Project Roots : we submitted a proposal to The Culham St Gabriel Trust to support our work piloting across Winchester Diocese in developing tools and resources for schools to combat anti-semitism. We were awarded £25,000 to support our work which has been acknowledged as nationally ground-breaking and innovative, and has twice been cited in The House of Lords.

viii. Annual Diocesan Education Project : our project grows in impact and engagement – with more diocesan parishes engaging with schools as they deliver our theme and Project Resources, that culminate at our Cathedrals and Priory. It receives national reporting in the media, and is increasingly being taken up by community schools, other dioceses, and indeed, schools in the USA!

Jeff Williams

Director of Education

March 2026