**Section 2: Vision**

**The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Education**

“And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Jn 17:3)”. In Biblical Greek, ‘know’ implies a knowledge through personal encounter and experience. Personal communion with the ‘only true God’ is our ultimate goal. To be one with God in intimate personal communion through Jesus, the Son of God is the end for which every person was created.

In Catholic education, all that we do and all that we learn should tend to this: a knowledge of God through personal encounter and experience. Personal communion with the ‘only true God’ is our ultimate goal, the end for which every person was created, the goal of all our longing and the fullest rationale for all our doing. It is the most fundamental ‘why’ of any curriculum planning in Catholic education. And since this union is achieved in and through Jesus, then Jesus must be the focus of the Catholic educational endeavour. It is Jesus who reveals God fully to us in his person and, at the same time, reveals in his person what it is to be fully human, fully alive. Jesus Christ must be at the centre of any school and curriculum called Catholic.

This means that our schools are…

**Catholic:**

Catholic schools and colleges exist to support Catholic parents in their responsibility for bringing up their children in accordance with the teachings of the Church through the academic, physical, spiritual, moral and religious education they provide. Leadership, , organisation, academic and pastoral work, prayer and worship all aim to prepare young people for their life as Christians in the community.

Our schools are Catholic also in the sense that they are ‘for all’, especially the poor: their mandate and bounds extend outward to all people and is inherently inclusive. As of the Church, so of her schools: ‘In you, all find their home’. People are attracted to light even when they do not know the source. Since the Incarnation of the Son of God reveals what it is to be fully human, people are drawn to the Catholic school by the sense that its sacred precincts guard true human values like the family, the moral law and the dignity of the person. In the setting of a Catholic school all pupils should experience their dignity as a person ‘before they know its definition’.

Their belief in the value of each individual leads catholic schools and colleges to have a special duty of care for the poor and educate those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged.

**Schools:**

As the Second Vatican Council’s ‘Declaration of Christian Education’ puts it: ‘[n]o less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth’. The Catholic school as a civic institution is not at odds with its identity as a Christian community whose educational goals are rooted in Christ and his Gospel. Thus it is truly civic and apostolic. For this reason, Catholic school leaders under the supervision of their bishop must ensure that education in a Catholic school is at least as good as that in other school.

Catholic education aims to offer young people the experience of life in a community founded on Gospel values. In religious education in particular, the church aims to transmit to them the Catholic faith. Both through religious education and in the general life of the school, young people are prepared to serve as witnesses to moral and spiritual values in the wider world,[[1]](#footnote-1) and each individual person is understood as made in God’s image and loved by Him. All students are, therefore, valued and respected as individuals so that they may be helped to fulfil their unique role in life.

Both these principles entail the pursuit of excellence in all areas of a schools’ life and make Catholic schools…

**Defenders of the Curriculum:**

To the mind which can only view Catholic schools as at best incidental and at worst oppositional to the aims of true education, the above will be contentious. And yet the appropriate freedom of secular enquiry in its own province has long been a concern of the Church. It is inspired by a consciousness of the unity of truth, of truth not contradicting truth, and of their ultimate harmony of faith and reason not in a proposition but in a person, Jesus Christ. Hence a Catholic place of learning should dedicate ‘itself to every path of knowledge, aware of being preceded by him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"’. Without this harmony, secular subjects are a threat to themselves. St John Henry Newman experienced from his early to mid-academic career the shift of a university curriculum from a classical basis to one in which emergent disciplines, like Geology, Botany, Political Economy, History, and so forth, came gradually to the fore. On the one hand, he powerfully defended the freedom of a discipline to be pursued in accord with methods proper to it. On the other hand, he saw the danger of the student being so deeply cut into the groove of their subject specialism as to fall into the presumption that its principles had mastery over other subjects. We live still in the shadow of this presumption and of its reactionary sibling – the “post-truth” mentality

This means that the new Curriculum for Wales presents our educators and our schools with an exciting opportunity. With the emphasis on a more holistic education for young people, the aims of the new curriculum relate well to the commitment of the Church to assist in the education and formation of young people, so that they may direct the gift of life toward Christ and the common good. The imperatives that are central to a Catholic Education also ensure that our young people are truly “Qualified for Life” by being presented with a holistic “curriculum for life”.

Integral to our approach to the new curriculum is also a commitment to foster and develop ability in, and understanding of, the Welsh language and the culture of Wales. Welsh Catholic history is abundant in such practice and traditions, which is part of the rich legacy that makes up our linguistic and cultural heritage and which we seek to make fruitful for what lies ahead for Wales and for the education of our young people.

1. Principles, Practices and Concerns; A statement from the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, p.3 (CES, 1996) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)