

# CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

## INTRODUCTION

### BISHOP LEO O'REILLY

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this conference to launch Catholic Schools Week. This is the first time that we have celebrated a Catholic Schools Week, although it has been part of the calendar of Church events in Northern Ireland and elsewhere for some years now.
2. The purpose of the week is to raise awareness of the very important role that Catholic schools play in our parishes and communities. That role is about helping parents to provide an education for their children which is rooted in the teaching of Christ and takes Christ as its model and inspiration. The purpose of this week is also to make ourselves, Church people, and others, more aware of the huge contribution that our schools make to society. Catholic schools make this contribution by providing an education which strives to achieve excellence while it also puts the person at the centre of the endeavour. While being very focussed on immediate realities like teaching and learning, examinations and jobs, the vision for Catholic schools situates them in a larger context of the Christian vision of life and of eternity. It sees values like faith and hope, community, solidarity, truth, justice and charity as essential to a holistic education.
3. The theme to be explored during this week in schools and parishes around the country is, "Catholic Schools – a Vision for Life". The Pastoral Letter published by the Bishops' Conference last year, *Vision 08: A Vision for Catholic Education*, provides ample material for reflection and discussion. Schools will have received a resource pack a couple of weeks ago to enable them to present this material to their pupils and engage them in reflecting on it. Similar resources have been made available through parishes for use in the home. As pupils, parents and teachers reflect on this theme in the coming week some of the key questions they will focus on will be: "What makes a school Catholic?" and "What does it mean to be a Catholic school?" Does the reality on the ground measure up to the ideal?
4. It is my great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker this morning, though in truth he needs no introduction. He is Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. He has made many valuable contributions to the discussion about our evolving education system and the place and role of Catholic schools in it over the past few years. We can look forward to a thoughtful and challenging presentation to mark this important occasion.