



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP  
 appointed to be read  
 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth  
 on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016, the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year.

## THE FUTURE OF OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Dear Families and Friends,

Over the last 18 months, I have visited every Catholic school in our Diocese. We have 76 schools, including 23 independents, 3 ecumenical schools and 7 secondaries.<sup>1</sup> Each school has its own personality and whilst there is always room for improvement, let me tell you: our schools are wonderful! I have been deeply impressed by all the inspiring heads and teachers we have, the warmth and joy of our children, the support and commitment of parents, the hard work done by governors and the loyal dedication of all the support staff. So let us thank God for our schools and pray for all involved in running them.

Schools and parishes are the two principal agencies of the Church's mission. Currently Catholic education in the Diocese is undergoing major change. We have begun the complex, challenging task of converting and grouping our publicly-funded schools into 4 Multi-Academy Trusts. These will be under the patronage of 4 contemporary saints of mission: St. Edith Stein, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Blessed John Henry Newman and Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati. The new education-support offices by the Cathedral will be blessed on 1<sup>st</sup> November. The academy process gives us a unique opportunity to reshape Catholic education to the benefit of parents and pupils. We hope too to reorganise services, improve the recruitment and on-going formation of teachers and leaders, and update the RE syllabus. Let us ask God's blessing on all the people involved and their patient efforts.

Our schools serve three different groups: practising Catholics (with the aim that they become more intentional disciples), not-yet-practising Catholics, (that they might reach a deeper love for Jesus in the Eucharistic life of the Church) and those from the wider community who seek a Catholic education (that they might be offered the Gospel of salvation). In the light of the new

evangelisation, I have asked staff in all our schools to develop mission-strategies appropriate to each group, in order to bring them closer to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

I now want to offer some authoritative teaching on Catholic education and how we should understand it, not only in the light of modern needs, but from the Church's two-thousand year tradition of running schools and universities.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, the primary educators of children are parents; schools only exist to help them.<sup>4</sup> It is my fervent hope that from now on we will see our schools as "Catholic Formation Communities" serving not only children but also parents, governors, teachers and staff. Catholic schools offer a unique education and they do so in close collaboration with their parishes.<sup>5</sup> The life and energy of a Catholic school is focused on the truth, goodness and beauty of God revealed in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Catholic schools exist to make Jesus Christ better known and better loved,<sup>7</sup> and to form disciples of Christ within His Body the Church. For we believe that He is the only Way to authentic human flourishing, both here on earth and forever in heaven.

In a Catholic school – independent, voluntary aided, free or academy - everything should be done to create an authentic Christian ethos. The entire curriculum should be so centred on Christ that all teaching and learning, and all subject-areas, especially the sciences and humanities, become interrelated and unified in Him.<sup>8</sup> The school should be a fully participative community, modeled on the self-giving love between the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Everyone should be treated with dignity, respect, justice and love. The school should be a centre of prayer, ideally with a chapel and a chaplain, so that all can more easily develop a personal relationship with God, focused on the love of Jesus in the Scriptures and the Blessed Eucharist. With the busyness of school days, it is easy to forget that prayer is crucial for all Catholic Formation Communities. Yet there are small ways we can ensure it is not neglected. Staff and governors' meetings should always begin with some prayer and formation. And to help them build up a personal relationship with Jesus, I would like all children from Year 5 upwards to have regular periods of Eucharistic Adoration, contemplative prayer and *lectio divina*.

As Catholic Formation Communities, schools can help all their members discern their God-given vocations and their charisms, enabling them to grow in virtue and holiness. They should form persons modelled on Jesus Christ, with a concern for social justice and an "integral ecology," servants of the poor, the needy and the marginalised.<sup>9</sup> They should enable our children to become intentional disciples of Christ so that as good citizens, they can confidently evangelise contemporary culture, building the Kingdom of God.

I am aware that in some parts of the Diocese we are short of Catholic schools and school-places. The government's intention to scrap the 50% cap will be a great help with this. But while we seek a long-term solution, I wish to ask you to 'think outside the box,' to find creative ways of reaching out to all those Catholic children in non-Catholic schools. We can't neglect them: they need Christ! We cannot fold our arms, awaiting a school! So what can we do to help them **now**? How can we support them, form them, catechise them?

I am also aware how short we are of Catholic heads and Catholic teachers and of the need to provide for them on-going faith-formation. Again, we cannot simply shrug our shoulders! What are we doing about it? We need to be innovative, to find new ways of attracting staff, encouraging our young to become teachers and drawing in the many Catholic teachers currently not in the Catholic sector. At the very least, we need to pray for teachers. St. Paul sees teaching as a God-given vocation, something we see in the inspiring teachers we have today.<sup>10</sup> So today after Mass, or when you next visit the Blessed Sacrament, please remember to pray for more vocations.

One last point. Do you have a school within your parish and Pastoral Area? If so, please support it! Just as our clergy should willingly act as chaplains and be on governing bodies, so too the lay faithful should willingly volunteer as governors and helpers. Primary schools might strengthen further the links they have with their parishes; secondaries might strengthen links with their feeder parishes by, for instance, appointing student ambassadors.

Let us end by responding to today's Psalm: "O that today you would listen to His voice: harden not your hearts."<sup>11</sup> More, let us join in the prayer that the apostles made to the Lord in the Gospel: "Increase our faith."<sup>12</sup> We make that prayer today especially for our schools, as, through the hands of Mary Immaculate, we place all our heads and deputies, all our teachers and staff, all our parents and governors, and, of course, all our children, *in Corde lesu*.

Thank you for listening!

+ Philip  
Bishop of Portsmouth

---

<sup>1</sup> There are over 2,200 Catholic schools in England and Wales, and those that are state-funded comprise more than 10% of the total number of schools. The Church is thus by far one of the largest providers of education in Britain. However, relative to some of the Northern dioceses, our Diocese of Portsmouth does not have a large number of Catholic schools. For more on this see "Education" on [www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk), and also [www.catholiceducation.org.uk](http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk) (September 2016)

<sup>2</sup> See Bishop Philip Egan *The Future of Our Diocesan Schools*, Address at Schools Day, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2015, available online on [www.portsmouthdiocese.org](http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org) (September 2016)

<sup>3</sup> The Catholic Church was the original provider of education in England and Wales until modern times and for "much of the history of Western Europe, the Church was virtually the sole provider of formal education": D. Jones and S. Barrie *Thinking Christian Ethos. The Meaning of Catholic Education* (London, CTS: 2015) 117. From this volume, much of Chapter Eight ('The Ethos of a Catholic School') and Chapter Nine ('The Mission of the Catholic School'), especially the section on Christ as the beginning and end of education (141-143), is relevant here.

<sup>4</sup> "Parents and those who take their place, have both the obligation and the right to educate their children. Catholic parents have also the duty and the right to choose those means and institutes which, in their local circumstances, can best promote the catholic education of their children" *Code of Canon Law* 793 §1. See also Bl. Paul VI *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965) 3, available online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (September 2016)

---

<sup>5</sup> During his visit to Britain in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI said, “A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints.” See Pope Benedict *Address of the Holy Father to Teachers and Religious* Chapel of St. Mary’s University College, Twickenham, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010: text available online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (September 2016)

<sup>6</sup> For an authoritative statement on this from the Catholic Education Service on behalf of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, see M. Stock *Christ at the Centre. Why the Church Provides Catholic Schools* (London, CTS: 2005/2013 revised).

<sup>7</sup> Ven. Jean-Marie-Robert de Lamennais (1780-1860), co-founder of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, once said that his schools would exist to “educate the young and to make Jesus Christ better known and better loved”.

<sup>8</sup> This interdisciplinary integration and correlation was at the heart of the discourses, lectures and essays that Bl. John Henry Newman gave in Dublin in the early 1850s, and which were later collected into his *The Idea of a University*. See especially Discourse Three ‘Bearing of Theology on Other Knowledge’ and Discourse Four ‘Bearing of Other Branches of Knowledge on Theology’ in D. O’Connell ed. *The Idea of a University* (Chicago, Loyola UP: 1927) 59-113. Elements of Newman’s basic position were developed systematically in the thought of Bernard Lonergan SJ. See for instance the lectures Lonergan gave in Cincinnati in 1959 on the philosophy of education, published in R. Doran and F. Crowe eds. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan Volume 10. Topics in Education* (University of Toronto Press, 1993). See also his essays ‘Theology and Man’s Future’ and ‘The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World’ in R. Doran and J. Dadosky eds. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan Volume 13. A Second Collection* (University of Toronto Press, 2016) 114-126 and 156 respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Many of our schools have a magnificent record of service to the poor and needy, not least through their generosity to CAFOD and to charitable appeals. See Congregation for Catholic Education *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) 15 - available online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (September 2016). For the meaning of the term “integral ecology,” see Pope Francis *Laudato Si* (London, CTS: 2015) 137-162

<sup>10</sup> “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12: 27-28 [NRSVCE]). Cf. Eph 4: 11-13 and Rom 12: 4-8

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 94: 9

<sup>12</sup> Luke 17: 5