



QCA Primary Curriculum Consultation Response

The Catholic sector welcomes many aspects of the Rose Review but the lack of reference to Religious Education is a matter of concern. We know that a separate consultation is collecting views on the updated non-statutory guidance on Religious Education but the almost total absence in the Review of comment and recommendation on Religious Education, an important aspect of the curriculum in any type of school, is nonetheless worrying. Its absence suggests that it is to be given less regard in the Primary Curriculum and school leaders may feel less responsibility to plan for its inclusion. Reminders about its statutory nature in all maintained schools are sought.

Many heads, diocesan representatives and others will make their own detailed replies to the consultation exercise. The Catholic Education Service for England and Wales (CESEW) has a broader remit than any single school or diocese; I am not using the online form since I am commenting on the nature and scope of the consultation, rather than on individual features of the Review.

Several aspects of the Review are generally welcome. Greater flexibility for heads and teachers to organise the curriculum goes some way to right the over-centralisation of the last two decades. If the final programmes of learning are slimmer and less cluttered, schools should indeed be more free 'to shape how the curriculum is taught and to supplement it', as the Review hopes. The attempt to establish a foundation of aims and values on which to build the curriculum is valuable and the present consultation is an important part of the process of seeking consensus. We have already made a substantial contribution on the aims and values of Catholic primary education in our submission to the Review and a copy of this is attached.

The increased emphasis on pupils' personal development and the promise of a more organised approach to this field are also welcome, though the right of faith schools to frame their curriculum in the light of their beliefs and ethos must be maintained and acknowledged. We anticipate that Catholic schools, with clear aims and values of their own, will be strongly placed to contribute to the national development of the framework and to means of assessing pupils' progress in this area. We expect that the QCA will weigh this contribution carefully, bearing in mind the size of the sector (educating 10% of the pupil population) and its longstanding provision of high quality education in its schools.

Providing guidance on designing curricula to incorporate new elements and approaches is part of the QCA's responsibility. You need to be aware that Catholic schools are expected to devote 10% of curriculum time to Religious Education; this should be reflected in your guidance. In this context I would cite the 14-19 Guidance put together by St Helens Local Authority, which included models for Catholic schools teaching 10% Religious Education and was discussed with you at the time of the introduction of Diplomas. We have no doubt that Catholic Religious Education can be a perfect vehicle for also developing many of the skills and attitudes fostered, for example, by the SEAL programme and by the planned PSHE framework that is being developed (a matter on which we have responded separately). However, this is not the primary purpose for Religious Education and this must be borne in mind. We are ready and willing to discuss this and to show you schools where it is already happening. It is essential that the Catholic perspective is represented in your deliberations.

Oona Stannard
Chief Executive & Director

20 July 2009



Submission to the Rose Review of the Primary Curriculum

SUMMARY

- Catholic primary schools are very successful and make a major contribution to the provision of high quality education in England.
- Their success is founded on a Christian vision that underlies every detail of school life. Shared beliefs and values are the seedbed from which the curriculum grows.
- The quest for perfection for every individual coupled with commitment to the poor and disadvantaged, lead to a warm welcome for the Every Child Matters project and for moves to personalise the curriculum for each child.
- Parents are integrally involved in Catholic education and their active support for their children's education is recognised in Ofsted reports.
- Religious Education has a special place in the curriculum as the focus for spiritual and moral formation and accounts for 10% of curriculum time in Catholic primary schools
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are of paramount importance and should permeate the curriculum. Ofsted reports highlight the outstanding success of Catholic schools in these areas.
- Education about sex and relationships has a major part to play in helping pupils to become most fully themselves. It needs to embody the values of the Church's teaching in this area and fully to involve parents.
- Formative assessment makes an effective contribution towards personalising the curriculum for each child.
- The outcomes of summative assessment need to be used sensitively and should not undermine individuals or schools. Competition that sets schools or individuals against one another, so that success for one is achieved at the price of failure for another, is morally unacceptable.

INTRODUCTION

Context

Catholic primary schools are a major component of the education system in England, the 1703 schools constituting about 10% of the total of primary schools. They make a significant contribution to the national provision of education. They fulfil the desire of Catholic parents for Catholic education for their children, in accordance with the Education Act of 1944. They meet their own criteria for success, while achieving highly against external criteria such as test performance with children who closely reflect the national population in terms of all the standard measures. The system

would be poorer without them and could profit from examining what can be learned from them.

This submission emphasises what is distinctive about Catholic primary education. Other bodies have commented on the place of particular subjects such as modern foreign languages, reading, writing and literacy within the curriculum and on the efficacy of the assessment regime operating today, and indeed Catholics have been involved in formulating submissions on these kinds of topics, for example, through their schools and professional associations. On such matters Catholics hold a range of views not very different from those in the population at large. This paper focuses firstly on the aims and purposes of Catholic education that underlie the details of the curriculum and secondly on the school's role in promoting the personal development of pupils.

Background

The special arrangements for joint funding of voluntary schools date back to the 1870 Education Act, at which time 70% of all schools had voluntary status. The sharing of responsibility for buildings and maintenance continues to this day in England, the sum paid by the Catholic Church currently amounting to about £20 million each year. Although this contribution demands commitment and even sacrifice from parishes and dioceses, the sector greatly values its part in funding its schools and has no wish for the arrangement to alter. The contribution confirms the place of the Catholic sector as a major partner in the provision of education in the UK, as well as bringing to parents and parishes a true sense of ownership of the schools.

The 1944 Education Act articulated the general principle that 'pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents, in so far as that is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure'.¹ Support for transport to get pupils to school was another key aspect of the Act, designed, as the responsible minister R.A. Butler explained, so that 'children of a particular denomination should go to a school of that denomination'. All Catholic primary schools have Voluntary Aided (VA) status, which brings rights and duties additional to those of community schools, particularly in terms of governance.

AIMS AND PURPOSES

Catholic education is inspired by a vision of life seen whole.

'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..... The people of God have always looked to Christ as teacher, and teaching forms an integral part of God's redemptive work in Christ.... Catholic education is based on the belief that the human and the divine are inseparable.'

'Because of this, all aspects of the Catholic school or college, the academic work, the relationships, the priorities, the aims and objectives, the pastoral care and

¹ Section 76, Education Act 1944

discipline, have the potential to speak of God's loving care for each person involved in the school's life. God is at the centre of the learning process and is the ultimate purpose of schooling, as of all aspects of life. Christ's love should permeate all that occurs in school.²

The Christian values enshrined in the person and the teachings of Christ create the ethos and permeate the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. These values demand a special emphasis on caring for the poor, the stranger and the outcast from society. At best they bear fruit in whole-hearted commitment to inclusion - of 'looked-after' children, 'hard to place' children and immigrants of all kinds. There is no doubt that Catholic schools are socially inclusive: data from Ofsted shows that the intake of Catholic schools closely reflects the population at large in terms of standard measures of disadvantage, special educational needs and ethnicity.³

The Catholic vision of education puts parents and children at the centre; schools are established to support parents in their responsibility for their children's education. The position of parents as the prime educators of their children has always been taken very seriously by Catholic schools. The rite of baptism explicitly names parents as the first teachers of their children. The role of the parish in building on and extending the role of both home and school is also highly valued in the sector, and is a major contributor to the development of faith.

The strong support of parents goes far beyond a general agreement with the school's aims; it has a marked impact on children's learning, identified by Ofsted inspections of primary schools: '(Parents) were likely to make a greater contribution to their children's learning-76% good or better, compared to 70% for other schools.'⁴ This judgement was strikingly reinforced for the secondary phase, where 72% of schools were judged good or better on this criterion, compared to 55% of other schools.

As well as having close links with parents, Catholic schools exist in partnership with the local parish and with the diocese. There are practical consequences of this network of relationships, which is highly valued by all partners. Each diocese has an education office which provides advice and support, additional to that provided by the Local Authority (LA). Parishes also support schools, both financially and in other ways. Parish priests often act as chaplains for local primary schools. At best, all parties share a common vision of the purpose of education and indeed of life.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Curriculum

² Evaluating the Distinctive Nature of a Catholic School (CES, 1999)

³ Quality and Performance: A Survey of Education in Catholic Schools (CES, 2006)

⁴ All references to Ofsted data are from the Quality and Performance document referenced previously, and draw on data from inspections in the period 2003-5

The holistic vision of education described above implies that education encompasses the full network of experiences within the school. Underlying the whole enterprise are the attitudes and values which the schools seeks to convey. At every level, Catholic schools offer education for life, including life beyond death. This does not undervalue the formal curriculum, but provides a broader context for it. The search for excellence is an integral part of the spiritual quest. Christians are called to seek perfection in all aspects of their lives. In Catholic education, pupils are therefore given every opportunity to develop their talents to the full.

The concern for individual perfection means that the Every Child Matters agenda and an increasingly personalised curriculum are warmly welcomed by the Catholic sector. One aspect of this concern is a deep commitment to meeting the special requirements of those who need extra support to engage with the standard curriculum.

Teaching is seen as a vocation. The principal and model teacher is Christ himself. The late Pope John Paul II wrote, 'to teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson that tends to last the longest.' This high aspiration requires strong support for teachers, beginning from recruitment and selection, and including staff development, appraisal and pastoral care for all staff.

The holistic view of the mission of Catholic schools described above implies that distinctions between the 'religious' and the 'secular' curriculum are unhelpful: the curriculum as a whole is religious. However, it is not part of the Catholic vision of education to introduce religious truths into curriculum areas where they do not naturally or appropriately belong. Catholic schools follow the National Curriculum and are subject to the normal cycle of Ofsted inspections to ensure compliance with government policies. In addition, Catholic schools devote 10% of curriculum time to Religious Education throughout the compulsory age range and their religious life is inspected by diocesan inspectors acting under section 48 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006.

In planning the curriculum, the primary concern of Catholic schools should be the full development of individual pupils with their particular potential, needs and background. This will demand that the curriculum has breadth, balance and relevance, while taking full account of the needs for differentiation, progression and continuity. It should be informed in all its aspects by recognition of the spiritual dimension. Proper regard will be given to areas of learning and experience which encourage spiritual, moral, social, cultural, intellectual, aesthetic and physical development. A curriculum which shows these characteristics should provide opportunities for all pupils to experience achievement and success.

The curriculum will be founded on attitudes and values that are consistent with the Catholic vision of individuals, of relationships and of society. There needs to be a proper balance between the acquisition of knowledge and the development of those skills, attitudes and values which will enable pupils to grow as free and responsible members of the community. The overall aim is to enable each pupil to become an independent and autonomous learner.

Throughout the curriculum, topics occur which raise specific moral and religious issues for which an adequate and consistent response will need to be planned in the light of the teaching of the Church. The response should ideally be given within the context of the particular curriculum area. In addition to the general professional development necessary for all teachers, those in Catholic schools therefore need ongoing support in deepening their understanding of the Church's teaching.

Assessment

In accordance with the Catholic belief in upholding the dignity and value of each individual, any method used to assess the performance of pupils must respect and promote individual dignity. The primary purpose of assessment should be formative, to help the individual by identifying areas of achievement, recognising where development is necessary and providing guidance on how to move forward. Methods of assessment should help pupils to grow to a realistic awareness of their potential and to identify strategies which will enable them to develop it. Such forms of assessment make a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Schools will also make appropriate use of aspects of performance data to identify areas for improvement in the provision they make for their pupils.

In Catholic schools, only the individual's performance should be judged against the criteria which are applied at various stages of formal education, not his or her personal worth. Schools will wish to ensure consistency in the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress and in the setting of targets according to pupils' ability. A fuller picture of pupils' achievements might find its place in a portfolio of achievement. Pupils should be encouraged to evaluate their own performance.

While recognising the need constantly to motivate, encourage and support pupils in achieving excellence, the school should be aware of a number of issues. Imagination and sensitivity must be brought to bear in helping pupils deal with their relative successes and failures in areas of the curriculum. Schools and colleges will seek to encourage sensitivity in handling information on individual pupils' achievement, amongst their peer groups as well as amongst teachers. This sensitivity should also inform the processes by which results are made public. Any assessment procedure must have due regard to the inherent human right not to be degraded or undermined, especially when results are made known.

Given the importance of parents in the process of education and their responsibilities as the first educators of their children, the school or college will wish to involve them by reporting the results of assessment of their children as fully as possible and not simply in compliance with statutory requirements.

While recognising the legal requirement to publish information on pupils' performance, schools will have particular regard to the potential impact of this on their own pupils, staff and parents and on neighbouring schools. "The pursuit of excellence is intrinsically good when it is seen as an integral part of the spiritual quest and not simply as a matter of competitive league tables. Competition is, of itself, neither good nor evil, but when it is used to brand children or schools in a way which limits their freedom or potential, it is damaging to human flourishing. It also carries the danger of communicating to children

and young people – and, indeed, to the wider community – that a person’s value is measured solely in terms of academic, sporting or financial success ... when a school encourages its pupils and staff to perform to the best of their ability for their own sake, its aim is to enable them to fulfil their God-given potential. If competition sets one school against another, if success in one institution is achieved deliberately at the expense of another, it is morally unacceptable.”⁵

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Catholic schools are not unique in placing emphasis on broader dimensions of children’s experience of education but they are unusually successful in their achievements in these areas. Q&P p.20 shows that Ofsted judgements about pupils’ personal development were significantly higher in Catholic primary schools than in most schools nationally. For example, pupils’ attitudes, behaviour, relations with others, respect for other people and acceptance of the responsibilities of living in a community were excellent or very good in a much greater proportion of Catholic schools than other schools. They were more often judged as excellent or very good at keeping pupils free from bullying, racism or harassment. Catholic schools did particularly well in cultivating pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and fostering self-knowledge and spiritual awareness; in the latter area, more than double the proportion of Catholic schools provided excellent or very good quality compared to other schools (53% compared to 24%). It is worth noting that these differentials are maintained through the secondary phase (Q&P p.22). It should also be emphasised that these outcomes are achieved with pupils who closely reflect the national population.

Integral involvement of parents, shared values and a common vision of the purpose of education go some way to explain this success. Classroom teaching of Religious Education is a central aspect, presenting “the Christian message with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge.”⁶ RE lessons will be explicitly concerned with the spiritual and moral development of pupils and provide a vocabulary for consideration of these areas. However, spiritual and moral development will also be nurtured through other curriculum areas, by methods of learning, teaching and assessing and by the way pupils, staff and others behave towards each other, their property and their environment. Equally, Religious Education makes a contribution to pupils’ social and cultural development, especially within the context of the Church’s social teaching, and of its cultural breadth and universality. The development of pupils in these aspects is the shared responsibility of those involved in all areas of the curriculum and in the whole conduct of school life.

Catholic schools warmly welcome several aspects of the government’s recently published response to the Review of Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). The emphasis on the importance of a framework of values within which SRE can be set finds a ready reception in the Catholic sector. The priority given to parents resonates clearly with the stress in Catholic thinking on the place of parents as first educators of their children. Also welcome is the respect for the special character of schools of a religious nature, which implies that in Catholic schools all SRE will be shaped in

⁵ Common Good in Education, CES 1997:13

⁶ Central Directory for Catechesis, para.73

accordance with Catholic teaching. In this respect as in others, the detailed content of the curriculum will evolve through time, but the values underlying it and the aims to which it aspires are constant.

Oona Stannard
Chief Executive & Director
Catholic Education Service for England and Wales

25 November 2008