



Evaluating the Distinctive Nature of a Catholic School



(A summary of key points from this out-of-print document issued by the Catholic Education Service)

Bishop David Konstant, the then Bishop of Leeds, reminds us in his preface that “our Catholic school communities are at different points on their journey in faith. All have a glimpse, distant and hazy through frail human sight, of a shared vision.” The working papers of the document were to help “bring that vision into sharper focus and definition”.

The **General Introduction** reflects that Life reveals God’s presence, and that the Church sees education as an integral part of its mission to proclaim God as Creator, Christ as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Inspirer of all that is good in human living. Education, teaching and learning, is a holy act, and true education is concerned with the whole person. Therefore the curriculum is a unity, every part of it is religious, and it must reflect in its content and delivery that Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school; the curriculum must respect people and expectations for pupils and staff, on their individual and personal journeys of faith, must be realistically determined.

The primary role of the school is to educate, yet with sensitive appropriateness of interrelations evangelisation and / or catechesis will take place. Christ’s mission to humanity is conducted in a spirit of love and understanding; cultural diversity should be highly prized. The school should remember that it is in a wider context of learning and should provide such tools for learning that education and faith development can continue in the parish and in the home.

“The Catholic school is essentially different and distinct from other institutions in its philosophy and its practice. Above all, its ethos is synonymous with and inseparable from its curriculum.”

The process of evaluating a school

Highlighted here is the centrality of the Mission Statement of the school and its constant re-visitiation by and with staff, governors and parents; how the school’s Improvement Plan and policy statements stem from it; the opportunities for all stakeholders to express opinions about the school; and procedures for monitoring policy statements and action plans against aims and objective deriving from the Mission Statement.

Ethos

Ethos is the characteristic belief and spirit of a community. All aspects of the Catholic school (curriculum, relationships, priorities, aims, objectives, pastoral care, discipline) have the potential to speak of God’s loving care for each individual involved in the school’s life. The school’s ethos is realised and becomes apparent through daily action and day-to-day living. Perceptions of the school by its stakeholders and by external agencies should be taken into account when evaluating how the school’s values manifest themselves.

Environment

The school environment makes non-verbal statements about the ethos of the school, and one is encouraged to ask how welcoming an environment has been created, with well-being, dignity, good relationships, equal opportunities, health and safety and child protection being at the core.

Displays, routines, communications, pupil work should reflect gospel values; obstacles such as litter, graffiti and vandalism should be dealt with effectively.

Religious Education

Religious Education should be according to the rites and practices of the Catholic Church. Religious growth and development (the aim of Religious Education), alongside spiritual and moral and social and cultural development, should not be confined to time-tabled RE lessons or the work of the RE department, but should be the responsibility of all curriculum areas. RE remains of course at the heart of the Catholic school's curriculum. RE should be stimulating and promote growth, it should be developmental and provide challenge. RE's pre-eminence should be reflected in the school's Improvement Plan, its importance recognised and recognisable in terms of staffing and qualifications of staff, in terms of CPD, budget provision, appropriate time allocation, accommodation etc. The school should avail itself of diocesan support for the teaching of RE.

School as a Worshipping Community

Collective worship should be a central and integral part of school life, with prayer, worship and liturgical celebration determined by sound educational and pastoral principles. Pupils should be assisted in exploring a variety of methods and settings of prayer. The Eucharist and other forms of Catholic Worship, both sacramental and non-sacramental, will encourage active participation and have educational value. The daily act of worship can be organised in a number of different ways and should be distinct, especially in terms of assemblies, from notices or school business.

Chaplaincy

Chaplaincy provision serves the personal and spiritual needs of all members of the school community, a provision which need not depend upon a single individual. Links with RE and pastoral care are to be highlighted. Those working in Chaplaincy must be seen to be available as counselling friends and must cultivate the trust of members of the school community; much help can be given at times of bereavement or sickness. Chaplains will coordinate ministries within the school, appropriate catechesis, prayer, retreats and Christian action.

Home, School, Parish

There should be dynamic interaction between home, school and parish in order to develop the whole person. Parents are the first educators in a home where faith is formed; the school's primary task is to educate and the curriculum, including RE, should be directed towards this primary task. The parish will build upon the work of home and school in faith development. The school must be realistic in dealing with the variety of home backgrounds, including those not part of the wider Catholic community.

The Curriculum

"The curriculum, in all its aspects, must reflect the fact that Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school." The curriculum provides opportunities in learning for each individual's potential, value and self-worth. It includes structured learning programmes and ad hoc experiences. The curriculum must provide a Catholic setting in which children can acquire understanding, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to grow, through the expertise, commitment and positive influence of teachers. Due regard must be paid to external directives and policies but without compromising the school's distinctive curriculum. Schools should offer education for life. Provision must be appropriate, realistic, respectful of the views of stakeholders, and monitored and evaluated in order to ensure improvement and development.

Special Educational Needs and the Curriculum

Catholic schools have particular responsibilities in providing for children with SEND and their parents (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7). A Catholic school should plan a curriculum embracing the needs of all pupils. Inclusive, differentiated provision is made appropriate to pupils' needs and gifts.

Citizenship, the World of Work and Careers

Catholic schools should encourage young people to make a positive contribution, not only to the society to which we belong, but also to the wider world. Pupils need to be aware of and develop their future contribution and service to family life, to the workplace and to the wider community.

Education in Personal Relationships

The Catholic school aims to provide a framework for living, the ability to form and conduct relationships in accordance with Christ's law of love. Pupils will be helped to understand the nature of relationships, reflect upon how they are conducted and acquire skills to develop and handle present and future relationships. Sex education has specific objectives: of affective maturation of the pupil, of self-control, and of correct behaviour in social relationships. Teaching should encompass HIV / AIDS, equality and health issues.

Pastoral Care

The presence of Christ should be evident to all in a school's threefold ministry of affirming, strengthening and healing in cooperation with Christ, through recognition of Christ living in each individual. Concern will be shown for the whole school community – pupils, parents, staff and governors. The discipline structure's sanctions will reflect a sense of justice and forgiveness, and promote positive behaviour by all members of the school's community. Due regard will be paid to diversity within the school community, to the issues of transition and transfer, to healing and reconciliation. Schools will use appropriate expertise and support from external agencies.

Staff

"The effective running of the school depends on the commitment of every person who works within it." Management of staff should be in the context of Christian values. In recruitment, governors will look to the contribution a candidate can make towards implementing the school's Mission Statement. The school's Christian values will be reflected in a policy of equal opportunities, due regard for involvement of Catholic agencies and to the Catholicity of the school, post-interview outcomes, staff induction and staff development in terms of the Catholic life of the school, professional development, pastoral care of staff, healing and reconciliation and appraisal. A Catholic school has a wider responsibility to the body of Catholic schools by ensuring the supply of informed teachers for Catholic schools.

Admissions Policy

"A Catholic school should frame its policy on pupil admissions in the light of principles derived from its distinctive Catholic character." Emphasis is placed on the Church's teaching on the poor, the disadvantaged and those in need of love. Needs of pupils of other faith traditions should be met, in Christian charity. The Catholic character of the school should be preserved.

Prospectus

The prospectus should state the Catholic aims and values that underpin and influence the school's educational enterprise; set out aims and objectives regarding personal, academic, spiritual, moral and cultural development, and regarding relationships between stakeholders; describe the school as it is, and plans for future development.