

Bishops' Statement on Education following Education Symposium between Bishops of England and Wales, Diocesan Schools' Commissioners, Financial Secretaries and the Catholic Education Service on 22 March 2017

Parents are the primary and principal educators of their children. The Church too, alongside parents, has the duty of educating: she is *'bound as a mother to give her children an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ.'*¹ We acknowledge the particularly important role that Catholic schools play in offering Catholic education to the children in our country, for *"to put Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of the educational enterprise is the key purpose of Catholic schools. In a Catholic school, the Church seeks to build the foundation of our spiritual development, our learning and teaching, the formation of culture and our society in Christ. The fullness of life is to be found when Christ is at the centre of our lives."*²

Since the mid-nineteenth century our aim has been to provide a place in a Catholic school for every Catholic child. We reaffirm this commitment and strive to ensure a place for children of parents who seek a Catholic education for their child. To do this, we welcome the opportunity to work with the UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government in opening new schools in areas where Catholic children are unable to secure places in Catholic schools.

The teaching of the Catholic Church concerning its mission in education provides a coherent vision that articulates how Catholic schools are distinctive in a profoundly human and Christian way. *"Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Those who profess this faith believe that in Christ the truth about Almighty God and the truth about the human person is revealed. The unfolding of this truth constitutes the Church's teaching. The acceptance of this truth brings true freedom and the fullness of life. Proclaiming this truth, this Gospel (Good News), by making Christ known to all peoples, constitutes the mission of the Church."*³ This vision is crucial to the ongoing success of our mission in education. This is why it is important that we speak with one voice, and we reaffirm our support for and development of our positive partnerships that exist with the Department for Education in London and the Department for Education and Skills in Cardiff.

As both society and the education landscape undergo significant changes, the roles of Catholic school leaders and Diocesan Schools' Commissions have never been more critical. We will ensure that the Catholic Education Service, working with Diocesan Schools' Commissions, will strive to protect and improve Catholic education in England and Wales so that it is fit for the mission of the Church.

Catholic school leaders and governors play a central role in the spiritual and academic life of their schools. The formation of Catholic school leaders and the exercise of good governance are strategic priorities for Catholic education. We ask the Catholic Education Service to develop strategies for leadership and governance that will provide Diocesan Schools' Commissions with innovative options for responding to this challenge.

We recognise that Diocesan Schools' Commissions have never been more crucial to the success of Catholic schools. As agents of the Diocesan Bishop, working with and in his name in the local Church, their professionalism in supporting their schools, leaders and governors is vitally important. We ask the Catholic Education Service to review and report on the various approaches taken by dioceses in supporting their schools.

As Bishops, we recognise the great value of our Catholic schools. We see the deliberate and vital role that they play in the life of the Church and in society, and for these good reasons, we commit to continue to provide and invest in Catholic education in England and Wales.

Agreed at the Spring Plenary Assembly 30th April 2017

¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education, 3 (1965)

² Stock, Mgr Marcus, *Christ at the Centre: Why the Church provides Catholic Schools*, CTS, 2012, A1.1

³ *ibid.*