

Catholic Schools Partnership

Catholic Schools in the Republic of Ireland A Position Paper

Introduction

Schools and their future require diligent reflection and consideration by all parties involved. Change in educational policy needs to be thought through carefully as the contribution of good schools to the development of social capital and the common good is inestimable. The Catholic Schools Partnership, an umbrella group providing support for all of the partners in Catholic schools in the Republic of Ireland, has reflected on many of the key issues facing all of the stakeholders in Irish schools at this time and presents this position paper to parents and students, to public representatives and civil servants, to patrons and trustees, to school staffs and management, to priests and parishes and, indeed, to all of our fellow citizens, as we look to a shared future in our democratic society.

This paper is part of a process of consultation which the Catholic Schools Partnership is undertaking. It follows on the publication by the Irish Bishops' Conference of *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future* (2007) and *Vision 08 - A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland* (2008). More recently (August 2010) the Department of Education and Skills published data on stable demographic areas where the Catholic Patron might consider a change in patronage of some schools. In response to this the Catholic Schools Partnership has undertaken three steps: (1) further qualitative analysis of parental choice regarding schools; (2) the publication of this position paper and the invitation to individuals and organisations to respond; (3) internal consultation within the Church with parents, patrons, teachers, priests, pastoral councils, students, trustees and managers. The results of this consultation will be analysed at four regional assemblies in June 2011 with representatives from all dioceses. The Catholic Schools Partnership will then present the findings of its research to the broader public. In this context the announcement (March 2011) by Mr Ruari Quinn TD, Minister for Education and Skills, of a forum on the future of Catholic patronage of primary schools is most timely.

We welcome your views (as individuals or organisations) on the issues analysed here and on how best to address the various challenges that we face. Details on how to submit your views are to be found at the end of this paper.

A vision for Catholic schools

Schools are important places. We spend a lot of time in them. This includes a significant proportion of that most formative period in life between 4 years of age and 18 years of age. The informal education received at home and in the community is of crucial significance. The formal education of children in schools has its own integrity related to the stage of development of the pupils. When

schools are working at or near their best they are truly a remarkable human achievement. Young children have a safe place to learn and play and pray; adolescents grow into a deeper intellectual, emotional and moral world; teachers use their personal and professional abilities to nurture and challenge new generations; parents, members of boards of management and other adults give of their time and money to support the educational enterprise. The hope is that by 17-18 years of age a young adult who is free, rational and capable of mature relationships will be able to cross the threshold into higher education or the world of work.

Today all schools find themselves in challenging circumstances due to enormous social, cultural and economic changes. In an age dominated by media and information technology, significant new pressures are brought to bear on children and adolescents, on family structures, on religious practice, on community life and, not least, on behaviour in the school classroom. In this new cultural context every school needs to redefine its identity so that it is not just reacting to the latest trend or fashion but that it can truly articulate its self-understanding. Drawing on the document of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference *Vision 08 - A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland*, the Catholic Schools Partnership has articulated the following vision for Catholic schools.

Catholic schools in Ireland are a living expression of a long and varied tradition of education inspired by the life of Christ. Such schools emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good; where knowledge is sought and respected while faith is nurtured and challenged.

One can expand on this vision as follows:

...in Ireland...

- there are about 3,400 Catholic primary and post-primary schools in the Republic
- parents are the most important educators of their children
- most Catholic primary schools are rooted in parish communities where they form a critical element in local life and foster a sense of shared responsibility for the educational enterprise
- home, school and parish work together in support of Catholic education

...a long and varied tradition...

- witnessing to the centrality of the Gospel
- teaching and learning for more than fifteen hundred years
- expressed in different ways depending on the socio-economic context, not least through the leadership and energy of religious congregations
- changing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as lay leadership emerges in the church to work alongside bishops, priests and religious

...dignity of the human person...

- each person is made in the image of God and is called to share in God's own life forever
- valuing a broad curriculum and co-curricular activities in order to foster a deeper sense of the whole person
- emphasis on pastoral care and student support not least for those who are educationally disadvantaged
- commitment to service of all students with special needs

... creating an inclusive community in service of the common good ...

- schools seek a life-giving environment where students and staff hear the call to service and the creation of a more caring human society
- growth in moral awareness and commitment to the search for justice, integrity and care for the earth
- schools are communities made up of pupils, parents, staff, board members, patrons / trustees and others associated with the school
- in a more multicultural society Catholic schools welcome all that is positive in this new diversity, instil an attitude of respect for the good of the other and welcome pupils of other faiths and none

...knowledge is sought and respected...

- respecting reason and scientific /technological progress while maintaining a balance between the humanities and technology in education
- seeking excellence, including academic achievement, in the context of a broad Christian philosophy of education
- nourishing the mind and soul through a varied academic curriculum, involvement in the arts, physical education and sporting activity, and a commitment to moral development and personal responsibility
- creating a dialogue between faith and contemporary culture

...faith is nurtured and challenged...

- all those who are part of a school are invited to constantly rediscover what it is to be a follower of Christ
- a religious education which includes faith formation, prayer and sacramental experiences, and a growing awareness of being stewards of God's creation
- support for staff, principals, pupils, parents and members of boards in opening their hearts and minds to the presence of the divine
- continuing the mission of Christ entrusted to the church to go and teach.

Teaching and learning in the twenty-first century

The leaders of tomorrow are in the classrooms of today. All pupils are capable of imagining, creating and exploring. Fostering a commitment to critical thinking and creativity is the heartbeat of any living tradition and Catholic schooling is an expression of just such a living tradition. We hear much today of “innovation” and the “knowledge economy”. To be truly innovative and knowledgeable is to be more fully human. It is human beings that will create the innovation and knowledge that we need. The aim of schooling is far greater than job training or qualification for a particular third-level programme – it seeks to create a human person who is knowledgeable and innovative and so can adapt to many different roles and realities in the future. We need an approach to schooling that keeps curiosity alive, fosters a love of learning, stimulates problem-solving and critical thinking and encourages students to become independent learners.

A fundamental aim of a vibrant school system is to facilitate the emergence of a literate society where individuals learn how to learn so that each person can embark on a life-long educational journey. Literacy impacts on all aspects of life and opens the door to further horizons of knowledge and imagination through all the multiple intelligences including literature, mathematics, music, science, religion, art, sport and the whole range of new possibilities that are emerging through information technology. If any education system fails to make students literate and numerate then it closes the door to much that matters in life. With all our partners in education we must renew our commitment to the attainment of literacy for all.

The role of parents

Parental choice in education is recognised in most democracies and enshrined in the Irish Constitution, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in United Nations and European legal instruments. It is also strongly affirmed in the teaching of the Catholic Church. This principle clearly holds that parents have the right to educate their children in accord with their social, political, cultural, linguistic, religious and moral self-understanding. Whilst others may disagree with these views, the parents’ decisions concerning a child’s education should be respected and, where practicable, facilitated except in the cases where a child’s physical and/or emotional wellbeing are endangered. The ultimate expression of parental choice in schooling is the decision to educate children at home. Most parents do not take this option based on personal, educational and economic judgments, but its very existence in principle is an important statement with regard to parental rights in education vis-à-vis society in general and the State.

Different types of school

Throughout the world democratic societies provide funding and legal protection for a plurality of school types. The spectrum of provision covers a broad range from schools provided by the State itself to various forms of communal and voluntary groups who come together to give expression to a particular vision of education. Many of these groups owe their inspiration to religious beliefs.

There is no such thing as a value neutral education. All schools, whether established by the State or by one or other voluntary group, necessarily and implicitly espouse a vision of the human person and give expression to a particular ethos by their choices, actions and priorities. Some people argue that schools should adopt a neutral stance in relation to religion. The inference is that religious belief is purely a private matter and should have no role in the public sphere of education. However, those who would exclude religion from school also espouse their own ethos. They impart a worldview, a philosophy of life, just as much as the person of faith. Moreover, they imply an understanding of the nature of religion which is philosophically mistaken and unjustified.

Faith schools

The interaction between religious belief and education is as old as schooling itself. From the schools and universities of medieval Europe, through the growing rates of literacy promoted by the reformation and counter-reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on to the furthest end of the spectrum with the atheistic schools of twentieth-century communist regimes, the question of God cannot be avoided in education. Some schools in their structures and curriculum embrace a particular belief in God; others present all religions and atheistic humanism as equally valid responses to the question of God; others demand that such beliefs be left at home and not influence the life of the school; others ban all mention of God. But the question of God will not go away. Religious belief makes a fundamental claim on the conscience of religious believers because it deals with ultimate questions. Since religion deals with matters of fundamental, ultimate concern it follows that the religious response has a priority in all one's subsequent reasoning and deliberation. The identity of believers is inseparable from their religious faith. It is not one more interest alongside others akin to a hobby or a leisure time pursuit or a family tradition. Rather, it is a reality which frames and interprets all of life. To equate all religions is in a real sense to empty them of any significance. No believer will ever do this. The study of religions and religious beliefs by the social sciences quite properly brackets out the question of belief and the truth claims of each religious tradition. But such studies, while contributing to our knowledge, are a limited lens through which to interpret the conscientious option for religious belief. Many adults are committed to the education and formation of their children in accord with their religious beliefs.

Faith schools exist in almost all countries except those where they are outlawed by non-democratic regimes. In many nations they form a central part of the education

system while in almost all democratic societies they are funded by the State. Such schools provide a real public service and they are a notable expression of the contribution of the voluntary sector to the development of a vibrant civil society. Jurisprudence has evolved in this area to emphasise two freedoms: the individual freedom of parents to choose the school they want for their children and the collective right to form and run schools of a particular denomination. There is a well-developed awareness among policy makers in western democracies concerning the need to provide space for structures of civil society to emerge between the powerful centralising forces of the State on the one hand and the impersonal dynamic of the market place on the other. The principle of subsidiarity should inform such a process. As an organizing principle it suggests that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. The principle is based upon the autonomy and dignity of the individual, and holds that all other forms of society, from the family to the State and the international order, should be in the service of the human person. Subsidiarity assumes that these human persons are by their nature social beings, and emphasises the importance of small and intermediate-sized communities or institutions, like the family, schools, the churches, and voluntary associations, as mediating structures which empower individual action and link the individual to society as a whole. All of this contributes to the common good.

Social inclusion

Religious affiliation is not the only measure of diversity in Ireland. Arguably, it is the least important such measure. Most religious organisations (educational and otherwise) are extraordinarily inclusive in their approach and very respectful of diversity. Catholic schools are caring and inclusive communities precisely because they are Catholic. They have adapted to demographic change with significant net migration into Ireland and have led the way in integrating migrants into local communities. They have been leaders in areas such as special needs, social inclusion and traveller education. One of the great strengths of our primary school system has been that in most parts of the country children from various social strata have attended the same school together. In any reconfiguration there is a danger of much more streamlined social stratification as the evidence demonstrates that, given the choice, many parents will opt for a school which draws most of its pupils from the more upwardly mobile social classes. Thus the strength of our present system where most parents identify the local primary school as their school should not be underestimated.

It must be noted that parents who have a choice sometimes opt for more socially exclusive schools. Travelling some distance to a particular school while passing by other schools can be an indication of this. Similarly, language or the payment of fees can raise the bar of likely social participation. While the principle of parental choice must be respected, the Catholic Schools Partnership believes that parents should also reflect on the common good when it comes to issues relating to schooling. In particular, Catholic fee-paying schools must make serious efforts to reach out to socially deprived communities, to pupils with special needs and to foster an ever deeper sense of social awareness among all members of their school communities. Otherwise, they risk becoming a sign that is contradictory in terms

of Christ's mission. It is the responsibility of the leaders of all schools to foster an ever deeper sense of social inclusion and service of the common good.

Religious education

Catholic schools are committed to a religious education which invites students to grow into a deeper understanding of Christian faith; it is respectful of difference, it is holistic and it is in dialogue with contemporary culture. Such religious education is philosophically justified, it is based on well established educational principles and it fully respects the human rights of all involved. But this does not mean that all religions are the same or that we can reduce religious beliefs to the lowest common denominator between them or that we merely need to impart some information on all religions. Religious education has nothing in common with indoctrination which amounts to a deliberate harming of students by undermining their natural ability to reason. In contrast, Catholic schools are committed to the deepest respect for both faith and reason and as such they contribute significantly to the formation of rational and mature citizens of our democratic society.

In January 2011 a National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (*Share the Good News*) was launched by the Irish Episcopal Conference. This details a ten-year plan for catechesis across the life cycle from childhood through adolescence to later adulthood. At its heart is a strong commitment to adult religious education. With regard to schools the Directory acknowledges the impact of a changing culture on children and adolescents. It calls for a religious education based on a partnership of home, school and parish. There is an ongoing debate in the Irish Church about the relationship between these three realities. It is generally accepted that Catholic primary schools do a really good job in religious education, not least with regard to preparation for the sacraments. However, difficulties arise because of the lack of any faith context in some homes. Thus the best efforts of school and parish can be undermined.

There is the further problem in some large urban areas that the link between school and parish is weakened by mobility as many pupils attend schools in parishes other than their own. All of this has led to an understandable divergence of opinion on the best way forward. Many believe that this is a time to strengthen the links between parish and school so that this nexus sustains Christian faith in a secular world. Others believe that the parish should now take on many of the responsibilities currently discharged by Catholic schools, not least with regard to the sacrament of confirmation. It is generally agreed that a religious education which ignored the sacramental life of the Church would not be Catholic in any meaningful sense of the term. Given these various views it would be helpful if a group of parishes or a diocese were to undertake a pilot programme over several years to experiment with a more parish-based religious education. In particular, this might focus on the sacrament of confirmation. In the meantime other parishes and dioceses would continue to strengthen the element of parish support for school-based religious education. Were such a pilot programme to be completed there would then be a lot of evidence to inform everyone's judgment on the best way forward.

Confusing terminology

In the Republic of Ireland we speak of denominational, inter-denominational and multi-denominational schools. The meaning of these terms is very unclear. Currently the Department of Education and Skills does not recognise the designation of non-denominational schooling. Consequently, there is a tendency to speak only of denominational and multi-denominational schools and to define the latter as more open and inclusive. Inevitably, this gives rise to negative representations of denominational schools as closed and sectarian. This is completely at odds with the experience in local communities throughout the country.

A non-denominational, wholly secular school would give expression to its own ethos but it would exclude, on clearly articulated philosophical grounds, all religious symbols, rituals and formation. The Catholic Schools Partnership acknowledges the right of patrons and parents to establish such secular schools. It is notable that no patron is providing such an education in Ireland today. To expect Catholic patrons to provide such education is obviously irrational. The absence of truly secular schools is a contributing factor to the confusing terminology used in Irish educational discourse. As a result the term ‘multi-denominational’ is used in numerous, often contradictory, senses.

Primary schools

The primary school system in the Republic of Ireland has two notable characteristics. There is a preponderance of denominational schools and there is a very large number of schools. These two facts are inter-related. 97% of schools are under the patronage and management of a religious denomination (89% are Catholic). There are approximately 3,300 primary schools for a population of 4.5 million people. This is an extraordinarily high ratio of schools per capita. As a result there is a preponderance of very small schools.

Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland

No. of pupils	No. of schools	% of total
200 or less	2,300	70%
100 or less	1,500	45%
50 or less	620	19%
20 or less	100	3%

Many countries have established 200 pupils as the smallest suitable size for a primary school. 2,300 of our primary schools (70%) have less than this threshold of 200 pupils. This profile of a large number of small, denominational schools is a characteristic of the Irish primary school system since its inception. It is unlikely that such a large number of schools would have opened were it not for the close

links with local parish communities. These parish structures were themselves a response to a uniquely scattered demographic settlement pattern whereby Ireland has a notably high ratio of rural dwellings. Even today almost 50% of the citizens of the Irish Republic live in population centres of around 5,000 persons or less. By European standards this is an enormous rural population. As a result, the contrast with countries/states with similar populations in terms of the ratio of primary schools per head of population is notable.

	Population	No. primary schools	No. of persons per school
Rep of Ireland	4,500,000	3,300	1,363
Nth Ireland	1,790,000	870	2,057
Scotland	5,200,000	2,150	2,418
Denmark	5,400,000	2,100	2,570
Kentucky (USA)	4,300,000	1,100	3,900
Louisiana (USA)	4,500,000	1,200	3,750

Not least because of the size of school enrolments, the Irish system has been dependent on local, voluntary effort with regard to management and finance. There are close to 20,000 volunteers acting on boards of management. They receive no pay, no subsistence and no travel expenses. This is a very notable example of local participatory democracy. The remarkable thing about these schools is that they are managed so well and at such little cost. In Ireland we have thousands of well functioning denominational schools. A primary school system rooted in local communities serving a dispersed population at little cost in terms of patronage and management is a notable reality in terms of social capital. This is quite remarkable in a country where all political leaders admit that the public service must become less expensive to operate and more responsive to people's needs. Where is the evidence in any walk of Irish life demonstrating a capacity to motivate such a level of volunteerism? The only other example on such a scale is the Gaelic Athletic Association and it is notably rooted in the same parish structure as the church. In many small communities the only infrastructure remaining is schools and churches. These schools are the very heartbeat of small local communities so the traditions and services they preserve, provide and foster should be considered carefully before reconfiguring the current system.

Reconfiguring the primary school system

In 2007 the Irish Bishops stated:

It is sometimes the case that people choose the Catholic school simply because it is the only school available, and not because they wish their children to have a Catholic education. This can cause difficulties for parents who do not share the ethos of a Catholic school. It can also put an unfair financial and administrative burden on the parish. We feel that in such circumstances the Church should not be left with the task of providing for the educational needs of the whole community. As the Catholic Church accepts that there should be choice and diversity within a

national education system, it believes that parents who desire schools under different patronage should, where possible, be facilitated in accessing them. In new centres of population it is incumbent upon the State to plan for the provision of school sites and to ensure, in consultation with the various patron bodies, that there is a plurality of school provision reflecting the wishes of the parents in the area. (*Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future*, 5.1)

Over recent years new schools in rapidly developing demographic areas have been opened by various patrons – An Foras Pátrúnachta, Educate Together, Vocational Education Committees and the Catholic Church. This broad range of provision is welcome as a response to a more diverse population. In many locations the Catholic Patron has not applied to be considered as the patron in order to facilitate greater diversity of provision.

With regard to areas of stable population where there are unlikely to be any new schools over coming years some existing schools may no longer be viable as Catholic schools. In such situations the Catholic Patron, in dialogue with the local community, might make any buildings which are surplus to requirement available so that the Department of Education and Skills could plan for greater diversity of school provision in that area. This must be planned locally and based on respect for the rights of parents and all other stakeholders, including local parish communities. If sufficient demand for a school under different patronage can be demonstrated then all of the stakeholders should work in partnership towards this goal. This will most likely occur where a Catholic school closes due to lack of numbers or where two such schools amalgamate. In any case of a change of patronage of a Catholic school, provision will have to be made for the rights of Catholic parents and their children. Furthermore, in all such cases local communities will understandably raise the issue of finance given the large transfer of resources from parish to school over many decades. In order to deal with all of these issues it would be helpful if some pilot projects could be undertaken where all the modalities associated with a change in patronage could be tried and adjusted as necessary.

Post-primary schools

Irish post-primary schools have evolved over the last two centuries. From the late eighteenth century onwards voluntary denominational secondary schools were established in many towns and cities. To say that they were voluntary meant that they were not State schools. They charged fees until the introduction of free second-level education in 1967, though in many cases these were reduced or waived depending on family circumstances. The vast majority of Catholic voluntary secondary schools joined the new free education system in the 1960s though a minority of them chose not to do so and continued to charge fees. All of these schools – the minority who charge fees and the vast majority who do not – are denominational schools. The other main providers of post-primary schools are the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which were established in the 1930s and community and comprehensive schools. The VECs run State schools under the non-denominational structure of the local VEC but providing religious education and formation in accord with parental choice. These VEC schools have

provided a notable service to the community, not least in reaching out to those who are socially disadvantaged.

In the 1960s the government promoted the establishment of comprehensive schools. These were mostly denominational schools which provided a comprehensive curriculum (much wider than the traditional academic programme) in a co-educational (mixed gender) environment. A small number of such schools were established. A major change occurred in the 1970s with the introduction of community schools. This was a notable development as for the first time there were joint patrons / trustees establishing co-educational schools with a comprehensive curriculum. This process demonstrated the capacity of the education system to respond to the newly emerging Ireland of the 1960s and 70s. Community schools have as joint patrons the local VEC and various Catholic bodies and they are multi-denominational in nature as they must provide for the religious education and formation of all pupils. The deed of trust for such schools states: “The religious worship attended by any pupil at the school and the religious instruction given to any pupil shall be in accordance with the rites, practice and teaching of the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs.” The Catholic patrons have a responsibility to draw from the rich tradition of Catholic schooling in their contribution to the developing ethos of each community school.

From the 1980s onwards VECs opened designated community colleges. The local VEC invited the Catholic bishop of the diocese to sign an agreement concerning his participation in the organisation and management of the college. In many respects these colleges mirror the structures of community schools.

At present in the Republic of Ireland there are 730 second-level schools made up of 384 voluntary secondary schools, 254 VEC schools including community colleges and 92 community / comprehensive schools. The Reformed Church communities (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist) are served by a range of voluntary secondary and comprehensive schools.

The future of Catholic post-primary schools

The second-level system has evolved since the 1960s in response to a changing Ireland. The evolution of the Catholic system continues with the establishment of lay trustee bodies taking over the patronage role of many religious congregations in recent years. As the numbers of professed brothers, sisters and priests continues to fall, many of these congregations have now asked lay leaders to oversee the continuing development of the ethos and charism that inspired the foundation of their schools. These new trustee bodies which are just commencing their work are a further welcome expression of lay leadership in Catholic schools in Ireland.

The announcement by the Minister for Education and Skills in July 2010 of a reform of the process for the recognition of new second-level schools is to be welcomed. An increase of 67,000 pupils in the second-level system up to 2024 is envisaged. The provision of this number of places will require a combination of new green-field schools and the expansion of existing schools.

The table below outlines the changes in the number and types of second-level schools in the period 1990-2010. The decline in the number of Catholic secondary schools is due in the most part to a rationalisation process which resulted in the establishment of either community schools or community colleges.

Number and Type of Schools at Post-Primary Level 1990 and 2010

	1989/90	1989/90	2009/10	2009/10
	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils
Voluntary Secondary Schools	493	213,788	384	185,006
VEC Schools and Colleges	252	85,205	254	111,256
Community/ Comprehen- sive Schools	63	40,139	92	54,425
TOTAL	808	339,132	730	350,687

The programme of rationalisation has resulted in some parts of Ireland having no Catholic voluntary secondary school. In major urban areas the national policy of establishing either community schools or colleges has resulted in no green-field Catholic secondary school being established since 1992.

A number of Catholic secondary schools are facing very challenging times due to severe curricular and financial cut-backs. It is timely for the Catholic sector and government policy to detail a vision and strategy for the provision of such second-level schools into the future. A process of consultation, research and negotiation is required if Catholic secondary education is to be widely available to all young people and parents who wish to avail of it in the years to come. The Catholic Schools Partnership has just commenced this process.

An issue of concern in recent years has been the complete absence of new voluntary secondary schools. Such schools receive significantly less funding than other second-level schools. Furthermore, the patronage structure which supports these schools receives no State funding. This is clearly unjust and will, over time, undermine this important sector. As a matter of justice, the Department of Education and Skills should seek to equalise funding for all schools and it should decide on the patronage of new second-level schools in accord with parental choice and the need for diversity. Most people do not realise that schools in the Catholic secondary sector are severely disadvantaged in terms of annual grant support vis-à-vis the other two post-primary sectors. It is generally acknowledged that a Catholic secondary school of 400 pupils receives €90 per pupil less per annum in grants from the State than a similarly sized community school and €212 per pupil less than a 400 pupil vocational school. On average over 30% of total annual expenditure in a Catholic secondary school must be raised through fund-raising in the local community. In the current economic crisis such levels of fund-

raising by charitable and voluntary organisations are not sustainable. It also places a huge burden on school management, made up of volunteers who give willingly of their time and expertise, to sustain such fund-raising which in turn reduces the time available for all of the other responsibilities that boards of management must undertake. In particular, there are serious concerns about the workload carried by principals in Catholic secondary schools as a result of recent cuts in funding. This is exemplified in the experience of many schools where the advertisement of a teacher post draws several hundred applicants while a vacancy for principal might elicit one or two applications. Such a scenario is unsustainable.

Conclusion

It is undoubtedly true to say that Catholic education is more than schooling. Rooted in an understanding of the human person as a child of God, redeemed by Christ and destined to share in God's own life forever, it is a lifelong process of human growth and development in response to God's call. It begins in the home, continues in the school and matures through involvement with the Christian community in the parish. These three dimensions of home, school and parish must work together if Catholic education is to truly attain its goal of forming mature human persons in the image and likeness of Christ. But schools remain critically important. One of the most notable characteristics of Catholic education is a respect for faith and reason. This helps to explain why such schools are so popular throughout the world. Faith and reason can live and thrive in the same person; while one cannot be reduced to the other they both can play a dynamic role in forming and educating a mature person. The church continues to be involved in education as it forms a central part of its mission and because there are parents who wish to have their children educated in a context which respects both faith and reason. We hope that those educated in such a context will be able to make a dynamic contribution to our democratic society, to the life of the church and to the dialogue of faith and culture.

Christian faith is always lived in particular cultures. The dialogue between faith and culture takes place in the heart and mind of the individual believer, in families, in parish communities and, not least, in schools and colleges. Catholic schools and colleges stand as a reminder that the Christian faith is not a private, irrational commitment embraced by individuals but it comprises a philosophically justified act of faith in a transcendent, personal God and an intelligent and reasonable response to what was revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they give expression to the public dimension of Christian faith in their commitment to social solidarity, outreach to those in need and promotion of the common good. There will always be a certain tension between religious faith and culture: some people reduce culture to religious faith and so withdraw into a fundamentalist ghetto where everything outside is seen as a threat; others empty culture of all religious reference so that religious belief amounts to nothing more than personal whim and traditional superstition. A true dialogue between faith and culture allows one to inform the other and calls individuals, families, communities, and indeed, our schools and colleges, to an ever greater commitment to human maturity.

The members of the Council of the Catholic Schools Partnership are:

Michael Drumm, Chairperson
Kathleen Bradley, Retired School Principal
P.J. Callanan, Catholic Primary School Management Association
Marie Carroll, Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools
Jim Cassin, Executive Secretary, Episcopal Council for Education
Patrick Collier, Conference of Religious of Ireland
David Corrigan, Conference of Religious of Ireland
Mairead Darcy, Pastoral Worker
Tom Deenihan, Diocesan Secretary, Diocese of Cork and Ross
June Fennelly, Conference of Religious of Ireland
Thomasina Finn, Conference of Religious of Ireland
Eileen Flynn, General Secretary, Catholic Primary School Management Association
Maighread Ní Ghallchobhair O.P., Dominican Sisters
John Hayden, Former Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority
Margaret Mary Healy, Catholic Primary School Management Association
Brendan Kelly, Bishop of Achonry and Chairman of Episcopal Council for Education
Ferdia Kelly, General Secretary, Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools / Joint Managerial Body
Gerry Lundy, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Northern Ireland
Anne McDonagh, Education Secretary, Archdiocese of Dublin
Mark McDonnell, Chairperson, Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools
Donal McKeown, Auxiliary Bishop of Down & Connor, Chairperson of Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Schools
Denis McNelis, Vice Chairperson, Catholic Primary School Management Association
Maeve Mahon, Advisor for Religious Education, Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin
Paul Meany, Secondary School Principal, Marian College
Noel Merrick, President, Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools / Joint Managerial Body
Lorcan O'Brien, Moderator of the Curia, Archdiocese of Dublin
Brendan O'Reilly, Executive Secretary, Episcopal Council for Catechetics
Leo O'Reilly, Bishop of Kilmore and Chairperson, Episcopal Department for Catholic Education and Formation
Ena Quinlan, Vice President, Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools / Joint Managerial Body
Paul Scanlan, Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools
PJ Sexton, Lecturer in Education
Maria Spring, Chairperson, Catholic Primary School Management Association
Ann Walsh, Deputy Principal, CBS Kilkenny

Invitation to respond

This Position Paper was published by the Catholic Schools Partnership on 6 April 2011 as part of an ongoing consultation process on the future of Catholic schools in the Republic of Ireland. The Council of the Catholic Schools Partnership invites responses to this paper and will reflect on these in its deliberations on the nature, purpose and future of Catholic schools. Please forward responses by email to office@catholicschools.ie or to:

Catholic Schools Partnership
Columba Centre
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Responses should be submitted by 16 May 2011.