

CATHOLIC EDUCATION in SCOTLAND

- questions and answers for parents -

The following questions have been asked by parents who are interested in Catholic education in Scotland. The answers are intended to provide some general guidance on the issues raised.

1. Why are there Catholic schools in Scotland?

Catholic schools have existed in Scotland for as long as Catholic communities have been established in various parts of the country. Most Catholic schools were founded as Parish schools, funded by the local parish and often housed in the local parish premises. In some places religious congregations founded schools to provide the benefits of Catholic education, often for the poorest communities.

Today Catholic schools in Scotland are public schools - designated as "denominational schools" because they were, from the 1920s onwards, gradually transferred from Church ownership to State ownership. The 1918 Education (Scotland) Act guaranteed the following rights to the Catholic community:

- Catholic schools were to be funded by the State and open to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors;
- as public schools, Catholic schools were to be open to all, but were expected to retain their own ethos and identity in order to serve the needs of the Catholic community;
- any teacher appointed to any post was required to be approved by the Church with respect to their "religious belief and character";
- the local education authority was expected to appoint, with the approval of the Church, a Supervisor for Religious Education in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools exist today because so many parents actively choose Catholic education for their children - approximately 120,000 young people in almost 400 schools provided by 29 local education authorities.

2. On what basis do local authorities have to provide a Catholic school?

Local authorities are required to provide a denominational school where there is a sufficient number of pupils to justify a school, following a request being made by the Church.

It shall be the duty of an education authority, in the performance of their functions under sections 1 to 6 of this Act, to provide for their area, sufficient accommodation in public schools (whether day schools or boarding schools), and other educational establishments under their management to enable them to perform their said functions.

In any case where an education authority are satisfied, whether upon representations made to them by any church or denominational body acting on behalf of the parents of children belonging to such church or body or otherwise, that a new school is required for the accommodation of children whose parents are resident within the area of the authority, regard being had to the religious belief of such parents, it shall be lawful for the education authority to provide a new school. (Education Act Scotland 1980)

3. Why do other churches or faith groups not have their own faith-based schools?

Historically, schools in Scotland were set up by religious groups such as the Church of Scotland, but most became State schools through time. In the Education (Scotland) Act 1918, when Catholic schools were transferred to local government management, so were another five Episcopalian schools which still exist. There is also a Jewish school in the south of Glasgow, funded by the local authority.

An independent school can be established by any individual or group, provided that it meets a number of legal requirements. It is also open to any denominational body to request the establishment of a school but on different terms from the denominational sector where established schools were transferred to the state in 1918.

4. How can my children receive a Catholic education if there is no Catholic school in my area?

If there are insufficient places for Catholic pupils in the available denominational schools in the area, the Council may have to build a new school. Failing that, it may be possible for the Council to transport children to another denominational school.

5. Are Catholic schools exclusive to Catholic pupils?

Catholic schools are open to all pupils who live in the school's defined catchment area. Only in cases of over-subscription will a pupil's faith affiliation be a determining factor in admissions. Catholic schools are communities of faith, characterised by the traditions of Catholic Christianity, inclusive and welcoming of all young people.

6. What happens if my local Catholic school is oversubscribed?

The local Council is responsible for determining its schools' admission policies, including setting the criteria for responding to placing requests.

7. What support does the Catholic Church give to Catholic schools?

The local Council is responsible for financing and managing Catholic schools in its area. The Church provides additional support such as the following:

- a nominated chaplain
- advice, resources and support for various aspects of learning and teaching, in particular religious education

8. What makes Catholic schools different from other schools?

The Catholic school is different because its mission is to develop as a community of faith and learning, providing the highest quality of education, and offering formation through the promotion of Gospel values, through celebration and worship, and through service to the common good. Everything that happens in a Catholic school should be determined by this mission.

9. Do Catholic schools perform as well as other schools?

Recent school inspection reports indicate that number of Catholic schools being rated as "Excellent" or "Very Good" is a significantly higher than non-denominational schools.

9. Can it be fairly claimed that Catholic schools are divisive and support sectarianism?

There is no evidence to support this assertion. A recent report by an independent Advisory Group on Sectarianism issued stated: "We do not believe that sectarianism stems from, or is the responsibility of, denominational schooling, or, specifically, Catholic schools, nor that sectarianism would be eradicated by closing such institutions."

10. Is the Catholic Church in favour of shared campus schools?

It is the firm view of the Bishops of Scotland that the most appropriate arrangement for Catholic school education is served by the provision of distinctive, discrete school buildings located at the heart of the communities which they serve. Such arrangements fully support the distinctive vision of Catholic education which has been developed over many years.

In a small number of exceptional circumstances, the provision of a Catholic school, co-located on a campus with a non-denominational school, may be accepted by the Church as the only viable context for the provision of Catholic education in the local area. In each and every case, the agreement of the local Bishop will only be forthcoming after significant discussion and reflection, and following proper and meaningful consultation by the local education authority with parents and with others affected by the proposal.

11. Who is responsible for a Catholic school's ethos and values?

All who work in a Catholic school are expected to support its mission as a community of faith. Parents, as the first educators of their children, also have a big part to play in complementing and supporting the values and ethos of the school. The ultimate responsibility for promoting the ethos of the school lies with the Head Teacher who is regarded by the Church as the school's chief catechist and expected to work in partnership with the local parish(es) to support the faith formation of young people.

12. What can Parent Councils do to promote a Catholic school's ethos?

Parent Councils can do many things to promote a Catholic ethos. For example they can:

- ensure that all Council meetings begin with a prayer
- ask about how the school promotes a Catholic ethos
- learn about the school's religious education programme
- support the school's pastoral team
- encourage parents to participate in meetings, social occasions, fund raising
- help the school to evaluate its development as a Catholic school
- ensure that faith development is part of the school's improvement plan and the Parent Council plan for the year
- ensure that faith development is discussed at Parent Council meetings
- organise talks on matters of faith, retreats and services for parents and grandparents.

13. What is the role of the Church representative on a Parent Council?

The Church representative is nominated by the Bishop to serve as a full member of the Council for the benefit of the school and its pupils. The Church representative's role is

- To take an interest in the school's effective management and development
- To promote the effective partnership of home school and parish in the education and formation of young people
- To represent the views of the Catholic Church, as specified by the Bishop of the relevant Diocese, where these are relevant to the school's activities
- To encourage a commitment to the spiritual formation of the school community through the shared experience of prayer and liturgy.
- To be aware of the Church's view on all relevant matters and explain these in meetings when appropriate.
- To report to the Diocese on major issues of potential concern, conflict or sensitivity.

14. How are teachers appointed to Catholic schools?

All teachers are appointed by the local education authority, following a process of recruitment and selection. In a Catholic school there is a legal requirement that all teachers will obtain the approval of the Church that their “religious belief and character” are appropriate to the post. Generally, where a teacher is responsible for religious education, (s)he will normally be an active faith witness.

15. How much religious education do Catholic schools provide?

Every school in Scotland is legally obliged to ensure that all children and young people are able to benefit from an entitlement to Religious Education throughout their years in school. The central obligation of the Catholic school in the provision of religious education is to the local Bishop who holds legal authority over the content of the religious education programme and over the minimum amount of time for religious education to which children and young people are entitled: 2.5 hours per week for children in primary school and 2 hours per week for young people in secondary school. (In secondary schools this is expected to be provided through 2 periods (50/55 mins.) per week, PLUS additional activities through the year.)

16. Do Catholic schools provide sex education?

For any years Catholic schools have provided ‘Relationships and Moral Education’, using comprehensive Church guidance, which stresses the importance of parents and teachers helping young people to learn about how to develop loving relationships, including the ideal of marriage between husband and wife.