

**THE WAY AHEAD: CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS IN THE NEW MILLENIUM
(Extract from Church of England Press Release)**

The Church Schools Review Group, chaired by Lord Dearing, published its final report in June on how the Church of England should shape the future of its 4,700 schools.

The Church of England has probably its best opportunity in education since the Education Act 1944, concludes *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium*, the report of Lord (Ron) Dearing's Church Schools Review Group. At the same time, it recognises that responding to the opportunity represents a major challenge to the Church, and it suggests how the challenge can be met. It makes some 80 action recommendations grouped according to where responsibility for action lies.

The *Way Ahead* takes into account more than 800 pages of commentary received in response to an earlier Consultation Report, issued in December. It highlights the full implications of the General Synod's Resolution in November 1998 that "Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation". It argues for a growing unity of purpose within the Church community and spells out how Church schools should be fully integrated into the life of parishes.

Partnership is the theme of the Report, not just within the Church, but also with central and local government. In particular, it re-affirms and makes proposals for developing the Church of England's historic partnership with government and local education authorities in the provision of education for more than 900,000 children and young people. It makes proposals for stronger links with the Church Colleges of Higher Education and with independent schools that have a Christian foundation.

The *Way Ahead* recommends an increase in provision at both primary and secondary level. Proposing 100 additional secondary schools, to include Fresh Starts, City Academies and new schools on both green and brown field sites, as well as transfers from the Community sector, the Report highlights the discrepancies in provision between dioceses. It also emphasises the disparity between the Church of England's 775,000 places in primary schools and 150,000 places in secondary schools. In expanding provision, the Report argues that the Church should seek especially to serve those in areas of social and economic need. It welcomes an ecumenical approach. The Report suggests the establishment of a national fundraising task force to raise £25m for new schools and regionally-based support groups to assist dioceses in expanding provision.

The Report welcomes the initiatives for an expansion of faith-based schools outlined in the Government Green Paper, *Schools Building on Success*, published in February 2001. It suggests a collaborative procedure for enabling Community schools, successful or struggling, to become Church schools through a partnership approach with local education authorities, where there is local agreement.

Lord Dearing's Review Group puts teachers at the heart of its report, stressing the need for the Church to encourage vocations to teach and challenging the Church at all levels to promote teaching as an important expression of Christian ministry. It identifies the future supply of Christian teachers as the most important issue facing Church schools. It urges the Church to

engage in a dialogue with Government to achieve a reduction in the administrative workload of headteachers, especially of small schools. It invites the Church to find new ways of encouraging the recruitment of teachers from minority ethnic groups.

Church schools and colleges must be distinctively Christian institutions, the Report states. For any new Church schools, it says, there should be a core of Christian pupils but these schools should serve the local community in all its diversity. The Report notes the current popularity of Church schools, suggesting that parents welcome the explicit recognition of Christian values within the life of the school, as well as noting the good reputation many schools have earned in the broadest sense of the education they offer.

The Bishop of Blackburn, Chairman of the Church of England Board of Education and National Society Council, said, "This Report is a celebration of Church schools in the new millennium – a unique gift from the Church to the nation – places of hope and faith, where all people are valued and respected as individuals. We want to offer what Church schools provide to the growing number of parents who seek Christian education for their children. I commend the Report to the Church."

Lord Dearing said, "Everything in the Group's Report has its origin in the General Synod's resolution stating that 'Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'. We have set out to show the implications of that statement. This is a real time of opportunity for the Church in education. Many parents are showing that they welcome the opportunity to send their children to a Church school, and both national and local government have shown a willingness to work in partnership with us.

"At the heart of our message is a coming together of all the elements of the Church community in supporting the work and the distinctiveness of Church schools. In particular, the most significant issue facing us is the long-term provision of Christian teachers."

Background

The Church Schools Review Group was established by the Archbishops' Council in response to the November 1998 General Synod Report, Church of England Schools in the New Millennium. The Synod passed a resolution recognising that Church schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation. The resolution addressed parishes, dioceses and the Archbishops' Council.