

A Pastoral Letter from the
Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

VISION 8

A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland - Executive Summary



Irish Bishops' Conference,
Columba Centre,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare,
Ireland.

Tel: +353 (0)1 505 3000
Fax: +353 (0)1 601 6401

Email: info@catholiccommunications.ie
Web: www.catholiccommunications.ie



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COMHÁIL EASPAG CAITLÍCEACH ÉIREANN

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Why This Letter Now?

Education and, in particular the role of the Catholic Church in education at all levels, has recently been a source of much discussion in Ireland. Why Catholic schools in Ireland? What is the special character of these schools? How do they contribute to society and the educational system of which they form such a significant part? It is against this background that we, the Catholic Bishops of Ireland, wish to set out our understanding of the nature and purpose of the Catholic school in Ireland today. In presenting this vision of the Catholic school, we wish to invite a response from those engaged with the Catholic Church in education.

A Vision of Life Lived to the Full

- Catholic schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education, based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Catholic schools aim to help each pupil to develop his or her full potential as a human being.
- Catholic schools propose a sacramental view of reality helping pupils to see God 'in the bits and pieces of everyday life'.
- Catholic schools aspire to create an open, happy, stimulating and mutually respectful community environment in which pupils are able to develop the full range of their abilities and talents in a balanced, integrated and generous way.
- Catholic schools seek to transform not only the individual human lives of pupils but also society.
- Catholic schools value intellectual and practical reason, promoting dialogue and understanding between faith, tradition, culture, and heritage.



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Religious Education, Prayer and Worship

Religious Education, Prayer and Worship form an essential part of the curriculum, functioning at its core. Such learning is founded on faith and inspired by wonder at the transcendent mystery of God revealed in the complex beauty of the universe.

Pastoral Care

The Catholic school seeks to provide sensitively and effectively for the needs of **all** its pupils, aiming to accompany them through the important experiences of their growing-up years.

Education for Living

The challenge is to enable pupils act with justice and integrity in an imperfect world, now and when they are adults themselves. Concern for others' needs leads to practical local and global outreach and partnerships.

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Education for Excellence

Catholic schools continue to meet the challenge of seeking educational excellence. However over-emphasis on competition, a too narrow preoccupation with examinations and specialising at too early an age are inimical to true education.

The Role of the Catholic school in the Community

Education is, to a very significant extent, the way in which the various overlapping communities to which we belong as human beings – the family first of all – initiate us into the richness of a shared life and heritage. Education can never be reduced to becoming simply a good citizen, or a productive contributor to the wealth of society. While these form part of the process, education is always about more than any of them as it is concerned with the whole person.

Parish Schools and the School as a Community Partnership

The great strength of the Catholic primary school system in Ireland has been its rootedness in parish communities. Efforts are ongoing in Primary and Secondary schools to develop a stronger collaborative partnership between the school, the parish and the local community by means of such structures as Boards of Management/Governors, faith development initiatives and inter-agency partnerships which are for the good of pupils, their families and the community as a whole.



The school: an inclusive community

Catholic education values tolerance and inclusiveness. In an increasingly multicultural society, Catholic schools welcome pupils of other traditions, faiths and none. The schools see such diversity as offering opportunities for deeper understanding among people holding diverse convictions. Such diversity also promotes the common good of society as a whole.

Education in a Time of Transition

At this time, responsibility for many of the schools formerly administered by Religious is being transferred to trusts made up wholly or partly of lay people

A Catholic Education Service

It is the Bishops' intention to provide in cooperation with the Religious Trustees further support in the near future for those involved in the work of Catholic education by establishing a national Catholic Education Service for the whole of Ireland.

“We look forward to a fruitful dialogue about the best way of ensuring that our schools can develop in the coming decades.”

Invitation to Dialogue

In conclusion, we look forward to a fruitful dialogue about the best way of ensuring that Catholic schools can develop in the coming decades. We are convinced that this can only happen on the sure foundation of remaining faithful to the Gospel we serve while, at the same time, 'scrutinizing the signs of the times', as these signs emerge in the needs and demands of the larger national and international community to which we belong. In this way, in conversation with all our partners in education, we will ensure that the schools themselves and their supporting structures remain effective, relevant and true to an authentic vision of the Catholic school for our times.