Induction of a New Headteacher

‘God has created him me to do him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another’ Blessed John Henry Newman

Introduction

The appointment to school leadership ranks amongst the most important duties and responsibilities entrusted to the governing body of a Catholic school or the board of directors of a Catholic academy. Whilst a governing body may sigh with relief that at the end of a rigorous recruitment process they have found the right candidate to lead their school in its next stage of development, the process doesn’t stop there. The governing body needs to give consideration as to the ways in which it will support their new leader both in settling into the new role and in the longer term.

Too often, it is assumed that the new headteacher will meet with the outgoing headteacher and find out ‘whatever they need to know’.

- A well-planned induction is a critical part of a successful recruitment process and will enable the new head to get up to speed as quickly as possible.
- The induction process for a new head is often unstructured and left to chance. Your new head will feel supported by the governing body and more confident in taking up the reins if you start planning the induction early.
- The Chair has a key role in preparing the induction of the new head. You should agree a programme of induction to the school, have obtained information about local and city provision and have considered ways of welcoming the new head to the community.

Before the new head starts

The specific circumstances of the appointment need to be taken into account (there may be sensitivities) but the following should be considered in liaison with the outgoing headteacher

- The first step in induction should be to liaise with the appointee’s school to allow for time to visit the new school prior to starting the role
- Where possible the Chair should arrange for the new headteacher to be introduced to staff and possibly attend a governing body meeting in order to meet with those members who may not have been involved in the recruitment process
- Arrange an introductory meeting with the parish priest
- Agree a programme of visits and meetings, and who will do what and when. It is common for the Chair to be in regular contact with the new head, but your appointee might also welcome assistance in organising
discussions with staff and the outgoing head. The Chair may need to facilitate discussions with the new head’s current school about the time needed to make visits to the new school and meet the staff.

- Newly appointed heads benefit from having a mentor, usually an experienced head from a similar phase school. Be aware that your head will have preferences and expectations of their own, discuss it first. Often the local partnership of Catholic schools will, with the Diocese, identify possible mentors. The governing body needs to ensure that the new headteacher makes good use of this support. A Diocesan mentoring programme is available for mentors and mentees to use as a framework.

- Make an audit of useful information and keep the new head informed and involved in any major financial and staffing decisions that occur between appointment and taking up the post.

- Ensure the school has set up IT, email database etc access for the new headteacher.

- The Chair should make sure that any first-time head has information about any induction programme offered by the Diocese, local authority or nationally. New headteachers should be encouraged to attend headteacher induction days, residential etc. especially those that address the specific needs of a headteacher in a Catholic school.

- New headteachers should be encouraged to address their own development needs. It is a time of change and often there is a temptation to ‘be in school’. However CPD is important in keeping the new headteacher informed and being able to carry out the role more effectively. Establishing an expectation of the governing body that the headteacher will give time to their personal development needs is vital. Their role as a spiritual leader should not be overlooked.

- The Chair should devote some time to finding out in advance the headteacher networks which operate locally and organise the co-ordinator to make contact. The Diocese can provide contact details for local chairs of headteacher organisations in the Catholic partnerships. Remember that experienced heads moving to the area also need to be welcomed into the community.

* New headteachers will be contacted by the Diocesan Co-ordinator for Headteacher Well Being during their first few weeks and a visit will be arranged. The co-ordinator will explain the role she has in:
  * promoting well being of headteachers in the Diocese of Leeds
  * providing confidential personal support for individual headteachers
  * providing support for resolving issues
  * facilitating networks
  * providing conferences supporting wellbeing

When the new head starts

- On the first day the chair on behalf of the governing body should welcome the new head to the school and arrange for a welcome card etc.
• Take the new headteacher through any current urgent issues they need to be made aware of straight away.
• Arrange for the headteacher to meet with the parish priest and share their expectations with regard to planning the liturgical year in school and attending events

**Establishing the relationship**

• The chair and headteacher should have a close working relationship and they should work closely together having a shared vision for the school. The chair should make time to listen to the headteacher’s concerns and give constructive advice, talk through disagreements before governing body meetings, work together on effective school policies.
• The headteacher and chair both need to be clear about the boundaries of responsibility between the governing body and the headteacher and staff of the school. The chair and governing body’s responsibility is to the school as a whole and occasionally this may cause tension if the headteacher feels unsupported. The headteacher and chair should work together to establish a good rapport by which both the head and chair share the same vision for the school, can discuss concerns in confidence, explore issues, share bad news without recrimination, and be honest to each other. They needs to establish this relationship from the outset by:-
  • The chair arranging a meeting with the new headteacher at the earliest opportunity
    - at the meeting go through any issues relating to the governing body e.g. governor vacancies, committee structure, any governor issues including governor’s individual roles and interests
    - highlight any issues that have been identified as a priority for the governing body over the coming year as part of the School Improvement Planning cycle though these may change
    - share the ways in which they can best work together, no doubt the chair is also a very busy person
    - share good practice some from the appointee’s previous school which can be used to benefit the governing body. Share expectations so that you can jointly agree on actions – remember the way in which schools work does differ and this can be most apparent when a new headteacher is appointed, build on good practice
  • Make use of any relevant data gathered during the selection process. This information could help begin the head’s performance management and professional development. Arrange for formal appraisal to be carried out as soon as possible

REMEMBER: Communication is the most important part of the induction. All parties will no doubt be committed to establishing a good working relationship but sometimes it is the unexpected and unintentional differences that may cause tension. An openness and sharing the history of some aspects of the school will pave the way to a good positive future.