



Catholic Schools

Delivering for Communities

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Foreword

I am very pleased to introduce this paper which articulates the future vision of Catholic Education, its ethos, and values.

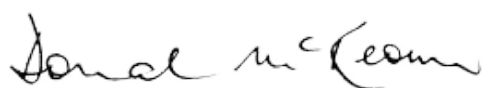
Catholic Education is a worldwide dynamic reality with the power to positively change lives, create futures, and enrich the lives of everyone in the wider community and society.

Today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world. Catholic Education is founded on the ministry and message of Christ. Through faith-based education, we put the person at the centre of the education journey, nurture development and celebrate the unique talents of each individual.

Inclusion is an integral part of the Christian message. As such, all our providers of education are inclusive centres of learning that listen, encourage constructive dialogue, and support the development of mutual understanding of all faiths, cultures and backgrounds. This enables learners to contribute positively to our society and to the economy.

The Catholic school sector is an exemplar of service delivery which continues to address the key educational challenges of our time and improve outcomes for children and young people. We believe that we have much to contribute to the creation of a high-achieving, inclusive education system in Northern Ireland that cherishes diversity.

I hope that this paper will be beneficial not only to our educators, parents and learners, but to our colleagues in the wider education sector as we cultivate a positive, innovative, nurturing, and inclusive educational landscape for all.



Chair of CCMS & CSTS
The Bishop of Derry -
The Most Reverend,
Dr Donal McKeown



Introduction

The context of Catholic schools in Northern Ireland

The family of Catholic schools represents the largest single provider of education in Northern Ireland.

Catholic Education is provided through schools in the Catholic Maintained Sector, Catholic Voluntary Grammar schools and St Mary's University College.

Catholic schooling is not unique to Northern Ireland. Our schools belong to a global network of Catholic education that comprises more than 200,000 schools and almost 1,000 universities and colleges worldwide.



Catholic schools constitute a unity of vision and purpose – that of educating and enriching the lives of all in their wider communities.

Far from being segregated, exclusionary spaces, Catholic schools stretch outward with a common goal of creating a better world for everyone.

The ethos of care for the individual, faith formation and education of the whole person is fundamental to Catholic Education.

Catholic schools globally enable learners not only to realise their own personal gifts but to also value the contribution made by others.

Statement on Catholic Education

Catholic education, rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, offers welcome, care and celebration of the unique identity of children and young people from all cultures, backgrounds and faiths.

Catholic education is inclusive. It provides the opportunity for holistic growth, academic excellence and achievement for all.

The Catholic family of schools promote the core gospel values of faith, hope and love.

Catholic schools equip young people with the skills, attitudes and values to become confident, capable, critical and discerning thinkers who are ready to contribute to and shape their world and contribute to the Common Good.

Catholic schools offer a view of the world that integrates the often fragmented areas of human learning. This focuses on the value of the individual, shared values that promote community and the universal vocation to holiness.

"We need to give a soul to the global world through an intellectual and moral formation that can support the good things that globalisation brings."

- Pope Francis addressing the Gravissium Educationis Foundation Conference 'To Educate is to Transform' 2018



How do Catholic schools ensure that young people are provided with a learning and teaching environment that enables the human potential to flourish?



The Catholic school recognises that upholding and protecting the dignity, self-esteem and self-worth of the individual is what provides a learning and teaching environment that enables the human potential to flourish.

The Catholic school encourages openness to dialogue with children and young people through a strong learner voice.

The learners' voice is actively encouraged, given a platform of importance and influences and shapes the school community by ensuring:

- Well-defined learner leadership roles and responsibilities;
- Strong learner voice in the process of school development planning, monitoring and evaluation;

”Every human person is precious and has value that does not depend on what they have or on their abilities, but on the simple fact that he or she is a person, the image of God. If disability or illness makes life more difficult, it is no less worthy of being lived and lived to the fullest“
Pope Francis addressing the Seraphic Institute of Assisi 2021

- Opportunities for learners to participate actively in contributing to decisions that impact them, through, for example, effective student councils;
- Extra-curricular activities which nurture the holistic development of learners;
- Appropriate subject choices which meet the needs of all learners;
- Collaborative evaluation of learning and teaching by learners, support staff and teachers;
- Learner involvement in community and charitable outreach and opportunities to explore the root causes of need;
- Opportunities to work in groups and teams;
- Classroom practice which is interactive and enables debate and discussion of key issues;
- A positive behaviour management policy which is consistently and fairly applied (for example a restorative justice approach); and
- A strong focus on Catholic social teaching in policies and practice.

In so doing, creating confident, capable, critical thinkers who are ready to contribute to and shape their world.



How does the Catholic school celebrate and grow community?

The community dimension is central to the Catholic school. All children, young people and their families, irrespective of their background, culture or creed, will find a welcome and a strong bond of community and fellowship within the Catholic school.

Catholic schools are linked in a special way to families and the wider community through faith formation, shared aims and values, supportive interactions, charitable acts, prayer and sacramental practice.

The Catholic school is a community of learning and nurturing teaching where, through a network of support, learners are encouraged to be the best they can be by ensuring that:

- The sharing of facilities, resources and the expertise of the school is available to the local community;
- The school proactively interacts with the family of Catholic schools and schools from other sectors, sharing knowledge and expertise, through for example, clustering and joint projects;

- The school community fully embraces Shared Education programmes and recognises the educational and social benefits to learners, the promotion of equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion which sharing can provide;
- Outreach programmes linked to for example; the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Trócaire and Concern are well established and reflect a Church that is compassionate in pursuit of the Common Good and care for the marginalised; and the welfare of all in the school community and beyond;
- The Pope John Paul II Award programme continues to advance young people, through the development of their Christian leadership skills and involvement in a range of activities (some of which are faith-based) in their own communities;
- The ongoing promotion of the annual Catholic Schools Week celebration (a global event) showcases and affirms the school in a special way to the wider community; and
- The Catholic school remains intrinsically connected to the local, national and global community through the network of Catholic Education.





How important is faith formation within the Catholic school?

Catholic schools are founded on the ministry and message of Christ which speaks of good news for all.

The word catholic means universal and therefore the fundamental purpose and good news of the Catholic school sector is that it provides a values-led education to all children and young people of all faiths and none.

The Catholic Ethos informs all aspects of the school curriculum. The learning and teaching environment respects and upholds the dignity of all its learners, with Catholic Social Teaching at the core.

The Catholic Church has a history of social teaching that goes back centuries and provides a compelling challenge for living responsibly and building a just society. The Catholic school is intrinsically connected to the wider global community through the network of Catholic Education and church outreach programmes.

Catholic social teaching upholds that the person is sacred, social, and, while a unique individual, part of the wider society.

The focus of social teaching is the Common Good; that is the well-being of all in society, rather than the good of individuals.

What is unique about Catholic Social Teaching is not its subject matter, but the fact that questions which touch on the Common Good are explored through the lens of the Gospel. 7



This encounter is developed through increasing the awareness of Christian values in all aspects of the life and work of the school by ensuring:

- Relationships are respectful and inclusive;
- An appropriate pastoral and preventative curriculum that is learner-centred and value-led;
- Mentoring, role modelling and advocacy for our children and young people;
- Availability of retreats for all who wish to take part;
- Opportunities for learners of other faiths to explore and develop their spirituality;
- Opportunities for learners of no faith to develop their own view of the world;
- Celebration of Church feasts throughout the liturgical year;

- Priority is given to Religious Education and ongoing formation;
- Regular prayer and collective worship;
- High quality sacramental preparation; and
- Regular chaplaincy support.

Catholic schools are not just for learners from the Catholic tradition; they openly and warmly welcome learners and staff from other Christian and non-Christian traditions as well as those who do not identify as having any religious faith.

It is part of the vision of Catholic schools that they also work with the families of learners from other religious traditions and cultures to assist them in developing their understanding of their own faiths.

How does the Catholic school ensure holistic growth, academic excellence and achievement for all?

Catholic schools strive for excellence; they provide the highest standards of educational outcomes for all learners.

The learning and teaching environment endeavours to inspire and support learner aspiration and ambition and to create caring respectful learners equipped with mutual respect for others and a vision for their place in the world.

The ethos of a school connects and binds all of its work and interactions. The quality of learning, teaching, policy and practice of the Catholic school flows from a strong foundation of the Catholic ethos and Christian values.



The school has strong leadership at all levels and demonstrates a commitment to effective self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Relationships between staff, learners and parents/carers are based on mutual respect, service, inclusion, fairness, support and understanding.

The school community has high expectations for learners and staff. The ethos of a school is alive and relevant as it is reviewed and evaluated regularly by all stakeholders in the wider school community.



Catholic schools have high expectations for all staff and learners, based on a commitment to human dignity as key to raising standards. A realistic optimism and a belief that only the best is good enough for our young people is essential to learner achievement.

It is the aim of Catholic schools to equip all young people, including our vulnerable learners, with the skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to become confident, capable, critical and discerning thinkers and learners who will contribute to and shape the world they live in and contribute to the Common Good by ensuring:

- High quality learning, teaching and feedback for all learners, in a safe, supportive and appropriately challenging learning environment, where all learners are enabled to experience success;
- High quality, research-based professional development for all staff,

- A strong culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement;
- Learners, at all key stages, have access to an inclusive, broad and balanced curriculum, which facilitates and supports their needs and aspirations and provides pathways for personal and career development;
- Academic and vocational pathways are equally valued – appropriate educational opportunities, skills development and pathways are respectful of all abilities and talents;
- All are encouraged and supported to achieve their potential;
- The school provides additional support and travels the “extra mile” for those learners identified as vulnerable, including; learners with additional educational needs, learners and families who experience poverty, deprivation and trauma as well as the children of migrant and displaced families;
- The school’s extra-curricular offer of extended educational, social and personal well-being activities nurture the learners’ development;
- Decisions about policy and practice in the school are taken with the needs and best interests of the learner at the core; and
- The uniqueness of each learner is valued and celebrated.

In a growing secular and pluralist society, Catholic schooling continues to enjoy support and confidence. Indeed, Catholic Education and its purpose and contribution to the Education System is essential in a functional pluralistic society.



Why do people choose Catholic Schools?

In a mature society, it is essential that parents, carers and learners have the freedom to exercise their right to choose the school that best suits their needs and their philosophical beliefs.

Most parents and carers who witness to the Catholic faith choose to send their children to the Catholic school.

Some parents and carers who do not subscribe to Catholicism or to any faith tradition or culture make the conscious decision to send their children to a Catholic school. They do so because they want their children educated within an integrated values-led curriculum, which promotes critical thinking within a moral framework and underpins high-quality learning and teaching with exceptional levels of pastoral care.

Parents and carers appreciate the holistic development enshrined within Catholic education that seeks to ensure that every learner is given the opportunities and experiences to fulfil their potential and live life to the full.



Contributors:

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CCMS
Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools

**Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools
Linen Hill House
23 Linenhall Street
Lisburn
BT28 1FJ**



**Catholic Schools'
Trustee Service,
St Mary's
University
College
191 Falls Road,
Belfast,
BT12 6FE**