

National Board of Catholic Women

Education Committee

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR THE ELECTION 2024

This is not an official document and not to be confused with the election document that Patricia is preparing. This document was put together to aid the process but considering the recent directive of DfE “Faith school designation reforms” consultation, it was thought that it might help members to better understand the current debates and responses surrounding education.

- 1) Secularism and The Government: “A landmark review into faith engagement has found the government needs to recognise faith groups as a force for good.”**

The Bloom Review: ***Does government “do God?”***, a report commissioned in 2023 by the government to look at how government engages with faith groups, “recognises and affirms the incredible contribution that faith, people of faith and places of worship make to society”

[Government needs to better understand faith, independent review claims - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-needs-to-better-understand-faith-independent-review-claims)
(www.gov.uk)

Question one

How can MPs ensure that the findings of the Bloom Review are acted on and cited in Parliament to counter challenge those prominent MPs who appear to be influenced by the secular narrative which claims that faith has no place in school?

Background information and context for the question

(The secularist agenda is trying to undermine the right of Catholic parents to choose a catholic school for their children. Paul Barber of the CES writes “Within a universal right to education for all, Christians have a right to a Christian education, to assist them to become mature Christian adults and thereby to help shape the world.”

The Humanist Society presents a critical voice of Catholic Education observing and scrutinising government policy and school curriculums to make its case that either Humanism should be given as equal a place in a Faith school’s curriculum as the actual belief system itself, or that Faith Schools should not have any place in a secular society, as they give rise to discrimination.

2) Faith School Admissions Capped at 50%.

“faith can have incredibly positive impacts on personal well-being, success and feelings of belonging” Bloom Review

“true education is defined as the complete formation of the whole person, ordered towards the pupils eternal destiny, as well as the common good of society. The harmonious development of physical, moral and intellectual talents, nurturing a sense of responsibility and the right use of freedom and formation to take an active part in social life are key components. Declaration “ Gravissimum Educationis cited by Paul Barber- CES

[Gravissimum educationis \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/documents/gravissimum_educationis_en.html)

Question 2

Given that evidence suggests that faith and the expression of it, its tenets and its ability to furnish adherents and in particular children with a moral compass which is vital for personal and social well-being, how will the MP ensure that the cap on admissions, currently at 50% , is fair to Faith schools, recognising that the buildings and land of Catholic schools, are the property of the Church and that upkeep is, in part, paid for by the church; and also that consideration is given to the removal of the 50% cap for faith based free schools? (See below response by Bishop Stock)

Context

Kemi Badenoch and opposition to government’s plan to remove cap on faith based free schools

[Government plans to lift faith-based admissions cap on free schools in England | Evening Standard](#)

Humanists U. K. are making a case that the government, should not remove the 50% Cap on Faith Schools, which allows Catholic schools to select/ reserve 50% of its places for Catholic pupils, providing the remaining 50% is open to the wider community. The Bishops of England and Wales have argued that Catholic students must not be turned away from their own schools. These buildings are the property of the Church, and their upkeep is, in part, paid for by the Church. Therefore, parish communities directly contribute to their existence.

Paul Barber writes: “within a universal right to education for all, Christians have a right to a Christian education, to assist them to become mature Christian adults and thereby help to shape the world. Parents have a serious obligation to educate their children, and the right to be recognised and assisted by the State as their primary and principal educators”. Parents must be “truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children” and government should “always keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity so there is no kind of school monopoly.”

The Right Reverend Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds and Chairman of the Catholic Education Service (CES), has welcomed the decision by the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, to lift the cap on new free schools in England.

The decision paves the way for Catholic free schools to open, having previously been excluded under the 50 percent cap or 'rule' which would have forced schools to turn away some Catholic pupils.

Bishop Stock said: "These proposals are welcome. Dioceses are well placed to respond to differing local educational demands around the country, including the provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Parents can welcome this also.

"Catholic education not only provides a high performing school sector and promotes the formation of children in values and virtues; it is more ethnically diverse than other schools, educates more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds, and builds social cohesion within our communities."

The Department for Education also has plans to enable new faith-based academies for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Catholic Church has a long history of SEND provision, and at present there are seven non-maintained Catholic SEND schools, three other independent Catholic SEND schools, and 16 other Catholic independent schools which are approved for SEND provision. 01 May 2024

3) Faith Schools and Division in Society

Journalist Emma Duncan writing in The Times claims "the path to a more tolerant, socially cohesive society has to be worked for: faith schools undermine it"

She continues, "There is no educational upside to set against the glaring societal downside: they divide communities. And that applies not just to the few Jewish schools that Ofsted has found to discriminate against girls or the Muslim ones found to render pupils "vulnerable to extremist influences", but the vast majority that do a decent job.

Question 3

Given that the latest School census statistics show that ethnic minorities make up 45.5% of Catholic school intake, compared to an English state school average of 37.4% , and of these 10.8% of non-Catholic pupils are Muslim, arguably proving that RC schools promote cohesion rather than undermine cohesion, how can the MP ensure that these figures can be quoted in Parliament when the debate turns to the topic of schools and cohesiveness?

[CESDigestEngland2023.pdf \(cescensus.org.uk\)](https://www.cescensus.org.uk/CESDigestEngland2023.pdf)

Context

Times journalist Emma Duncan is highly influential and highly critical of faith schools, which she claims are undermining the common good and attempts to foster community cohesion. Writing in the Times April 2024 she claims the following "the proportion of people who believe in God in this country is below 50%, yet faith schools have proliferated and now make up 37% of primaries and 18% of secondaries." (The Times cited in the "Best articles: Britain" page of The Week 27th April 2024)

What is missing from her article is the fact that Catholic schools, land and are the property of the church and that Catholic schools educate more than 850,000 pupils, making up 9% of the state funded sector. The Catholic Church is the biggest provider of secondary education and the second largest provider of primary education overall.

Census figures are collated from adults who have been allowed to form their opinions in a more holistic way, by this is meant that adults born in this country have been exposed to both the religious and the secular within the education system and have ultimately made their choice to either believe or not. If children's voices were included in her statistics, then the figures may be slightly different as children often appear to be wide-open to the numinous. Thus, to deny the child the same experience of being exposed to a rounded education system which explores the concept of God along with other belief systems including atheism and agnosticism, which current educational syllabuses include, would be to narrow their developmental process and deny them the same opportunity of accepting or rejecting the concept of God as the adults who have gone before them. Self-determination and an existential choice are part of the maturation process. Catholic schools do not brainwash, they are monitored by a robust OFSTED and whilst in Catholic Schools up to GCSE 10% of teaching time is devoted to RE , the syllabuses are broad and balanced to allow informed debate, supporting each child as they make their own mind up as to belief in God. Furthermore, the opt out option from worship is always available, however is very seldom taken up -indeed Census data indicates that only 0.04 pupils exercise the right to withdraw.

4) Faith Schools, Exam results and Selective Intake

“Faith schools get better exam results, but that’s only because their selective admission policies mean they take in fewer poorer children.” Emma Duncan Times April 2024

“Today Catholic education outperforms national GCSE averages for English, Maths and Religious Education by up to seven percentage points, a testament to the sector’s success given the much higher proportion of pupils coming from the most deprived households in the country.” CES statistics

Question 4

Given the obvious disparity between the statements, and the Census statistics which reveal that just under a fifth of all pupils in Catholic education meet the highest national deprivation criteria, compared to a 12.8% England average, which means that Catholic Schools take in 50% more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds than the state sector, and a quarter fewer pupils from the more affluent areas attend Catholic schools than do those in the State sector, how will the MP ensure that the correct picture is given in debate to ?

Information and Context: Catholic Schools and The Common Good.

It is a well-known fact that the Catholic Church has a rich jewel in its crown, which is Catholic Social Teaching. Formed from Scripture and tradition, and over many decades, this teaching

manifests itself in seven key areas, which are designed to protect the dignity of the person. Key to this debate is Option for the Poor, a principal of Catholic social teaching which underpins every expression of Catholicism including education. Catholics have a duty to help the poor: "'The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition.' This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. . . . 'Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation'." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2444, 2448, quoting *Centesimus annus*, no. 57, and *Libertatis conscientia*, no. 68) (American Bishop's Conference website)

"Far from being inward-looking, Catholic schools aim to develop in pupils the desire and ability to contribute constructively to worldly affairs simultaneously with their readiness to respond to the call to conversion and to perfection. Such a positive contribution entails not only a willingness to give themselves wholeheartedly and energetically to the common tasks of safeguarding human welfare, but also the capacity to criticise prophetically prevailing priorities and power structures where these seem misguided and undermining of the common good. Individuals and communities outside the church will also, of course, contribute in significant ways to the critique of social policies, thus upholding the common good. Their challenges will sometimes be allied to those of the churches against secular (or other religious) decisions and sometimes they will be directed against the churches where these are perceived to lose sight of the common good, perhaps in seeking to protect their own interests at its expense. "

Catholic Education Distinctive and Exclusive by John Sullivan 2021

5) Catholic Education and R.E.

" Amid a national Religious Education (RE) teacher shortage we welcome the Bloom Review and is clear evidence that RE is vital for children and young people to learn" CES statement

Baroness Barran speaks "schools with a religious character more generally, ----- give children a moral compass, guiding them with values that will be integral not only through their school journey, but beyond that into adult hood, into the workforce and into society."

In his preface, Bishop Marcus writes: "As well as seeking to assist parents with the education and religious formation of their children, Catholic schools strive also to be of service to society. Religious education plays its part in this endeavour by enabling all pupils to be confident and secure in their religious faith and knowledgeable and respectful of other religions, and so play a crucial role in building a **cohesive society**. "This new edition of the Religious Education Directory strives to embody these inspiring objectives."

Paul Barber writes: "Today Catholic education outperforms national GCSE averages for English, maths and religious education by up to 7 percentage points."

Question 5:

Given such overwhelming support for R.E. in schools, how can the Government protect the right of the Catholic school to determine its own RE syllabus, and to reserve 10% of teaching time for the subject in the face of the demands of the Humanists UK and the National Secular Society both of which are demanding the syllabuses give more weight to a secular world view?

Context:

The New Religious Education Directory for 2025 has been unveiled, but criticised from the Humanist Society that it doesn't give enough to its own position.

<https://catholiceducation.org.uk/about-us/news-items/item/1003733-new-religious-education-directory-launched-by-catholic-education-service---> **Note : major religions are studied at Primary and Key Stage 3, with a requirement for another religion in addition to Catholicism be studied in more depth at GCSE.**

</humanists.uk/campaigns/schools-and-education/school-curriculum/religious-education/>

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/09/end-religious-discrimination-in-education-nss-urges-equality-commission>