

DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**  
SPIRITUALITY, FORMATION & EDUCATION SERVICE



## **Memorandum of Understanding**

20/01/12

## The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Memorandum of Understanding

### Purpose

In light of the significant changes affecting Catholic schools in the Diocese and nationally brought about by the Academies Act 2010, the Bishop and the Diocesan Trustees together with the school have set out in this Memorandum of Understanding their commitments to each other to ensure that the school continues (irrespective of any change in status from voluntary aided to academy) to be conducted as a Catholic school in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and in accordance with the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle so that at all times the school may serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Why does the Church provide Catholic Schools?

The Church provides Catholic schools to:

- Assist in its mission of making Christ known to all people.
- Assist parents, who are the primary educators of their children, in the education and religious formation of their children.
- Be at the service of the local Church – the diocese, the parish and the Christian home.
- Be a service to society.

The vision for the education of children in Catholic schools is based on answering the fundamental question, posed by Pope Benedict XVI: “*What kind of person would you really like to be?*” Education in the Diocesan family of schools is about enabling children and young people to grow as human persons; working together, the aim is to provide a rounded education for the whole person.

Catholic education is inspired by a vision of life seen whole, embracing the fullness of human experience and its expression in the life of the individual, in the family, in the local community and in society at large. We are created for goodness; we want to help children and young people fulfil that promise and enrich the world as they grow from childhood to mature citizenship.

The vision of a Christ-centred community of faith finds its meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ himself, who taught that he is the ‘way, the truth and the life’.

Governors, headteachers, senior leaders and all staff must reflect the image of Christ and go about their work with children, families, parishes and local communities in a manner that gives witness to the Catholic faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and Gospel values in action.

### Core Principles

There are some core principles that underpin our Diocesan Catholic schools.

The key areas of the distinctive nature of Catholic education are recorded in *Principles, Practices and Concerns* (Bishops’ Conference 1996) and can be considered as underlying principles:

- The *search for excellence* as an integral part of the spiritual quest.

- The *uniqueness of the individual* made in God's image and loved by him.
- The *education of the whole person* based on the belief that the human and divine are inseparable.
- The *education of all* with the particular duty to care for the poor and disadvantaged.
- *Moral principles* put into practice within a Christian community.

And, the following principles recorded in '*The Common Good in Education*' (Bishops' Conference 1996) also apply:

- *Subsidiarity* – which means decisions being taken as close to the grass roots as good government allows.
- *Solidarity* – which means we are all responsible for each other, with a willingness to see others as self.

The Church also promotes the principle of **Community Cohesion**.

- Thus, Catholic schools must continue to look outwards and work in partnership with all other schools in the wider community, to the benefit of all children in society.

## **Restatement of the Purpose of the Trust and Catholic Distinctiveness**

- A. The School shall be conducted in accordance with the terms of the trust of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- B. Each schools admission policy must be subject to any and all statutory requirements and common law (as the same are in force from time to time) and comply with the Diocesan Authority's model policy from time to time giving priority to baptised Catholic children above others and only using the criterion of practice of the Catholic faith in cases of oversubscription by Catholics.
- C. The provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship will be undertaken in accordance with the teachings, rites and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church and will be subject to the authority and direction of the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.
- D. Land held by the Diocesan Trustees is used by the School at the discretion of the Bishop and must be used for purposes which are consistent with the objects of the trust.

## **Commitments by the School to the Bishop**

### **Catholic Character**

1. The School will maintain and develop the religious character of the School as a Catholic School and no alteration shall be made to the Religious character of the School or conduct as a Catholic School without the consent of the Corporate Trustee of the Diocese and the Bishop.
2. The School will provide Religious Education in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
3. Sex and relationships education is to be in accordance with the social and moral teachings of the Catholic Church from time to time and in consultation with parents of pupils of each School from time to time.

4. The School will provide opportunity for regular Collective Worship in accordance with the rites and tenets of the Catholic Church.
5. The inspection and reporting of Religious Education, Catholic Life and the Collective Worship at each School is to be undertaken by persons appointed by the Diocesan Authority.
6. The School will promote an authentic culture of vocation, encouraging pupils and staff to interpret their existence in the light of God's plan, with pupils developing and staff modelling an understanding of communal obligations, personal aspirations and their role as citizens in society.
7. The School will assist parents, who are the primary educators of their children, in the education and Religious formation of their children.
8. The School will work in relationship with other Catholic schools and local schools based on the call of the Gospel to serve those in need.
9. The School at all times will serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Governance**

10. The school will comply with all directives issued by the Bishop and this Memorandum of Understanding has the status of directive issued by the Bishop.
11. The School will adopt and will comply with all policies of the Diocese and the Bishop communicated to the School from time to time.
12. All governors of the School undertake to fulfil and observe the objects and purposes for which the School has been established.
13. All governors have a duty to act independently and not as agents of those who may have appointed them and will act with integrity, objectivity and honesty in the best interests of the School and shall be open about decisions and be prepared to justify those decisions except in so far as any matter may be considered confidential.
14. The School will review its policies and practices on a regular basis, having regard to recommendations made by Diocesan Spirituality, Formation and Education Service and the CESEW, in order to ensure that the governance of the School is best able to adapt to the changing political and legal environment.
15. The School will consider on an ongoing basis the need for training and skills development of governors as well as considering succession planning to ensure robust practices are maintained and supervised particularly in light of the increasing autonomy of schools, making recommendations to the Bishop with regard to the nomination of foundation governors for his appointment. Only practising Catholics will be appointed as foundation governors.

16. The Diocesan Spirituality, Formation and Education Service will organise an annual meeting for all chairs of governors to provide a briefing update on current issues and to share best practice.
17. The School will not implement any proposals for a change in status or for the expansion or contraction of the School without the written consent of the Bishop.
18. Unless the Bishop agrees in writing otherwise, governors will appoint the chair from amongst the foundation governors.

### **Financial Management**

19. The School acknowledges that the Corporate Trustee has no financial responsibility for the School in any situation.
20. The School will develop appropriate risk management strategies adopting financial prudence and will comply with both legal requirements and guidance issued by or on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and any recommendations made by the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service.
21. The School will inform and keep the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service informed of any matter which is likely to be a cause for concern to the Corporate Trustee and/or the Bishop (generally but not exclusively this will involve matters affecting the Catholic life of the School, matters affecting personnel, financial matters, matters affecting buildings and the business plan for the School).

### **Buildings Maintenance and Capital Expenditure**

22. The governors will ensure that at all times any land used by the School will not be used for purposes which would not be consistent with the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church and that any lettings of School premises shall be in accordance with any policy issued from time to time by the Diocese.
23. The School will financially support the work of the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service. The school agrees to voluntarily place its Devolved Formula Capital grant into a collective Diocesan Fund (thereby allowing for greater flexibility for the benefit of all schools in the diocese).
24. The School will consult with the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service and share information about any planned significant maintenance and replacement of buildings and facilities used by the School and will not undertake any capital works to the buildings or any part of the School site without first obtaining the written consent of the Diocese.
25. The School shall develop in conjunction with the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service a 5 year estate management strategy that will identify the suitability of facilities in light of long term curriculum needs and the need for and availability of capital investment to meet the School's responsibility to ensure the buildings are maintained to a good standard.

### **Admissions**

26. The school will not change its admissions criteria without the consent of the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service.

## **Employment of the Principal and Key Teaching Staff**

27. The headteacher or principal of the School as well as the deputy headteacher(s) and the head or co-ordinator of Religious Education shall be practising Catholics in full communion with the Church.

When a school does not have a post designated as a deputy head teacher, the term "deputy head teacher" in the proposal above shall be held to include the most senior member of staff whose duties include deputising for the head teacher in his or her absence.

28. Governors will ensure that the employment of staff in the School shall be consistent with the policies from time to time notified to Catholic schools by the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service and the Bishop.
29. The school will continue to follow national pay and conditions for teaching staff and local pay and conditions for support staff.

## **Support for other Schools**

30. The School is part of a family of Catholic schools and the governors acknowledge that this means they have a responsibility which may extend beyond the School.
31. The School will work collaboratively with the other Catholic schools in the Diocese sharing resources and know how as may be appropriate with the following objectives in mind, to support each other to:
  - achieve consistently high standards of learning and teaching;
  - develop cost effective curriculum design and collaboration which optimises opportunities for students and provides added value progress for them;
  - provide support building upon individual specialisms and/or areas of identified strength between the schools to improve key aspects of performance;
  - achieve best value in service delivery especially where partnership working can add value.

## **Commitments by the Diocese**

### **Catholic Character**

1. The Bishop together with the Corporate Trustee acting through the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service will continue to support the development of a strong Catholic ethos in the School and in the community of Catholic schools, supporting a collective voice on national issues affecting the School and helping to communicate the School's concerns and needs to those with the responsibility for the funding and regulation of schools.
2. The Bishop will provide guidance on the teachings of the Catholic Church in order to support the teaching of others.

### **Governance**

3. The Bishop will ensure that any directive issued by him will be in writing and be clearly

communicated to the School.

4. Recognising that education is about the formation of young people and creating an environment that enables the development of character and an approach to life in the Catholic faith, the Diocese will continue to provide support to the School in the pursuit of excellence and high quality education.
5. The Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service will continue to support regular meetings of representatives of the Catholic schools in the Diocese to encourage the transfer of knowledge and the sharing of best practice. The headteacher, or a substitute if the headteacher is unable to attend, should attend meetings convened by the secondary headteachers of the diocese or the primary headteachers of the area cluster groups. The head of RE/RE co-ordinator is expected to attend Diocesan heads of RE meetings/area RE co-ordinator meetings.
6. The Bishop will seek in so far as he is able to ensure that high quality, committed, skilled individuals are put forward as foundation governors to the School and will conscientiously monitor the contribution made by such appointees and will remove foundation governors in the event of misconduct and/or a failure to support the high ideals of the School and the Bishop together.
7. Where the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service becomes aware of any matter of significant concern, including any matter which might lead to the Secretary of State exercising his intervention powers, the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service will discuss the matter with the governors honestly and in good faith with the aim of formulating a plan to address such concern.

#### **Buildings Maintenance and Capital Expenditure**

8. The Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service will not unreasonably withhold permission for the School to improve or maintain the School site.
9. In so far as the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service feels is prudent given competing requests from other schools in the Diocese, the Diocesan Spirituality, Formation & Education Service will support the School in any grant application to the Secretary of State and will provide advice and support in the procurement of capital works. No financial responsibility is assumed.

