

Section 1: Remarkable Catholic schools

'After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.' (Lk 3:46-47)

The quotation from Luke at the start of this section, is a reminder that education is a sacred task. Jesus, in this story, dispenses wisdom and understanding while in dialogue with the 'teachers'. The temple frames this incident metaphorically, locating the act of education in a place of God. The Archdiocese of Southwark is committed to ensuring that its schools are temples of learning. In that sense they should be 'remarkable'. The choice of this descriptor is deliberate to mark a separation from the Excellence Strategy, that was in place up to 2018, and to avoid confusion with Ofsted grades – there is no necessary correlation between 'outstanding' (Ofsted grade 1) and remarkable; schools can be remarkable for the many things not covered by an Ofsted inspection. It is also intended to avoid overlap with denominational inspection graded outcomes.

Catholic schools are already celebrated typically for their:

- effective behaviour management
- compassionate pastoral care
- high academic standards
- commitment to the 'common good', through charitable works
- efficient support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

This strategy seeks only to build on the many strengths that already exist in the Archdiocese's schools. Over the next ten years, the Education Commission aims to ensure that each school:

- is a temple of learning
- is evaluated strongly against external frameworks
- is part of a secure network of other schools that is able to celebrate successes, challenge underperformance and catalyse change if necessary
- has access to high quality advice and guidance across all aspects of its work, and which predicts future external challenges, potential turbulence or additional opportunities

To achieve these aims, the Education Commission will:

- realign the work of its officers to better meet the needs of schools
- use all available information to ensure that there is an, at least, good Catholic school place available for any parents and/or carers wishing to exercise the baptismal right of their child
- continue to provide expert advice and guidance on all aspects of the 'Catholic Life' of the school
- work to ensure that the denominational inspection process is fit for purpose, rigorous, reliable and fair
- help to organise schools into geographically sensible clusters, groups or systems
- work with governing bodies to ensure that schools benefit from courteous and professional challenge and support.

Section 2: Authentic Religious Education, spirituality and Chaplaincy

'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' (Jn 8:32)

The title of this section of the strategy is taken from the operational name of sub-team within the Education Commission. There is little ambiguity in understandings of what might be deemed authentic Religious Education. There is a relatively uncontested understanding of what is meant by 'Chaplaincy' in our schools. The term, spirituality, however, presents a potential challenge. Should we say, instead, 'spiritual formation', or 'spiritual development'? And, might this refer to pupils' or staff spiritual formation and/or development? Or should we still attempt to make schools places of authentic spirituality? Over the course of the next ten years the Education Commission will attempt to define what is actually meant and then determine how we might go about helping whatever it is happen.

The Gilbert Review is unequivocal in its praise for the work of the Religious Education, Spirituality and Chaplaincy team. Officers are expert and experienced in what they do and are renowned for providing high quality input, advice and guidance. There needs to be little fundamental change, however, there are, coming over the horizon, a number of phenomena which the team needs to predict and be ready to support school leaders in making any necessary adjustments. Among others, there will be a change to leadership in the Archdiocese, changes to the Curriculum Directory and denominational inspection framework, and probably revisions to GCSE and A Level specifications, for first teaching in 2024.

This strategy seeks only to build on the many strengths that already exist in the Archdiocese's work. Over the next ten years, the Education Commission aims to ensure that Religious Education, spirituality and Chaplaincy in each school:

- are consistent with the Archbishop's wishes
- meet the requirements of the Bishops Conference
- adhere, as relevant, to the Curriculum Directory in place contemporaneously
- and that those responsible for leadership of these areas respond to syllabus, specification, or other, changes to external assessment framework
- provide opportunities for pupils to experience meaningful liturgy, prayer, moments of reflection, pilgrimages and other occasions of solemnity and worthiness.

To achieve these aims, the Education Commission will:

- retain the calibre of its officers
- invest sensibly in the professional learning, formation and leadership qualities of the team
- have an officers visit programme that ensures effective monitoring and/or support for the provision of Religious Education and 'Catholic Life'
- work with all relevant bodies to ensure that the Education Commission is the single point of advice and guidance for the Archdiocese's schools on matters of Religious Education, spirituality and chaplaincy
- offer economically sustainable, geographically sensible, regular training, professional learning opportunities, coaching, mentoring and bespoke advice to those leading or working on these aspects of the 'Catholic Life' of schools
- continue to support schools getting ready for the denominational inspection process
- work alongside governing bodies to ensure that governors understand and exercise fully their responsibilities in relation to Religious Education, spirituality and chaplaincy.

Section 3: Firm foundation governance

‘Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.’ (Mt 7:24-25)

This well-known saying of Jesus is used in many contexts. Here it is used as a symbolic biblical foundation for the work of our governors. Governance is changing, especially as the requirements for governors and the responsibilities they carry have been increased considerably in the last few years. The use of this parable is certainly not intended to imply a heavy duty, top-down style of firm governance. Rather it is an acknowledgement that every school needs to be built on firm foundations and these include the community which first argued for and built the school, the staff and the leaders. Each of these groups has a constituency within a fully functioning governing body. Strong governance supports effective day to day management of each school. Strong governors also challenge school leaders so that accidents do not happen and malpractice is not possible. Firm foundation governance, as a concept, does not imply micro-management of a school nor the interference in the decision-making of senior leaders and other professionals. Firm foundation governance implies checking that the right decisions have been, or are about to be, made, that statutory requirements are met and that there is appropriate observance of civil and Canon law.

Currently, there is a wide range of governance practice seen across the Archdiocese, even when taking into account the principle of subsidiarity. There is a need for standardisation and equivalence, while acknowledging the DfE’s devolution of decision-making responsibility for the frequency and status of committee meetings. This is at every stage of the governance process: from the selection of Foundation Governors to the content of governing body meetings. Foundation governors are volunteers and, as such, commit a huge amount of time to the process. Asking them to do more is problematic. Asking them to undertake training in more of their own time is similarly problematic, especially when they have their own work or family responsibilities to consider. We have a four-pronged challenge over the next ten years, the life of this strategy:

- to make becoming and remaining a Foundation Governor appealing as a volunteering opportunity
- to encourage greater diversity among Foundation Governors to better reflect schools’ populations
- identifying governing bodies’ professional strengths, skills, gifts and talents and any critical gaps
- providing agile learning opportunities for governors which meet needs and do not just replicate prior learning

Over the next ten years the Education Commission will act to:

- build on the extraordinary commitment and dedication of the army of volunteers who provide voluntary governance of our schools
- reassert the pivotal role played by the Education Commission in the appointment of Foundation Governors on behalf of the Archbishop
- regularise the process by which Foundation Governors are appointed
- simplify the methods whereby a governor is declared a ‘fit and proper’ person to govern a school
- ensure that every school has a legitimate, quorate and effective governing body
- ensure that the articles and instrument of governance follow those in the Department for Education’s template documents.
- support governing bodies to undertake skills’ audits and evaluate the findings
- strengthen the quality, availability and accessibility of Foundation Governor training
- strengthen the training:
 - for clerks to governing bodies
 - those who clerk exclusion appeals
 - those who clerk admissions appeals
 - those who minute take at disciplinary hearings
 - and those who need to work with human resources (HR) professionals

Section 4: Resilient and flexible education estate

‘And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.’ (Mt 4:23)

The quotation from Matthew’s gospel has been selected to indicate that the Church’s mission to educate comes directly from Jesus himself. As a preacher Jesus used whatever location he was in to share the good news. This strategy seeks to acknowledge that the Archdiocese’s education estate needs to reflect that flexible and dynamic model. This is doubly necessary given the de-regulation of the education marketplace in the first two decades of the 21st Century.

The Archdiocese already has a significant number of academies, spread unevenly across its area. Although the drive to convert all schools has clearly gone, central and local government actions are likely to see the number increase over the period of the strategic plan. There may be changes to the regulatory framework but there seems little likelihood of a return to the world of the 1944 Act.

There are differing views within the diocesan community on the philosophy behind academies but the Bishops have accepted catholic schools can seek this status. It is nevertheless important to respect the views of school and parish leaders who are strongly opposed to the principle. On the other hand, where there is a conflict of views between schools in an area the principle of the common good also applies. The overriding factor has to be ensuring all diocesan schools have a successful and sustainable future.

Access to high quality information (see section 6), which is both accurate and reliable, usually provides the questions, but rarely the answers. For example, the data shows that we have more or less the right number of places for Catholic pupils in the Archdiocese’s schools; they are just not, however, necessarily in the right place geographically.

Over the next ten years the Education Commission will act to:

- simplify the type and variety of school organisational arrangements across the Archdiocese. These will include, but will not be exclusive to:
 - soft federations of voluntary aided schools where local school improvement functions already support effective working
 - hard federations, where leaders and governors perceive the cost-benefits of closer working methods such as shared resources, group procurement efficiencies or school improvement functions
 - academy trusts and/or chains which meet the requirements of the Archdiocese set out in Annex 1
- ensure that every school has a sustainable future, on the basis of the best guess of likely future pupil numbers
- rationalise the amount of provision in areas currently challenged by shifts in population
- avoid mothballing education estate, unless as a last resort for a time-bounded period
- monetise underused education estate
- build on and strengthen the process for prioritising repairs and maintenance of VA schools under the new SCA programme
- understand the emerging and enduring concerns of Archdiocesan academies with regard to their condition and fabric
- consolidate successes in our existing sixth form colleges, and build on the strengths in our schools with sixth forms
- build new schools where, and if, they are needed.

Section 5: Agile professional learning and formation for all staff

‘Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.’ (1 Cor 12:4-11)

All successful organisations recognise the need to invest in their key resource – the staff. The Education Commission is uniquely placed to be influential with staff in the Archdiocese’s schools with regard to their professional learning. However, there are many partner organisations who are simply better placed to deliver training, coaching and mentoring and other aspects of professional learning. The Commission does not have the capacity to replicate this activity; nor should it. Initial teacher education is best left to those who have expertise and experience in the field. So, too, with executive leadership models. However, this is a rapidly growing area of need in the Archdiocese but one for which there is currently a limited supply of wisdom. We need to contribute to the development of this as a field of legitimate leadership and management training.

This is a good example of where our work needs to draw on the best of what is known currently, but is also sufficiently agile to be able to respond in a timely manner to newly emerging professional needs.

As such, it makes sense to identify emerging and enduring professional learning needs, identify where there is existing knowledge or interesting practice that may be illuminative, exploit or create networks wherein professional learning objectives may be achieved, and then evaluate the effectiveness of these professional learning episodes in the new situations that our staff face.

Using this model, over the next ten years, the Education Commission will:

- collaborate with all stakeholders to establish priorities of learning need – this is a short term goal to ensure the rest of the strategy is fit for purpose
- support the CES’ hub model within the *Formatio* strategy.
- strengthen its strategic partnerships with providers of initial teacher education
- strengthen its strategic partnerships with those who provide formal professional learning opportunities for staff at all levels
- build on existing partnerships aimed at spotting potential teaching talent in our schools
- build on existing partnerships aimed at identifying teaching talent elsewhere, notably, Ireland, overseas territories, Catholics in non-Catholic schools
- use all available means to strengthen the formation and training of non-Catholic personnel, especially those in leadership roles
- create a specific professional learning offer from the Education Commission with regard to matters of the Catholic Life of schools
- seek to influence the pedagogic aspects of the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies currently offered by the Centre for Catholic Formation
- exploit the known benefits of *e*learning, *i*learning, and/ or handheld learning (*m*learning) to make professional learning ‘just-in-time’ for busy people.

Section 6: An adaptive Education Commission structure

'God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.' (Ps 4:1-3)

The Archdiocese has been well-served by 'dedicated and hard-working staff' (Gilbert, 2018) based at the Education Commission's offices in Orpington. However, the team faces a period of turbulence, caused by changes in personnel, the need for relocation, the blurring of edges between some job roles, and a wide range of external phenomena over which we have no control. Leaders in the Education Commission need to be mindful of these potential destabilisers. It is very likely that by the end of the life of this strategy, the personnel will be different and so will the structure.

This strategy will overlap certainly with the following phenomena which may well cause the Education Commission to realign aspects of its work and/or restructure how it operates:

- The appointment of a new Archbishop (2019)
- The publication of a new Curriculum Directory (2020)
- The centralisation of denominational inspections with a national inspectorate (2020)
- Political uncertainty, including the Brexit process, and a general election no later than May 2022.

Broadly speaking, historically, the Commission's work was divided into three main areas: Religious Education, spirituality and chaplaincy; Pupil place and estate planning; and Leadership and governance. Each team of officers was supported by experienced support personnel. Much of the expertise and 'know-how' is contained in the wisdom of the officers who have outlived a succession of Directors and Deputy Directors. Technology has been used as a tool to support processes. Its use has shifted to keep pace with, largely speaking, changes to the provision of ubiquitous and proprietary tools, rather than a needs-driven, coherent implementation of a bespoke system.

An exemplar

The dedicated staff have been hampered recently by the lack of a meaningful database. This is partly because of the vast array of information that the team both needs to, and has to, process. Changes in governance, for example, create a relentless need to update information assets. Changes to practice caused by the General Data Protection Requirement (GDPR) rendered one, relatively costly, database redundant. Inconsistent rules relating to 'read-write' permissions, and weak back-up or disaster-recovery processes, have also threatened the integrity of the data. All of this needs to be re-professionalised.

The integration of the Education Commission system with the rcaos.org.uk domain has been a positive start in streamlining and rationalising those assets. There have been cost-savings as a result. Moreover, growing technological capability in the team has meant that the Commission is now able to manage its own website, gather data through the careful use of online forms, and start to digitise many of the currently paper-based assets¹. This is essential if a 21st Century Education Commission is going to service 21st Century schools successfully.

The implication of these symbolic adaptations to the ways of working in the Education Commission, point to wider change across all aspects of its operation. This is inevitable as the passage of time means that some existing members of staff come towards the end of their period of dedicated and celebrated service.

¹ As and when need arises, one of the buildings officers is systematically collating all the documents, diagrams and plans that are 'held' with regard to the land, property and title holdings of the Archdiocese.

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This strategy will therefore provide the framework against which:

- job roles better match the emerging and/or shifting needs of the Education Commission
- all existing knowledge, know-how and information are gathered into one repository that supports easy retrieval
- as many tasks as can be automated are, leaving time for more human concerns and interactions
- demarcation between the sub-teams erodes to reflect the more adaptive and flexible realities facing school leaders
- contemporary working practices support efficiencies in terms of cost, time and travel, whilst maintaining family-friendly policies and processes
- a cost-effective relocation enables the Education Commission to exercise its duties and responsibilities more easily and become more accessible to its stakeholders.

In practical terms, the following are job roles currently not covered within the existing structure and suite of job descriptions. They are, however, deemed essential if the work of the Education Commission is to keep pace with externally driven changes and the current turbulence facing the education system at large. They reflect the way work is changing across society, as a whole, and are not just the product of an over-active Director's imagination.

1. Media and communications officer – we need to make better use of social media and online modes of communication.
2. Finance administrator – with a specific remit to support the LCVAP process, as it shifts into the 'SCA' process and we take responsibility for all the maintenance work across the VA schools in 14 local authorities.

Other job roles may well emerge as the strategy rolls out. For example, we may need to appoint someone with a singular focus on school standards. This would become even more likely if we continue to be held to account by local authorities, the Department for Education or the Regional Schools Commissioner, as existing school systems leadership arrangements fail to deliver the kind of improvements set out in the rhetoric of all political parties. We may need to appoint a Chief Inspector, if there is a strengthening of the section 48 process and it does, as is intended, become a centrally organised operation, with local management. This might not be a task that could be left to an administrator.

It is unlikely that the Education Commission could function on any less than the existing staffing establishment, given its existing remit and breadth of work. But, this strategy is also intended to support sustainable growth so that any further recruitment is underpinned by full cost coverage, with no increased impact on the Archdiocese's overall staffing budget. In keeping with contemporaneous workplace trends, the Education Commission will be open, across the next ten years, to a range of employment agreements, including internships, secondments, fixed-term contracts, as well as all manner of part-time contracts. In this, we will take account of employment best practice, legitimate concerns about modern slavery and will eschew 'zero-hours contracts'.

Annex 1: Principles for academisation (proposed)

- The Archdiocese will not any longer support new single academy trusts:
 - as constrained by apparent Department for Education (DfE) policy and apparent Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) practice
 - allied to concerns with regard to the sustainability of stand-alone academies
- The Archdiocese will work to incorporate existing single academy trusts into geographically sensible multi-academy trusts (MATs) or geographical clusters of catholic schools
 - this will be undertaken on a case by case basis and not under an overarching, one-size-fits-all plan
- The Archdiocese will support schools who wish to explore becoming an academy providing they:
 - only consider joining a MAT with a Catholic foundation
 - set out clearly a rationale for the type and quality of Catholic education they intend to provide and how this will make a greater contribution to the individual and collective strength of schools and the common good
 - present outline plans for academisation to the Education Commission at an early stage of their development
 - are likely to meet all the Archdiocesan prerequisites for academy status and after a period and process of due diligence to be determined by the Education Commission
 - can demonstrate clearly, and within legal norms, that the land and buildings in which the proposed academy is to be conducted are in the ownership of the proposer, or that trustees of said land and property consent, in principle, to those assets being transferred to the company owning the proposed academy
 - present financially sustainable plans which include a minimum of seven schools, and/or pupil cohorts totalling 3,000+
 - “Multi-academy trusts (and opted-in chains) with 5 or more academies and at least 3,000 pupils will continue to receive a school condition allocation for their academies.” (DfE [Conditions Funding Document 2018](#))
- All applications will be made to the Director of the Diocesan Education Commission and the final decision will be made by the Trustees of the Archdiocese of Southwark.
- All senior leadership positions in Archdiocesan supported MATs will be recruited against best practice human resources (HR) principles, through open and competitive application processes and in keeping with the Bishops Conference selection policies. Candidates will be expected to have qualified teacher status and experience of leading Catholic schools.
- The Archbishop will continue to appoint the members of the company who own the MAT, as well as the Foundation Governors and Directors, who will form a majority. It is expected that the Chair of any MAT, Trust or Board of Directors or Governors will be a Foundation appointment. It is expected that all the Archbishop’s appointees will:
 - know and implement the Bishop’s policies on education, including Religious Education
 - represent those policies to the MAT

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- understand and promote the distinctive nature of Catholic education
 - act for the good of Catholic education as a whole within the Archdiocese
 - respond to the needs of the Catholic community as a whole, as represented by the Bishop
 - secure the long-term future of Catholic education
 - always act in accordance with the mind of the Bishop.
- Each MAT will be required to provide information that contributes to the Education Commission's regular monitoring and evaluation framework and an annual report to the members of the company.