

Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter appointed to be read out at all Masses celebrated on Saturday 9th and
Sunday 10th September 2017.

Education Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

For many years the Catholic Church in England and Wales has celebrated Education Sunday, but today, for just the second time, we do so at the start of the academic year. It's a good opportunity to celebrate the high standards of education achieved in our Catholic schools, including the excellent work that goes on to ensure that all pupils know that they are loved by God, and to assist all Christian pupils to develop a personal relationship with Jesus and his Church. The theme for this year's Education Sunday is 'Gathered in my name'. It is taken from today's gospel reading where Jesus teaches us that, wherever two or more are gathered in his name, he is there among them to bless and equip them, so that he can then send them out to share in his mission of bringing God's love to all people.

Our Catholic schools certainly play an increasingly vital role in the mission of the Church, and all who are called to the vocation of educating the young share in this mission. Indeed, many of you will know that, following the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, the bishops made the important decision to build schools before churches.¹

There are now over 2,100 Catholic schools in England, and this makes up 10% of the national total of maintained schools. Our Catholic schools educate just over 850,000 pupils and remain the most ethnically and socio-economically diverse schools in the country.

1 Westminster Provincial Synod, 17 July 1852

Year on year, they outperform the national average both at primary and secondary levels.²

We can rightly be very proud of them.

Indeed, one of my greatest pleasures as your bishop over the past two years has been to visit many of our diocesan schools, to see at first-hand the great work that they do and to acknowledge the immense dedication of our school leaders, teaching staff, support staff, governors and directors.

Over the next year the way in which our diocesan schools are structured and governed will change, but their fundamental mission of providing a high quality, comprehensive, Catholic education to our children will not. The majority of our maintained schools in the Diocese

of Nottingham are academies within small Multi-Academy Trusts. In most cases, this is a group of primary schools along with the local secondary school. By September 2018, I have directed that all schools will be academies working within one of four large Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts. Each of these will be under the patronage of a Saint of the Church. A Catholic Multi-Academy Trust model throughout the diocese will mean that no individual school will be left isolated or vulnerable in this rapidly changing educational environment. The new Trusts will enable our schools to work even more closely together in a spirit of mutual support, cooperation and respect. There will be greater opportunities for career progression and the development of future leaders for our Catholic schools. As financial austerity becomes more of a reality for many schools, these Trusts will be able to purchase the services they require in a more financially efficient way.

I am aware of the very generous commitment of many members of our Catholic community who serve our schools as both foundation governors and directors of our existing Trusts. I would like to express to them my deepest gratitude. All governors and directors have a duty to uphold the Catholic ethos of our schools, but foundation governors and directors have a further particular responsibility to represent me as bishop, in ensuring that the quality of Catholic education is high, and that religious education and collective worship are carried out in keeping with the tenets and teachings of the Catholic Church. I am concerned, however, that the overall demands placed on both governors and directors are becoming ever more challenging. Our new structures will provide a more clearly defined role for governors and directors, and will also ensure that the same people are not having to fulfil both roles, which are quite distinct.

Directors will be asked to take on a more 'strategic' view of the trust as a whole, whereas governors will be enabled to focus on each school at a local level. However, in order to do this, it is essential that we begin to recruit more practising Catholics with the right skills and aptitudes who can take on these important roles.

2 Catholic Education Service Digest of 2016 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England

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It may be that some governors, who have recently come to the end of their term of office in their own parish school, might consider serving a school in a neighbouring parish. It would certainly be a shame if valuable skills and experience were to be lost to the diocese. More immediately, I wish to appoint foundation directors who will support us by working in collaboration with the Diocesan Education Service on the establishment of the new Multi-Academy Trusts and the appointment of Chief Executive Officers. The skills required

to serve as a director or governor are many and varied; they are certainly not restricted to the field of education or to a particular professional background. Training and support would be offered for both roles. If you feel that you would like to be considered for any of these roles, please do let your parish priest know or contact the Diocesan Education Service.

This Education Sunday I ask you to pray for the continued success of our Catholic schools.

May all who work in them and support them be strengthened in their calling, and may more of our young people, setting out for their studies at university, consider the vocation of a Catholic teacher. Please pray also for our Diocesan Education Service, which is tasked with the enormous challenge of implementing the changes I have described so as to protect and strengthen Catholic Education in our diocese.

Finally, there may be parishioners who, for a number of reasons, are teaching in a school outside of the Catholic sector but who may wish to find out more about teaching in or leading a Catholic school. If this is the case, I would urge you to let your parish priest know or to contact Peter Giorgio, our diocesan Director of Education, who would be very pleased to speak to you.

With my prayers and blessing to you and to all of your loved ones,

Right Reverend Patrick McKinney

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Bishop's House - Nottingham

September 2017