

The distinctive nature of the Catholic school

Catholic schools are guided in all they do by a coherent vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education. This faith-based vision sees the world as God's creation and human life as made in God's image and destined for everlasting life with God. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" and that we should try to follow his footsteps throughout our life's journey.

Catholic schools aim to help all students to develop their fullest potential, preparing them for life, informing their minds and forming their characters so that they can transform the world. This does not only entail the fullest possible human flourishing but a hope for the world to come. It means looking to a fullness of life with God which will never end and which makes sense of our whole human existence. It also means that eternal life is not "an imaginary hereafter" but "is present wherever God is loved and wherever his life reaches us."¹

Catholic schools, working in partnership with parishes, play an important part in the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to every generation. They are communities of faith and learning which are open, welcoming and inclusive. The Church expects that Catholic schools, working with parents and families, will seek to prepare pupils to find happiness and to lead lives of goodness, built upon Christian values, personal integrity and moral courage:

Every educator in the school ought to be striving to form strong and responsible individuals who are capable of making free and correct choices, thus preparing young people to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life.²

This aim is explicit not only in religious education programmes but in all aspects of a school's life. A vision of education inspired by Jesus Christ who came into our world so that we might "have life and have it in all its fullness" (John 10:10) is concerned with the development of the whole person and is the foundation of the Catholic school's learning and the hallmark of its ethos:

The Catholic school . . . with its educational service that is enlivened by the truth of the Gospel . . . faithful to its vocation . . . appears as a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the centre.³

Pope Benedict XVI has made explicit the Church's understanding of the centrality of Christ in the Catholic school:

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.⁴

The challenge for the school is to provide structured opportunities of encounter with Jesus, opportunities to learn about His life, to understand His teaching, to develop the virtues and values which He promotes and to follow His witness in service to others. Such opportunities,

¹ *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI, N.31

² *Lay Witnesses in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, No. 17

³ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, N4

⁴ *Address to Catholic Educators*, Pope Benedict XVI, Washington DC, 17th April 2008

provided across the life of the Catholic school, will promote genuine human growth for Catholic pupils and for those of other Christian denominations or other faiths or stances of living.

Useful references:

1. Catholic schools are guided in all it does by a vision of life and a philosophy of education which is *“attentive to the needs of today’s youth and illuminated by the Gospel message”* (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, n22)
2. Catholic schools are communities of faith and learning, where *“the life of faith need to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the Church’s mission may be served effectively and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ is being for others.”* (Pope Benedict XVI, addressing Catholic schools, Twickenham, 17th September 2010)
3. Catholic schools are a community of faith and learning which help young people to come to know Jesus Christ as the Son of God, to become familiar with His teaching and to use their own gifts and talents in order to give personal witness to Him in their daily lives. The context of Catholic schools in Scotland is expressed through the expectations in the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland. (Developing In Faith: Scottish Catholic Education Service pg 3)
4. “Catholic schools offer a distinctive form of education through: • proclaiming Gospel values • nurturing relationships based on respect and dignity • promoting service to others • helping young people to know, to celebrate, to pray and to live the Catholic faith.” (Shining the Light of Christ: Scottish Catholic Education Service)
5. *“Catholic schools are communities of faith and learning whose educational vision is based upon the teachings and values of the Catholic Church... Catholic schools aim to help students to develop their fullest potential, preparing them for life, informing their minds and forming their characters so that they can contribute with others, and above all with God, to the transformation of the world... Catholic schools are communities which are open, welcoming and inclusive. The Church expects that Catholic schools, working with parents and families, will seek to prepare pupils to find happiness and to lead lives of goodness, built upon Christian values, personal integrity and moral courage”*

(THIS IS OUR FAITH: Scottish Catholic Education Service
THE NATURE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL (pg 8)