

## Summary of Faith Group Work : Report to Parent Council

### Introduction

The Parent Council set up a sub group of parents (the Faith Sub Group) whose remit was to try to identify what we understood St Thomas as a Catholic School to be; what we can expect our children to receive from a Catholic Education and how much discretion is given to the Local Authority, the School and the Church to form the basis of that education. Finally, we wanted to understand how parents (including those of different or no faith) might play a role in this Faith Community, and particularly at this challenging time in our children's adolescent life.

What follows is a summary of what we hope are the answers to these questions which we split into 5 Themes, and which form the backbone of our work:

1. What are the **Mandates** from the Catholic Church and the State?
2. What differences if any are there in the **Curriculum, and RE** teaching?
3. What are the unique features in relation to developing the **Pastoral Care**?
4. What **Governance** arrangements are there re Employment of catholic teachers; Role of Parent Council /Chaplain/Chaplaincy Team?
5. What are the possibilities as regards the role of **Parental Involvement** in a Catholic School?

We researched the law and spent time talking with the Diocesan reps; SCES; the Chaplain, the Head teacher and other relevant bodies. A brief summary follows but a more detailed analysis is set out in **the Annex**, together with the important references of places to find information; and a "who's who" of people in our Catholic Education environment. We hope this will help parents find answers to most questions.

### Conclusions

Our reflection was and is that that St Thomas' is a progressive forward-looking school, which is alive to these many challenges. Our work during session 2016-2017 as a Faith Group came at a time when the leadership of the school was undergoing a change; the RE department was undergoing change; the Chaplain and Chaplaincy team was undergoing change, and the Ethos & Values of the school were undergoing change. There was anxiety amongst parents. However these changes offered huge improvements for the school and the pupils; and answer many of the concerns parents might have; but it also now sets the Parent Council and Faith Group a challenge to do what it can to support and nurture this new chapter of the schools journey. We set out some further Recommendations at the end of this Summary.

The school has worked hard to put its Pastoral Care at the centre of its work; and initiatives such as its Ethos and Equalities Working Group promoting the "Behaviour is for Learning- in the classroom" Cylinder and the "Bullying and Discrimination: Supporting positive Ethos & Equalities" Cylinder are entirely consistent with what we in the Faith Group parents believe a Catholic School and Ethos delivers. The school have "inclusivity" as a cornerstone.

There is more work to be done and the Faith Group would recommend the Parent Council retain some focus on "Faith" issues and values going forward particularly so that the role and views of Parents can help the school and staff in their work.

Summary of The Themes:

#### **1 .Mandates**

The Catholic Church handed its schools over to the state in Scotland under an Education Act with certain guarantees as to their Catholic ethos and practice. That Act later became the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. There is a protocol between the Bishops of Scotland and Local Authorities that is safeguarded by the 1980 Act. The Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) ([www.sces.org.uk](http://www.sces.org.uk)) is the arm of the Bishops Conference of Scotland that issues guidance for RC schools. This guidance is detailed in the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland (available at the SCES website) which describes the mission of a Catholic School as 'to develop as a community of faith and learning, providing the highest quality education, and offering formation through the promotion of Gospel values, through celebration and worship, and through service to the common good'.

## **2. Curriculum**

There is no obvious difference between the general Curriculum in a denominational and a non denominational school, with the exception that RE is taught in a different way in Catholic Schools (see The Annex for more specification) and there is a requirement for RE lessons through out the school years.

Catholic ethos is defined as the structure and content of how Catholicism is taught. It is detailed in the SCES document 'This is Our Faith', which is the syllabus guidance for Catholic religious education in Scotland's Catholic schools. The principles and practice papers for religious education in Roman Catholic schools and the corresponding experiences and outcomes enable local authorities and individual schools to take full consideration of local circumstances and community expectations and to involve parents, learners and the wider community when planning for teaching and learning. See The Annex for more specification.

Our school is teaching to the "This is Our Faith" syllabus whilst also looking at the key themes set out in the formal Nat 5 and Higher syllabus for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies Course. As parents we hope the teaching of RE enables learners to investigate, critically analyse and evaluate religious, moral and philosophical questions and responses, and to develop the ability to express detailed, reasoned and well-structured views.

## **3. Pastoral Care**

This appears to us to be a key element of what makes a Catholic School. As set out above there are already 2 initiatives within the school promoting an attitude to Ethos & Values which mirror the gospel values. As parents we want to better understand what and how the school can meet the modern day challenges that face teenagers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also want to know what we as parents can do to contribute to this. How do the school encourage "inclusivity" in an environment where pupils are struggling with social media, understanding sexuality and other parents and pupils have different or no faith?

The Faith Group were also conscious that during the Academic Session 2016-17 we saw real evidence of the school's inclusivity at work and have confidence that the school are actively engaging with a wide range of diversity issues.

RHSP education forms a key part of Health and Wellbeing within Curriculum for Excellence. In St Thomas as per other Catholic schools in Scotland the Called to Love programme is used. This was developed based on guidelines by the Catholic Education Commission (CEC) in partnership with Scottish Catholic Education Service (the operational arm of CEC) and Healthy Respect (Scottish Government funded national project hosted by NHS Lothian established to examine ways of supporting young people in choices about relationships, sexual health and wellbeing). In non denominational schools in the Lothians the programme used is called SHARE.

Called to Love 'offers a coherent programme of relationships education based on a Christian vision of human life, love and sexuality'. It is centred on the church teaching on relationships and marriage, and the value of human life, with sexual intercourse as part of a committed married heterosexual relationship only.

The programme does offer advice on issues which can be challenging for schools and teachers: sexual attraction and activity, sexual orientation/homosexuality, pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted infections/HIV/aids, contraception and natural family planning, all within the context of Catholic teaching.

As parents on the Faith Group we think this appears comprehensive and we offer parents pertinent other resources in the Annex.

#### **4. Governance**

Staff : the Senior Leadership Team and a teacher appointed to any post on the staff of any such denominational school by the education authority shall be required to be approved as regards religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school has been conducted. The role of approver rests with the SCES and the representative of the Catholic Church.

Role of parent Council: On the Parent Council you require to have a co-opted person nominated by the church or denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted.

Role of Chaplain: they make important and varied contributions to the life of a school, through involvement in Religious Observance as well as sometimes in acts of worship, religious and moral education and a broader pastoral role. Head teachers are encouraged to engage in full discussion with any such representatives they wish to be involved in the planning and the implementation of RO.

#### **5. Parental Involvement**

Recognising the important role of parents as first educators of their children, the Church has always encouraged them to take responsibility for educating and forming their children in accord with their beliefs. In expecting Catholic schools to develop as communities of faith and learning, the Church, encourages teachers to work closely with parents in support of their children's learning. The Church regards the parish as a vital link in contributing to the partnership of home, school and Church in forming children in faith. This partnership can include activities such preparing children to receive the sacraments, providing education about loving relationships and participating in prayer and liturgical celebrations.

A number of parent resources are available from SCES ([http://sces.org.uk/catholic\\_school\\_parents/](http://sces.org.uk/catholic_school_parents/)) including: information leaflets about the Charter for Catholic Schools, This is Our Faith, God's Loving Plan; advice for parent councils; and information about the Parental Involvement Working Group of SCES.

Faith Sub Group  
September 2017

#### **Recommendations of the Faith Sub Group**

1. That the PC acknowledge that the parents pupils and teaching staff together make up a unique faith community beyond the geographic limits of the individual parishes to which they belong;
2. That the PC fully supports the inclusivity & on-going work of the school in establishing Ethos & Values that underline and deliver a Catholic Education.
3. That this Summary and Annex be placed under the Parent Section on the school website to offer information to parents and potential parents of pupils:
4. To make it clear to new parents when they consider sending their children to St Thomas' about what to expect from a Catholic school and with a Catholic education; and that they are committing to the SCES Charter.
5. To make it clear that St Thomas's teaches the Call to Love programme, and to direct parents/pupils to alternative sources of reliable information upon request.
6. That the PC seek to further cement the relationship between school and parents in the faith domain in the ways we set out in the Annex at Theme 5
7. That the PC seek to support the important work of the fledgling Chaplaincy Team and co-opt a member on to that;