



Catholic Schools: Partners in Formation

Celebrating 175 Years of the Catholic Education Service



Catholic Education Service
Supporting Catholic Education Since 1847



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Foreword



In 2029 we will mark the bicentenary of Catholic Emancipation in the United Kingdom. This was the point at which most of the penal restrictions on Catholics were lifted and paved the way for the full restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850.

Shortly after this restoration, the newly reinstated Catholic Bishops of England and Wales had a choice about how to re-establish and rehabilitate the Catholic faith following three hundred years of persecution.

These founding bishops could have promoted the building of Catholic churches, shrines, and cathedrals in their newly formed dioceses. They didn't. Instead, they chose to build schools, schools which served the increasing numbers of poor Catholic migrants in England and Wales's expanding urban areas.

As we read in the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). Therefore, revealing this truth, proclaiming the Good News, and making Christ known to all peoples is the fundamental mission of the Catholic Church. This is why the Church provides schools and considers education to be one of, if not the most important way of placing Christ and the teachings of the Church at the heart of peoples' lives.

It is the same reason why those early bishops prioritised the building of schools and why nearly 200 years later, our network of more than 2,200 Catholic schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions remain at the forefront of the Catholic Church's contribution to society.

For 175 years the Catholic Education Service, in its various forms has been a constant in supporting dioceses and schools. Furthermore, after the Butler Act of 1944, the CES has been pivotal in representing Catholic schools and dioceses to the Westminster and devolved Governments.

Today, the Catholic Church is the second largest provider of education in England and Wales, and it is by maintaining this strong partnership with the State that Catholic schools can continue to serve the common good of society. Moreover, looking back at the 175-year history of the Catholic Education Service, this partnership between the Church and the State has been one of the most successful in delivering such an essential service as education. Long may it continue.

+ Marcus Stock

**The Rt Rev Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds
Chairman of the Catholic Education Service**

Introduction



It gives me immense pleasure to introduce *Catholic Schools: Partners in Formation*. Celebrating the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Education Service, this publication serves as a handy and concise guide to the history of Catholic education, the reasons why the Church provides Catholic schools, as well as the features that make Catholic schools unique and how they are preserved.

This is the first time such a publication has been brought together, including case studies and real-world examples of the Catholic ethos in practice.

Education remains one of the largest areas of Church-State partnership in the country. Roughly a third of all schools in England are of a religious character, and of these more than 98% of them are provided by either the Church of England, the Catholic Church or the Methodists.

Today the Catholic Church provides more than 2,200 educational institutions right across the country. Predominant amongst these are our primary and secondary schools which make up 10% of all State-funded schools. However, this figure also includes more than one hundred Catholic independent schools, 15 stand-alone Sixth Form colleges, four Catholic universities and many other Catholic higher education facilities, as well as our amazing network of Catholic special schools.

What unifies all these institutions is their Catholic ethos, and as we will explain in the coming chapters, this ethos is more than just a saint's name on the welcome sign or a crucifix hanging in the classroom, it is a deep understanding of what comes from being a community of Christ.

This is why the Church employs certain safeguards to maintain the Catholic character of its schools.

Often these safeguards are the target of campaign organisations that want to remove the Church's involvement in education. However, as this book will demonstrate, it is these safeguards which allow the Catholic ethos to flourish and as a result, continue to make Catholic schools extremely popular with parents of all faiths and none.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Barber". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Paul Barber
Director of the Catholic Education Service



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Saint Edmunds

Community growing in understanding.



A Brief History of Catholic Education

The Origins of Catholic Schools

The Catholic Church was the first provider of schools and universities in England. The earliest schools were cathedral and monastic schools established from the late sixth century onwards. This growing network was joined by schools based around the larger collegiate churches and, from the twelfth century by the foundation of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and their colleges.

At the Reformation in the 16th century, the Catholic Church's role as a provider of public education was forced to go underground or abroad until the 1800s. The oldest Catholic schools and colleges still in existence date from this period: St Edmund's, Ware, was founded at Douai in 1568, Stonyhurst at St Omer in 1593 and Downside School at Douai in 1607.

These returned to England in the late 1700s and early 1800s and were joined by schools founded by other monasteries that were making their way back to England at that time.

In 1847 a unique partnership was agreed with the State, and the Catholic Poor-School Committee was established by the bishops of England and Wales (at that time still vicars-apostolic), to represent them collectively and to focus on the promotion of Catholic elementary education for the growing Catholic population, particularly fuelled by immigration in the big cities and industrial areas.

The ordinary Catholic hierarchy of diocesan bishops was restored in England and Wales in 1850 and held their first Provincial Council in 1852. Because the Church has always viewed education as vital to the

formation and development of the whole person, they decided that the education of the poor was to be the Catholic community's first priority. They therefore put the setting up of Catholic schools for the Catholic community ahead of building churches, often using its schools in those early days as the place of worship for the parish.

The Birth of the Catholic Education Service

In 1905 the Committee was renamed the Catholic Education Council and its remit enlarged to include secondary education (this later became the Catholic Education Service). Catholic schools continued to be established throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which, at a time when state involvement in education was still very limited, meant that Catholic parents from poor backgrounds were able to send their children to school.

Service to those who are amongst the most disadvantaged in our society has also always been central to the mission of Catholic education. Many Catholic schools were established in the 19th Century to meet the needs of Catholic immigrants from Ireland and ever since Catholic schools have successfully received disadvantaged families from new immigrant populations and integrated them into British society over many generations.

In 1944 the educational landscape across England and Wales changed forever with the passing of the Education Act 1944 (also known as the 'Butler Act'). This act promised 'secondary education for all' and increased the school leaving age to 15, meaning that all children from

the post-war generation received a minimum of 10 years of education. The Butler Act continued the 'Dual System' of voluntary (Church) schools providing education alongside local authority schools, but now with equality of revenue funding through the local authorities, whilst retaining their distinctively Catholic ethos through various legal protections which continue to apply to Catholic schools to this day. The settlement between Church and State meant that the funding of Catholic schools was shared by the Catholic foundations of the schools (in most cases the Dioceses or religious orders) and by the Government. The first Catholic sponsored academies opened in 2005 and from 2011 some voluntary aided Catholic schools began to convert to academies.



The Church is also involved in higher education in England through its involvement in a range of higher education institutions. Following the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, the Bishops' intention to establish schools meant that teacher training became a priority. With this in mind, a number of teacher training colleges were established (St Mary's, Twickenham in 1850, being the first). Today higher education in the Catholic tradition continues to flourish led by the country's four Catholic Universities: St Mary's Twickenham, Leeds Trinity, Liverpool Hope and Newman University in Birmingham.

Catholic Education Today

The Role and Structure of the Catholic Education Service Today

Today the Catholic Education Service is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and works closely with the Bishops' Conference Department for Education and Formation with which it shares a chairman.

Dioceses and Religious Orders are responsible for the running of Catholic schools and the CES is committed to supporting them through the maintenance of national guidance, model documents, technical advice and professional training. The CES is governed by a management committee in accordance with its own Statutes, which are approved by the Bishops' Conference.

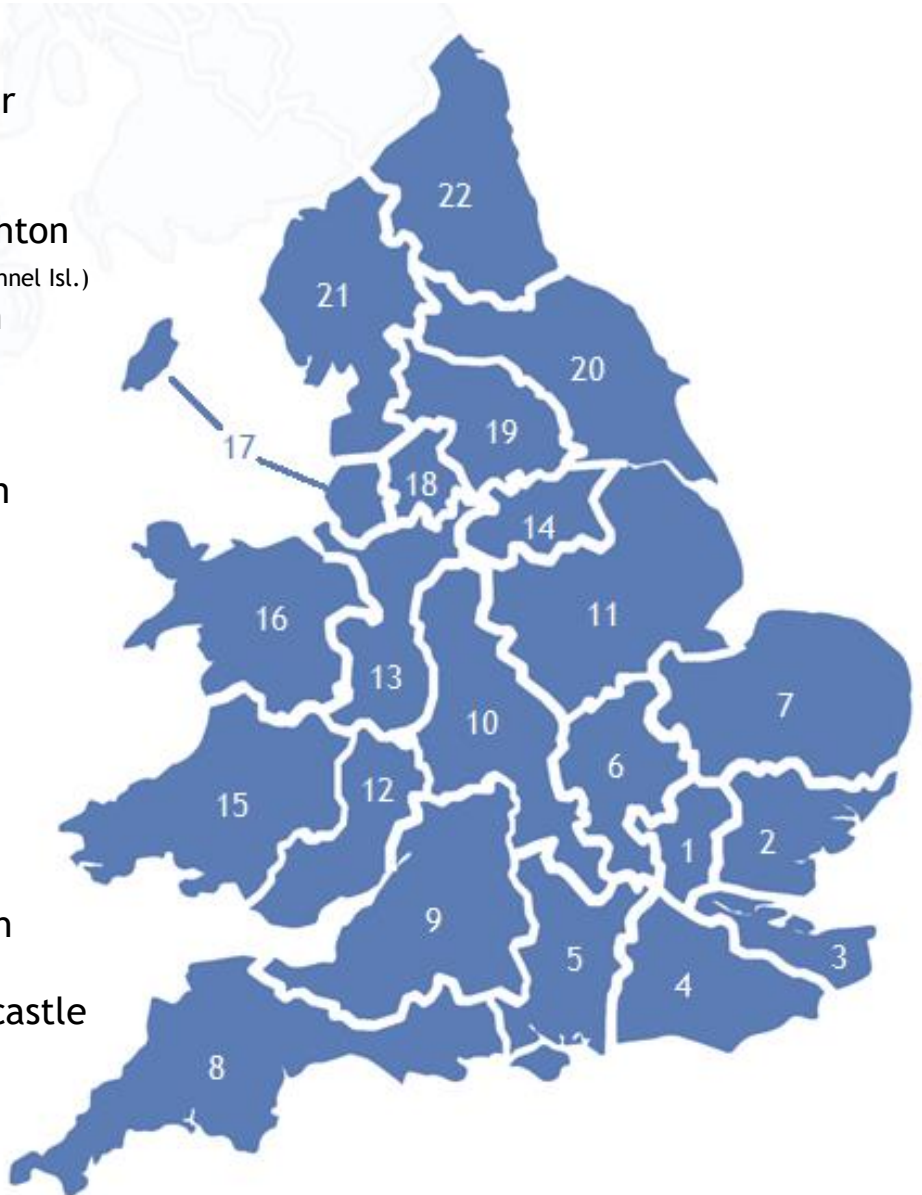
On behalf of the Bishops' Conference, the CES negotiates with the Westminster and Welsh Governments and other national bodies in order to safeguard and promote Catholic education. It also offers a Catholic contribution to the English and Welsh educational landscapes, seeking to ensure that the principles of Catholic teaching are protected by national education policy.

The CES is a member of the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) and is represented at its regular General Assembly. The CEEC is the European regional secretariat of the International Office for Catholic Education (OIEC) of which the CES was a founder member in 1952. OIEC provides permanent representation at various international bodies such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

The Dioceses of England and Wales

- 1 ✕ Westminster
- 2 Brentwood
- 3 ✕ Southwark
- 4 Arundel and Brighton
- 5 Portsmouth (inc. Channel Isl.)
- 6 Northampton
- 7 East Anglia
- 8 Plymouth
- 9 Clifton
- 10 ✕ Birmingham
- 11 Nottingham
- 12 ✕ Cardiff
- 13 Shrewsbury
- 14 Hallam
- 15 Menevia
- 16 Wrexham
- 17 ✕ Liverpool
- 18 Salford
- 19 Leeds
- 20 Middlesbrough
- 21 Lancaster
- 22 Hexham and Newcastle

✕ = Archdiocese





**2,200 Schools and Colleges -
one in every ten schools in
England and Wales is Catholic**



More than 850,000 Pupils



Over 50,000 Teachers



**Four Universities and 38
Higher Education Centres**



More than 17,000 Students



**66% of all pupils are Catholic
and a quarter of a million are
not of the Catholic faith**



**Routinely outperform the
national average at KS2 and
GCSE**



**The most ethnically diverse
schools in the country**



**Contain proportionally more
pupils from the most
disadvantaged communities**



**More likely to be Ofsted Good
or Outstanding**



ST MARGARET CLIFTON
SCHOOL STEVENAGE

Why the Church Provides Catholic Schools

Christ at the Centre

The primary reason why the Church provides Catholic schools is to be part of the Church's mission in education, placing Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of people's lives.¹ As Pope Benedict XVI made clear in a speech to educators:

“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.”²

By putting Christ, and his bride the Church, at the centre of the educational experience, Catholic schools seek to build the foundation of our spiritual development, our learning and teaching, and the formation of culture and our society in Christ.³

Furthermore, by putting Christ at the centre, Catholic schools are able to become places that allow the formation of young people through experiencing the fullness of Christian life. This is achieved by an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony.⁴

An education system which puts Christ at the centre does not see schools as institutions with the sole purpose of providing young people

¹ Christ at the Centre, Catholic Truth Society, 2nd Edition, 2012, Pg 7

² Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008.

³ Christ at the Centre, Pg 7

⁴ The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §34

with the skills to pass exams and enter the workforce. Nor does it only judge the success of such institutions on their exam pass rate and academic achievements, these are happy by-products. Rather, it sees schools as communities where the spiritual, cultural and personal worlds are brought together and where values, motivations, aspirations and moral imperatives develop pupils' actions as persons and inform the choices they make for the rest of their lives.

Parents as the Primary Educators

A fundamental principle of Catholic education is that parents are the primary educators of their children, and this understanding is not only underpinned by centuries of tradition, it is enshrined in the Church's own law (Canon Law).⁵

Canon Law is also clear that the Church has a responsibility to assist Catholic parents in delivering an authentic Catholic education through the provision of high-quality schooling.⁶ As a result, Catholic schools are extremely popular with Catholic parents.

Nevertheless, it is this respect for parents and the quality of their educational provision which also make Catholic schools popular with parents of all faiths and none. Whilst accepting the first role of Catholic schools is to support Catholic families, it is wrong to assume that families not of the faith are excluded from Catholic schools. The reality

⁵ Code of Canon Law, Can 793 § 1

⁶ Code of Canon Law, Can.796 §1 & Can.802

is quite the opposite and at present there are over a quarter of a million pupils in the Catholic school system from other faith backgrounds.

Reasons for non-Catholic parents sending their children to Catholic schools include:

- The long-established reputation for high academic standards in Catholic schools.
- Their own positive personal experience of being educated in a Catholic school, whether at home or abroad.
- Character formation and the virtues which a Catholic school imparts upon all its pupils regardless of their own faith.
- The pastoral support which is given within a nurturing school environment.
- A focus on preparing all students for the next steps in their life journey as flourishing members of society.
- The opportunity to foster a better understanding of the Judeo-Christian traditions which historically form British society.

Case Study - Muslim Pupils in Catholic Schools

More than 26,000 pupils in Catholic schools are Muslim, which is the largest non-Christian faith currently served within in the Catholic school sector. This popularity is partly due to the close links and personal experiences that some Muslim families have with Catholic education in other parts of the world and also the respect for faith that is at the heart of all Catholic schools. Here is the testimony of one such Muslim parent, Ashrat Ali.



“When it came to choosing a primary school for my five children, one thing was clear in my mind: I wanted them to have a broad and inclusive education which allowed them to mix with a wide variety of children. That’s why I decided to send them to a Catholic school.”

“I was lucky enough to have a range of very good secular primary schools near me. But the one problem was that the pupils there were practically all from the Muslim faith. This wasn’t an issue per se, but I was fortunate to have had an education where I mixed with people from all cultures and religious backgrounds, and I wanted my children to have the same.”

“Many people often look confused when, as a fully practising Muslim, I went out of my way to get my children into a Catholic school. Indeed, some in my own community found my choice of schools strange. But for me it was the perfect fit for my children. First of all, the religious character of the school was not the barrier that many presumed it would be. It was the importance that the school put on faith which meant I knew that my faith and that of my family would be respected.”

“Many in my community were concerned that sending my children to a Catholic school would affect their Islamic upbringing, but I was clear that that was my responsibility. And to that extent the school was incredibly supportive. One of the greatest things about my local

Catholic primary school was the serious and solemn way it respected faith - all faith. Because the staff knew how important their Catholic faith was to them, they respected how important my Islamic faith was to me and my family. Religion wasn't swept under the carpet or made into a taboo subject; it was openly embraced, talked about freely and respected by all. I severely doubt this would have been the same in a secular State school.

“Did my children participate in Nativity plays and Easter celebrations? Yes, they did. Was that a problem for me? Not at all. If you send your children to a Catholic school you should expect them to receive a Catholic education. Being against that would be like walking into a bakery then complaining because you couldn't buy fish. Being treasured for who you are is a value that is shared by both Christianity and Islam, and this ethos has benefited my children their entire lives.

“I truly believe that it was these values which enabled three of them to make it to grammar school. Too often these days people with no understanding of faith believe that all of society's ills can somehow be attributed to faith schools and that they are covertly carving up the country along cultural, religious and ethnic lines. In my experience this couldn't be further from the case.

“In fact, if I had wanted my children not to integrate with pupils from other religions or have no understanding of a faith other than their own, I would have sent them to my local community state school. A Catholic primary school was the best decision for my children and, even as a Muslim, I'm grateful that the state could provide my children with the opportunity of a Catholic education.”

An Extension of the Parish

Another reason why the Church provides schools is to serve as an extension of the parish community. In so doing Catholic schools, working in partnership with families and their local communities, are able to integrate both the spiritual and cultural education of young people.

But a Catholic school can never be a substitute for the parish community. Consequently, the fundamental partnership that should be developed and fostered is one between the school, its parish or parishes and the diocese. This partnership provides the source of a school's authentic ecclesial foundation - its mission and communion within the Catholic Church - and forms the secure basis for the school's mission and communion with the parish and the home.⁷

Being a natural extension of a parish or deanery (a group of parishes) allows Catholic schools to tailor their educational offering to best reflect their local community. Additionally, when we take into account the role Catholic headteachers have within the parish community as faith leaders, the transformational power of a Catholic school can be felt throughout an entire community.



⁷ Christ at the Centre, Pg 8

Case Study: Supporting Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) Pupils



Catholic schools are unique in the way in which they can support the GRT community particularly because so many GRT families, whether Catholic or not, seem to find similarities between their values and Catholic values. Indeed, many in the GRT community see the ethos of Catholic schools as an

extension of their own community's ethos. Here is how Holy Family Catholic Primary School in Bristol used their unique position in their parish to further the educational prospects of this often marginalised community:

For nearly a decade, Holy Family Catholic Primary in Bristol, has welcomed significantly higher than average numbers of Traveller children through its doors. In fact, some years have seen almost a third of the children coming from the Traveller community. The Traveller children that Holy Family serve face a variety of challenges however the school has been able to make significant progress with this community. This has been achieved through the hard work of staff reaching out the hand of friendship to the Traveller community, and by building relationships and trust through their shared Catholic ethos.

Traditionally low school attendance has been one of the biggest challenges to overcome but they managed to turn this around by setting out on an programme of training, understanding and learning about the Traveller community, even identifying a member of staff responsible for visiting homes and building links with them.

By fostering these strong links many positive outcomes have been achieved. School attendance among GRT pupils has increased, integration of Traveller parents has improved and a governor responsible for Traveller relations was established. The school also looked at the needs of Traveller children and developed a curriculum which makes learning more accessible to them, providing Traveller children with the skills they needed to further their education.

A Gift to Society

Another reason the Catholic Church provides schools is to contribute to the creation of a society that is highly educated, skilled and cultured. This is what the Church means when it refers to its schools contributing towards the common good of society and its culture.⁸

Whilst Catholic schools are provided first and foremost to support Catholic families, Catholic schools also strive to provide an education for all, especially the poor and marginalised members of society. In this respect Catholic schools play a significant role in providing educational

⁸ Christ at the Centre, Pg 9

choice to families, especially those who find themselves often in some of the most difficult circumstances.

Traditionally one of the greatest national benefits of Catholic education has been the extraordinary level of social cohesion they have generated both on an ethnic and sociocultural level. With the Catholic community in England and Wales being, in recent centuries, predominantly an immigrant faith, Catholic schools have played an important part in integrating and assimilating waves of immigration and continue to do so. Similarly, the fact that Catholic schools draw pupils from areas roughly ten-times larger than other schools, means they bring together a much wider pupil population, allowing young people to learn and play with others not necessarily from their own immediate geographical community.

Financially, Catholic schools also represent a benefit to the taxpayer. The Catholic Church provides the land and buildings for all its schools, and, together with its responsibilities for their upkeep, the Church contributes hundreds of millions of pounds every year towards the provision of schools for the good of the country.

Similarly, given the ownership and oversight of Catholic schools, the Church saves the public purse by funding management, legal, professional, and education support services. This funding is raised by, and comes from, the Catholic community.

However, it is not just on the macro level that Catholic schools prove a benefit to society. On a much smaller scale their impact is equally profound, one of the best examples being Catholic special schools.

Case Study: Catholic Special Schools

As the only national provider of a network of special schools, Catholic special schools have hundreds of years of collective experience in helping to educate children with a variety of complex health needs. These include moderate to severe complex learning needs and associated speech, language and communication difficulties, autism, and sensory impairment.

By their nature, Catholic special schools have a different context to other Catholic schools wherein their essence is to seek to educate the most vulnerable children by catering for increasingly complex needs. In these schools, the Gospel is expressed through the mutual service given to, and received from the vulnerable which creates a mutually enriching experience.

What these schools all have in common is a holistic approach to education within a caring, spiritual environment where every person is of equal importance, valued for who they are and encouraged to reach their maximum potential.

They also seek to maximise a student's life experience which enables independence and inclusion within a wider community. This is all underpinned by Catholic core values and beliefs, where daily life is infused with the nurturing values and virtues of the Catholic faith, understanding the need to believe, to hope, to forgive and to love.

Maintaining a Catholic ethos within the special school is achieved by ensuring there is a broad curriculum including religious education, which helps pupils build their self-confidence, respect for others and self-

reliance. Students come to value education, not just for what it brings to them personally, but for how it can help them contribute more fully to the communities in which they live, and equipping them to take their place as responsible, confident, young adults facing the realities of the modern world.

Catholic non-maintained special schools are amongst the most established and experienced education providers that offer a tailored education to support those with complex Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities across England. Along with SEN provision in mainstream Catholic schools, Catholic special schools play an essential role contributing to the diversity of choice as part of the range of schools meeting a range of needs.



The Catholic Ethos

The Catholic Ethos

The success of Catholic schools both academically and in their ability to produce well-rounded young people is attributed to their Catholic ethos.

Research from the University of Birmingham found that a school's ethos is the single most important factor that supports character education.⁹ There can be no substitute for ethos because it embodies the purpose and sets the direction for the school.

In Catholic schools this shared vision is the belief that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and is therefore worthy of respect. It is also a shared cultural and religious identity that puts the teaching of Christ and the Church at the heart of all aspects of school life both inside and outside the classroom.

Furthermore, another unique aspect of the Catholic ethos is that it accompanies all young people as they transition through their Catholic education. As such, it ensures that a young person's journey into adulthood is also a journey of faith, a journey which



⁹ Catholic Character Education, University of Birmingham & The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2019, Pg 4

recognises that true justice, peace and human freedom require, first and foremost, respect for the dignity of human life.¹⁰

When this Catholic ethos is put into practice it results in a process which the Church refers to as the formation of the whole child.

What is the Formation of the Whole Child?

The formation of the whole child is the development of young people as human beings, engaging them in a shared vision for life based on virtues that lead to human flourishing modelled on Christ.

There is a tendency to consider education as being a process of putting knowledge and skills into the students who attend school as if they were empty vessels, waiting to be filled with extraneous material. But the word ‘education’ derives from the Latin ‘*educare*’, meaning to ‘bring out’.

In this respect Catholic schools are profoundly humanist institutions, because for the Church, Christ is the universal norm of all human ethical action - as the ‘new Adam’, He redefines what it means to be human. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Catholic schools to ‘bring out’ this humanist vision.

This common vision calls all members of the school community to grow in positive personal strengths called virtues. These are not just

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, §15.

theological virtues but also moral, civic, intellectual and performance-based virtues as well.

Therefore, Catholic schools are institutions which encourage the school community to discover what is contained in the depths of every human heart.¹¹

Virtues-based Formation

A Virtues-based education seeks to give young people the foundations to make the right decisions in important situations.

This archetypal search for what is ‘true and good’ is the search which encompasses all aspects of human endeavour in Catholic schools. It is conducted within every classroom and school department, within the whole school curriculum and in all extra-curricular activities. It is a search that travels inwards in the acquisition of self-knowledge, as well as outwards in the acquisition of wisdom. The search itself ought to be the hallmark of every good school in the country with Catholic schools only differing from others in their explicit understanding that this search for the fullness of truth and for the good is undertaken in companionship with Christ.

Ultimately virtues-based formation seeks to identify virtues in the lives of others, whether in the contemporary world, in history, and (closer to home) in the school community, as well as recognising deficiencies in

¹¹ Formation in virtues: Educating the Whole Person, Department of Catholic Education and Formation Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England & Wales, 2020, Pg 2

virtue, both in others and not least in ourselves. The conclusion of this becomes most apparent when young people make the pursuit of virtues a habit of life.¹²

Immersion in Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic ethos is not just limited to spiritual development. The call to respect the dignity of every life also has a profound impact on the social responsibility of school communities. In the Catholic context, this social responsibility is described as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and represents a cultural tradition within the Church dating back centuries.

CST is based on the belief that God has a plan for creation. It is also the belief that humanity's part in this plan isn't just limited to things 'spiritual': it should involve every aspect of everyone's lives, from the things we pray about, to how Christians live as responsible global



citizens. CST is also the tradition of the Church's reflection on how we live this vocation for the common good in the world.

¹² Formation in Virtues, Pg 3

Catholic Social Teaching touches upon many different aspects of life, from the family to international development, how we think of those who are homeless to how we care for the environment, and from how we shop and consume to the rights of workers and the dignity of work. All the different areas that CST reflects upon have developed from practical reflection on the realities of modern life in light of the principles and themes of Catholic Social Teaching.

Relationship with the Wider Catholic Community

One of the key elements that CST brings to that Catholic school ethos is the concept that each pupil and each Catholic school is part of a wider Catholic community. In this respect, one could walk into a Catholic school anywhere in the world and the central principles of the Catholic ethos would be the same. One of the ways Catholic schools across the world are working together is a renewed focus on the care of our common home.

Case Study: Catholic Schools and the Environment

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis makes it clear that 'everything is connected'¹³, and one of the benefits of the Catholic ethos is in its development of globally aware young people. This is perhaps most relevant by Catholic schools' responses to the environmental crisis.

¹³ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015 § 42

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for decisive action on protecting and caring for our 'common home' - the earth. The Encyclical has bolstered an already growing movement in the Church towards sustainability, environmental awareness and climate action. Across the country Catholic schools have used it to inform and reform their own practices, with the Catholic Church becoming one of the largest consumers of green gas in the country. This is the story of St Mary's Catholic School, Dorset, and how their ethos has motivated them to effect change for the common good of our planet:

Between 2017-2019, St Mary's looked at how to reduce single-use plastic in the school and in the local community. The pupils delivered a local advocacy project over two years which included:

- Writing to businesses that supplied items to the school to ask them to reduce single-use plastic and asking parents to avoid purchasing items using single-use plastic.
- Writing to local businesses, and the town council to ask about their environmental policy and single-use plastic. The school received many positive replies, including from Buckingham Palace.
- Visiting local shops and businesses to audit their use of single-use plastic, talking to shoppers and the general public about the environment, and offering certificates designed by the pupils to businesses they felt deserved recognition. The school's Green Team visited local supermarkets in the town to look at how much unnecessary packaging is being used.
- They also asked members of the public what they thought and found that they agreed unanimously that it should be reduced.

Following this, the Green Team wrote to the supermarkets to ask if this is possible.

- Setting up a table outside the supermarket and gathering a petition of over 500 signatures calling for an end to single-use plastic.
- Undertaking a climate march with posters designed by the pupils and reading out poems written by the children.
- Speaking in public at the Town Council and on local radio.
- Undertaking beach cleaning and litter picking.

St Mary's also won the Plastic Free Schools award in June 2019. Members of the school Green Team have also joined a new Sustainable Swanage Youth Group run by the Town Council. In recognition of St Mary's status as a Plastic-Free School, some of the Green Team were invited in January 2020 to present awards to local businesses as part of Swanage's application to become a Plastic-Free Town - which it now is.



The Catholic Ethos: Former Pupils' Perspective

“My time at Trinity School was very special because of the strong sense that we were all part of a family that looked after, respected and cared for its members. The Catholic ethos of mutual respect, generosity and sharing meant that we all wanted to do our best and strive to make each other proud.”

Sheku Kanneh-Mason MBE



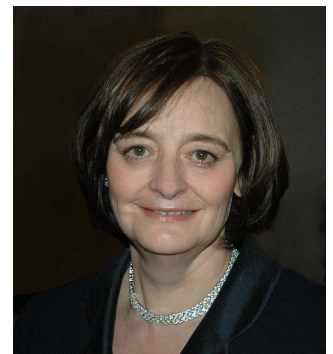
“From an early age, Catholic schooling taught me how it feels to be part of something. How it feels to be part of something bigger and something beyond the everyday. It taught me it’s ok to be fallible and it’s good to ask for help. There were things we should have talked about more, but I learnt there truly is more uniting us than dividing and that truth has driven me forward to start conversations, build bridges and change hearts and minds.”

Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green



“My Catholic school gave me the vital combination of high standards of teaching and a core set of values. These gifts were essential in the development of my self-confidence and my understanding of myself. But my education also taught me the need to take responsibility for my own actions and my obligation to give back something to the wider society around me.”

Cherie Blair CBE QC



*Cherie Blair image by Allan Warren
via Wikimedia Commons*

“I was educated by the De La Salle brothers. They gave us a different map of the world - they were very closely tied to the local community but also profoundly connected to all the places where the order taught in France, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia. In a thousand practical ways they made us feel a part of the global community. They nurtured my faith and gave me aspiration - not the corrosive material aspirations which we were being force-fed by adverts and peer pressure - but the real aspirations, to happiness and fulfilment.”

Frank Cottrell-Boyce



“I attended Catholic primary school. I learned how to incorporate faith into my daily life, and also about the importance of the routine of going to Mass on Sundays; and in fact, because I was a chorister, I had Mass six days a week - sometimes twice a day. It made Catholicism a natural and indeed a central part of how to live, behave and learn.”

Professor Peter Frankopan



Keeping Catholic Education Special

It's impossible to avoid the fact that faith-based education remains a controversial topic in modern Britain, with well organised, well-funded and highly vocal pressure groups campaigning for the dismemberment or closure of these schools.

Most of these secular campaign groups see the existence of Church schools and other schools of a religious character as the overbearing power of religion in a country with an increasingly non-religious population.

These opinions fuel their campaigns which range from legal challenges against national bodies to the targeting of individual schools, teachers and pupils.

These arguments are based on a false (but superficially plausible) claim that their values, unlike others, are 'neutral'. Yet can this really be correct? Are the values of atheist secularism really neutral? The education system passes values from one generation to another. The essential question is not whether we pass on values, but who, the parents or the State, chooses which values are passed on to their children? Do we really want an education system which doesn't reflect the diverse lived experience and culture of millions of families across the country?

As this publication has demonstrated with empirical evidence, case studies and personal testimonies, Catholic schools are pluralistic and, in partnership with the State, help form well-rounded and emotionally intelligent young people. Furthermore, when it comes to Catholic schools, it is the legal safeguards which are there to protect this special Catholic ethos, that campaigners most ardently dislike. These legal

safeguards were part of the agreement the Catholic Church reached with the Government as part of the 1944 Butler Act, where the Church entered into partnership with the State for the provision of schools.

This final section of *Catholic Schools: Partners in Formation* will look at why these safeguards are fundamental for the protection of the Catholic ethos, and are not the barriers to diversity and integration that campaigners say they are.

Admissions

Catholic schools' primary function is to support Catholic parents in the provision of a Catholic education for their children. To this extent, Catholic schools are allowed by law to prioritise Catholic children in their admissions policies.

However, there is often a fundamental misunderstanding of what faith admissions policies actually are. They are not, as secular campaign groups like to characterise them, rules for saying who is and isn't allowed in a particular denominational school. They are, in fact, oversubscription criteria for fairly distributing places when a school is faced with more applications than it has room for.

Whilst it is correct that Catholic schools can (and given their primary purpose, should be able to) allocate all places on the grounds of faith, in reality most Catholic schools not only have capacity for all the Catholics that apply but room to welcome others as well.¹⁴

¹⁴ Digest of 2021 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England, Catholic Education Service, 2021

Only a handful of Catholic schools (out of 2200 nationally) have a 100% Catholic pupil population and conversely there are a handful of Catholic schools where Muslim pupils are in the significant majority. As this publication has already documented, Catholic schools are ethnically, religiously and socially diverse, and Catholic admissions have fostered this, not restricted it. More often than not, what impacts on school diversity is capacity (the ability to expand provision to serve parental demand) and geography (the larger areas served by Catholic schools).

Employment and Reserved Posts

Being Catholic is not a prerequisite to working in a Catholic school, in fact roughly half of those who work in the Church's schools are of the faith. Nevertheless, when it comes to school leadership at the most senior levels (including the head of Religious Education), the Church does insist positions are held by practising Catholics.

As we have already demonstrated, what makes Catholic education so special is its distinctive ethos. A key part of maintaining this ethos is ensuring that the leadership are fully committed to the mission of the school. Catholic schools are not unique in this practice. Many organisations, faith-based and other, insist that those in leadership positions share a protected characteristic unique to the organisation, or are at least fully supportive of its aims. For example, the most basic prerequisite for the leader of any political party is that they are first and foremost a member of the party they wish to lead.

The Perspective of Catholic Leaders

“A child’s years at primary school are some of the most formative of their lives. As well as the basics of reading, writing and maths, children learn about the importance of moral values such as Faith, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Compassion and Wisdom. For Catholic pupils, the school works with them and their families on their spiritual development as they approach their first Holy Communion when they are welcomed as full members of the Faith”

**Hyacinth Appah - Headteacher (Retired 2021)
English Martyrs Catholic Primary School**



“A young person’s teenage years are always transformational. The role of the Catholic secondary is to journey with them, creating a supportive environment which makes them feel a welcomed member of the community of Christ. At St Michael’s we strive to bring Christ to all and all to Christ. As part of their Catholic ethos, Catholic secondary schools will allow young people to let them achieve their best, whatever their best may look like. To achieve this it is vital to ensure that the Catholic school offers a holistic approach towards educating every child in their care.”

**Ed Conway - Headteacher
St Michael’s Catholic High School**



“Sixth form education is a time during which young people grow and mature and make key choices about their future. As Catholic Sixth Form Colleges we provide communities in which pastoral care is valued just as much as academic success and within which each individual is supported. We believe that education is concerned with hope and justice and that we are responsible for contributing to society so that it cares and gives meaning to people for who they are, not just for what they can achieve.”

**Peter McGhee - Executive Principal
Loreto Sixth Form College**



Governance and Inspection

Catholic schools are not just an extension of their parish but form an integral part of the wider diocesan and global Catholic community. To ensure that Catholic schools are firmly rooted in their community, the Church is allowed to appoint a majority of school governors (and in the case of academies, directors) who are practising Catholics, these are referred to as Foundation Governors or Directors.

These Foundation Governors and Directors are drawn from local parishes thus cementing the bond between a Catholic school and the churchgoers who regularly fund the activities of the school through donations at Mass. Similarly, to keep the Church’s schools as centres of academic excellence, dioceses inspect Catholic schools separately to the State. These ‘Section 48’ (in Wales Section 50) inspections are in addition to

Ofsted and Estyn inspections. By focusing on the provision of Religious Education and Catholic life of the school, these inspections represent an extra level of scrutiny and accountability which help keep Catholic schools some of the highest performing in the country.

The Religious Education Curriculum

Religious Education (RE) is the core of the core curriculum in Catholic schools, and at both primary and secondary levels will take up at least 10% of the curriculum. As a result, one in five entrants for RE GCSE are from a Catholic school. RE in Catholic schools is distinctive from the curriculum that is taught in secular schools and is often described as a school-level version of the university discipline of theology. In Catholic schools the ability to set and inspect the RE curriculum is a role specifically reserved for the Catholic Church. This is not, as some argue, to keep Catholic RE purely confessional, but to maintain its theological rigour. Given the Church's 2,000-year history of theological study, this is something it is incredibly well placed to do.

On a societal level, well taught RE is an important part of creating an inclusive and tolerant society. Catholic RE is broad, covers all the world's major religions as well as the atheist and agnostic critiques of religion and belief. Given the amount of time Catholic schools allocate for RE, most pupils will, in Catholic schools, spend more time studying religions other than Catholicism than their contemporaries in secular schools.



Conclusion:
The Next 175 Years

Part of the uniqueness of Catholic education is its history. Indeed, its concept of human flourishing is directly linked to some of the great thinkers, philosophers and theologians spanning thousands of years.

Aristotle first gave birth to the concept of eudaimonia which provided a vision for human flourishing based on the pursuit of virtues. This was then developed into a Christian framework by St Thomas Aquinas who viewed education as a divine gift revealed to us in scripture.

Through centuries of development and refinement, from the writings of St Augustine, the humanism of St Thomas More and St Ignatius of Loyola to the theology of St John Henry Newman, this unique Catholic vision for education is delivered every day, in every Catholic school, not just in this country, but across the entire world.

As we look forward to the bicentenary of Catholic Emancipation it is important to reflect on how far the Catholic Church has come. In almost two centuries, the Catholic Church has become the largest provider of secondary schools, the second largest provider of primary schools and the only national provider of special schools in the country.

This was a success built on the dedication and hard work of the handful of recusant Catholics and the many hundreds of thousands of Catholic immigrants who made England and Wales their home. The same can be said for the continued success of Catholic schools today. The Catholic Church in England and Wales reflects the diversity of the Catholic Church worldwide and as long as we remain an open and tolerant place the Church's schools will continue to flourish.

What's more, the existence of not just Catholic schools, but other Church schools alongside Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu schools and all other schools of an immigrant faith are a symbol of a society that is accepting of belief and not a symptom of one that is divided along religious lines.

Furthermore, the existence of schools of a religious character represents a State that recognises parents' true role as the primary educators of their children. By allowing these schools to flourish, successive Government's have acknowledged that the education of our young people has to be a partnership, a partnership between parents, communities and the country as a whole.

For almost 200 years, and more specifically since 1944, Catholic schools, working in partnership with the State, have been able to provide parents with, not only the ability to raise their children in line with their faith, but also real choice in the educational system.

Over this time Catholic schools have become synonymous with excellence and have increased their popularity with families of all faiths and none. As we look to the future, we can confidently predict that this continued commitment to academic excellence and human flourishing will ensure that Catholic schools remain popular with parents.

Furthermore, Catholic schools will continue to be popular because of the generations of young people who have gone through their doors and have been formed into well-rounded and compassionate adults.

These alumni have seen first-hand the benefits of their Catholic education, and regardless of their faith, wish to pass the virtues that they themselves experienced, onto the next generation.

Those who have been through Catholic education understand that we, as human beings, never stop learning. Moreover, it is the tools that young people receive in their Catholic formation which give them the skills needed to make informed decisions throughout each stage of their life.

These values existed in the Church's earliest schools, they were there after emancipation, they are present today and will exist in Catholic schools 175 years in the future.





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