



# THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS IN THE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



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## Introduction

Where Clergy and Religious work together in partnership with school staff, the life and mission of the church is immeasurably enhanced. This strong partnership is recognized within the *Excellence: Religious Education and Spirituality* published by the Education Commission in 2014:

*It is important that schools work with priests, deacons and religious in supporting them in their work in schools, valuing the gifts each other brings and providing resources that will help them in their mission. (pg. 31)*

The aim of this document is to offer some guidance to the many Clergy and Religious who work with our primary schools. The Education Commission has a separate document offering guidance for working with Secondary Schools. In addition the Education Commission is committed to supporting Clergy and Religious in their work with schools through high quality in service training and advisory support.

## General Principles

Good communication is essential in any relationship, as is the need to value each other's role. It is advisable at the beginning of each school year that clergy discuss and agree the degree of availability and involvement with the school. Where circumstances change there should be an opportunity to reassess the situation. Always remember the need for flexibility and mutual respect.

Confidentiality is vital in this type of pastoral work. However, it is important to remember that in matters of safeguarding this cannot always be the case and protocol of the school must be followed.

You should be aware of the school's Mission Statement and values, actively supporting and promoting them. You should have an awareness of current developments and pressures in education generally and in religious education in particular. In the same way, the school should have an understanding and appreciation of the pressures and context of parish ministry. The roles of governor and that of pastoral care are distinct. Where you are also a member of the Governing Body there must be clarity on both the part of the school and you as to the purpose of any visit or involvement in the school.

The school should ensure that you are aware of daily procedures and routines throughout the school including lunch and playtimes as well as end of the day routine.



## Children

You need to be familiar with whole school policies on: *Safeguarding, Behaviour Management, Special Needs, Anti-bullying, Anti-racism, Personal Social Health Education (or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural), Relationships and Sex Education.*

Your role within the classroom setting needs to be discussed and decided with the teacher. You can also take the opportunity to get to know the children in informal situations, such as at playtimes or during clubs. There is a need to be aware of and sensitive to, children with special educational needs and other vulnerabilities.

## Staff

In order for you to develop your role within the school successfully it is important to develop a good working relationship with the headteacher. It is useful to get to know all members of staff by name and the various roles they play in the life of the school, particularly the Religious Education coordinator. All new members of staff should also be introduced to you. There are times when the school community comes under great stress. At such times the support and affirmation from you are of great value.

You could familiarise yourself with the *Religious Education and Collective Worship Policy*, as well as the policies and programmes of study for *Personal Social Health Education* and *Relationships & Sex Education* used by the school. Many schools have a staff handbook and it may be helpful if the parish clergy are included in the handbook and given a copy. Likewise, if the parish produces a directory it would be helpful if it could be made available to and include the school.

It would be good practice to negotiate for a 'pigeon-hole' alongside those of staff where information such as newsletters, invitations and liturgy programmes could be placed for your attention. It may also be useful for any staff 'update/briefing' emails to be sent to you if you are regularly involved in the school.

## Liturgy

Liturgy can be celebrated in many ways. School staff as well as yourself need to be open to a variety of liturgical celebrations. On some occasions, it would be appropriate for you to lead, whilst on others, the teacher or children would lead.



## Governors

Those of you who are regular visitors to the school are there to support all members of the school community and that includes governors. As has already been said, you may or may not be a member of the Governing Body. If you are, a distinction should be made between the two roles (governor and pastoral care) which is clear to all. If you are not a member of the Governing Body, there may be times when the Governing Body needs to make you aware of certain issues in order for you to exercise your pastoral role within the school.

If you are also a governor in the school you should not be a member of an Admissions Committee and must not take part in the governors' discussions relating to applications and decisions on who should be offered places. (*Diocesan Admissions Guidance*  
<http://www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/80.pdf> )

## Parish Links

Fostering positive relationships between school and parish is a task that belongs to both communities and they should act collaboratively in this endeavour. The school is part of the parish-school-home partnership.

*Catholic families will support local Catholic schools where the importance of Catholic education is emphasised within the parish, and especially by parish priests. (Archdiocese of Southwark, Our Vision for Catholic Education p16)*

One area of possible collaboration is sacramental preparation. It is desirable if all children attending the school, who are being prepared in their own parish for the sacraments, are supported by the school.

*Sacramental preparation has its rightful place within the parish catechesis programme. It is good practice for schools to liaise as closely as possible with local parishes in order to ensure appropriate support and connections between parish sacramental preparation and school Religious Education programmes. (Diocesan Policy on Religious Education and Collective Worship, 2014*  
<http://www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/13.pdf> )

The school should be willing to support their families and to liaise with parishes where necessary. It is recognised that some schools may serve more than one parish. Where this is the case, you can act as the bridge and be proactive in promoting the school in parishes it serves.

*Good communication between the home, school and parish is vital. Noticeboards in both parish and school could be used to create a link using themes common to the curriculum and the sacramental preparation. Hymns used in parish preparation could be used in school assemblies and Collective Worship. (Archdiocese of Southwark 'Becoming More Like Christ' 2005 p32*

<https://www.ccftootingbec.org.uk/sites/default/files/Becoming%20More%20Like%20Christ.pdf>



## Parents

You have a key role in the parish-school-home partnership. Relationships with the families within the parish and school are developed in many ways, not only by attendance at Sunday Mass and visiting families in their own homes but also by meeting them on the school playground, at class Masses or assemblies, open evenings and other social events in the life of the school.

*Partnership with parish communities and deaneries is vital for the identity and 'belonging' of the school. The school will be able to offer expertise in communicating the faith to children and young people. Parish priests will provide sacramental and pastoral ministry to schools and promote Catholic schools as the first choice for parents. (Archdiocese of Southwark, Our Vision for Catholic Education p23)*

There may be times when, in order to fully and appropriately support a family within the school, information needs to be shared between you and the headteacher.

## Aims for Clergy and Religious visiting and involvement in the Catholic Primary School

*Accompanying and sharing* the story of all within the school.

*Helping* all in the school community to appreciate the work of God in their lives.

*Supporting* all in the school community as they attempt to answer life's problems and helping them shape the questions.

*Being* a living witness to the Christian way of life.

*Listening* to the concerns of all in the school community and helping to deal with them.

*Animating* the liturgy, including school and class masses.

*Being* a presence around the school and meeting members of the community informally, e.g. in the dining room, staff room, playground, school gate.

*Giving* encouragement where and when it is needed.

*Having* the courage to try things out and then reflect on failure as well as success.

*Knowing* your people, the pupils, staff and all who work within and for the school.

*Being* what you need to be: **prophet, presence, bridge-builder.**

*Appreciating and Enjoying* the happiness and inspiration that being part of the school community can give and sharing its joys and sorrows.

*(Adapted from **Being a Chaplain**, Association of Catholic Chaplains in Education.)*



## Suggested ways in which Clergy and Religious can be involved in the life of the Catholic Primary School

- Planned programme of children's Masses for school/church as well as planned programme of class or whole school visits (to be logged in the school diary of events).
- Celebrating school/class Masses, Reconciliation services, assemblies involving the school community, including parents.
- Participating in activities which support the school programme for religious education (visits to the church to talk about its history, artefacts, vestments, signs and symbols of Baptism).
- Attending classroom celebrations (these could be pupil or teacher led).
- Sharing own interests with the pupils to support other areas of the curriculum (sports, art, computing, map reading, music and travel).
- Accompanying groups of pupils and teachers on school outings or school journeys.
- Chatting with pupils at lunchtime, playtimes and before and after school.
- Introducing other visitors to the school such as Missionaries, workers from diocesan agencies, key figures in the local community and other faith leaders.
- Reading stories to pupils
- Contributing to whole school events such as Book Week, RE Week and sports day
- Helping to prepare and celebrate liturgy for staff as well as providing valuable training about Church teaching
- Attending relevant staff in-service on such issues as Safeguarding, Whole School Development Planning and Review of the Mission Statement, Collective Worship and Religious Education
- Participating in the social life of the school by supporting and/or participating in bazaars, school/staff celebrations, productions and prize-giving evenings
- Finding ways to promote and celebrate the life of the school through displays of work in the parish or parishes served.
- Liaising between school and parish on a range of ventures such as supporting local food banks as well as fundraising and awareness campaigns for international Catholic charities



## Recommended Reading

School documentation such as:

Policies for *Safeguarding, Religious Education and Collective Worship, Personal Social Health Education, Additional and Special Educational Needs and Sex and Relationships Education*

The Religious Education programme of study used by the school

The Common Good in Education (CES publication 1997)  
<http://www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/553.pdf>

The Distinctive nature of a Catholic School (*CES Publication 1999*)  
<http://www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/554.pdf>

Chaplaincy - The Change and the Challenge - (*pub on behalf of ACCE 1996*)  
(ISBN: 9781898366157)

Guidelines for Schools & College Chaplaincy -2007  
<http://www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/58.pdf>

*On the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (The Report of the Bishops' Conference Working Party on Sacramental Initiation - Matthew James Publishing Ltd 2000)

Archdiocese of Southwark '*Becoming More Like Christ*' Guidelines for the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation (Christian Education Centre Publication 2009)  
<https://www.ccftootingbec.org.uk/sites/default/files/Becoming%20More%20Like%20Christ.pdf>

*Archdiocese of Southwark: Our Vision for Catholic Education 2009*

*The Excellence Documents*: The Education Commission 2014

Russi, J. SSMN, *how to survive as a governor in a Catholic School* (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2015)

## *Archdiocese of Southwark: Our Vision for Catholic Education*

*We stand on holy ground.  
Every child,  
Every young person,  
Every adult  
Is a unique image of God.*

*We are invited by God to nurture  
The life of the Spirit in one another  
As children of God,  
So that we become 'more like Christ'  
Fully human and fully alive.*

*This is our faith.  
This is the faith of the Church.  
This is our vision for Catholic education.  
This is the reason for our schools and college.*

