



Report of the Meeting of the Education Committee

Venue: Remotely (via Zoom)

Date: 17th March 2021, 10.45am–12.15pm

Part A

Attendance

Members: Rt Rev Richard Moth (+RM), Rev Mgr Canon Tony Barry (MgrTB) (Chair), Sarah Clayton (SClay), Bernadette Connor (BC), Sarah Conrad (SCon), Maria Cowler (MC), Joe Davies (JD), Michael Ferry (MFer), Margaret Fraher (MFra), Sarah Kilmartin (SK), John Lydon (JL), Rev Canon Tim Madeley (CanTM), Rev Tony Milner (FrTMil), Simon Parr (SP) (Secretary), Steve Tindall (ST).

Officers in attendance: Sarah Feist (SF).

1. Opening Prayer and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Marie Ryan (MR) and Annie Sutton (AS). Bishop Richard led an opening prayer. Marie and her family were a particular focus.

It was Bernadette's last meeting of the Committee. On behalf of the Committee, +RM thanked BC for her exemplary care of children and staff during her forty years in Catholic education as teacher, headteacher and Deputy Director of the Education Service. The Bishop expressed the Committee's deep gratitude to Bernadette. All members wished her well for the future.

2. Report of the meeting of 25 November 2020

The report of the 25 November 2020 of the Diocesan Education Committee was accepted as a true record.

3. Matters arising from the Report

There were no matters arising.

4. Supporting Diocesan Schools Post-Lockdown: Some Questions for the Education Committee's Consideration and Discussion

BC introduced this item. During the Covid period, despite significant challenges, remarkable things have taken place in our schools. We need to maximise our learning from the experience. In break-out groups Committee members were invited to examine a number of questions that focused on 'Looking Back', 'Looking Forward' and what schools want or need from the Education Service post- lockdown to enable the DES to best support school communities.

Key points in relation to the 'Looking Back' questions included:

- We have all been experiencing the same thing- it is worth taking time to acknowledge how we have been doing.
- There needs to be a period of restoration and renewal.
- Connection is vital – schools must not go straight back to doing things on their own – they must build on / keep collaborating.
- Parents do not always understand the term 'wellbeing' and that has caused some schools problems with parents thinking their children need to be happy all the time. There are also things that 'we cannot make better'.
- The ethos of our Catholic schools has helped many young people as we are communities of joy and hope and we believe that Christ walks beside us through times of difficulties.
- SClay said she has been holding assemblies in the school hall – introducing the children back to what it is 'we do'.
- The Rainbows programme will be helpful for those who have had a difficult time during lockdown.
- Important to consider creating a wellbeing package for headteachers, particularly new headteachers.
- Need to consider an induction package – how is that different from LA provision? – how is it different in Catholic schools?
- In some cases, the parish links have been weakened by the pandemic – some parish priests not able to go into schools. This will need building up again.
- Important to learn from schools where the links with the parish have been strengthened by the pandemic experience.
- Important that the Parish Priest is aware of / supports the Headteacher's (HT) wellbeing – ask how the HT is, pray with the HT, etc.
- Ofsted are still making visits – this does not help.
- This would be an ideal time for the Government to review the examination system for secondary schools.
- Important to remember the small things – all about building back relationships. Is it easier for primary schools to do this? Maybe talk to secondary school colleagues to see

what needs to be taught before children move on to secondary school? How have secondary schools engaged with primary schools?

- Reference was made to a White Paper that is expected shortly – where potentially single-form entry Primary schools may be encouraged to become academies.
- Imperative that we put mental health and wellbeing at the heart of everything we do.
- We should be resistant to the ‘narrative of catastrophe’ used by the media and even the Government, as to the desperate need to catch up. This is not helpful.
- Headteachers need to take time to consider what the key principles are that they believe in. Headteachers need to determine what the key priorities are – important not to lose that.
- Following on from the above, professional judgement is a process to go through carefully. It is important to take things at the right speed, and not be driven by the external messages of trying to catch up, accelerating things and age relatedness. School Leaders need to have the courage to prioritise the most important elements. It was more important to stick to core principles, build relationships and rebuild the community, right at the heart.
- It is an opportunity for schools to reconsider or refocus on what they believe are their main priorities in terms of curriculum design and not necessarily be led by secular standards of school performance such as league tables. It was acknowledged that there are potential consequences with this.
- The question however is whether the Government will be more open to doing things differently. Nick Gibb (Minister of State for School Standards) remains completely committed to the Ebacc. While various organisations have said that this is an opportunity for reform, positive moves from the DfE have not yet been seen. In fact, it is more likely that Government will probably continue in the same vein and perhaps use performance data to force schools to become academies.
- The conversation reflects the challenges schools are experiencing. Communities have been fragmented and wellbeing has been affected. This has further affected the ability to learn. There is a tension between the different directions that schools are pulled; between what the Government is pushing and what school leaders have in their hearts as the best way forward.
- ST referred to a recent study across 24 European countries where UK 15-year-olds had the lowest level of life satisfaction and the highest level of fear/anxiety. If the Government is not listening to the underlying message, there is a problem. While some boxes will need to be ticked, schools have to put the emotional, physical and emotional wellbeing of students and staff at the centre of all that they do. It is a chance for the teaching profession to clearly say what is needed for the children they serve. If everything continues to be governed by numbers and pupils are forced through hoops, UK students will remain bottom of satisfaction surveys in ten years’ time.

Key points in relation to the 'Looking Forward' questions and what schools may want or need from the Education Service included:

- There was appreciation in the way that Marie had kept in touch with headteachers personally, and how this continuing collaboration is important. Xavier and Bosco CETs do this for some schools; the deanery structure can similarly provide for others.
- Continued support with RSE and inspections would be important.
- Schools want the DES to continue to support schools in the way that they have been – "it is done so well".
- Collaboration is vital – all agreed how important this is for schools.
- Deanery model does not always provide holistic support – can sometimes focus only on the Catholic dimension with a narrow deanery agenda. It is important that deanery meetings broaden their focus to look at leadership, staffing, standards, curriculum etc. Schools have different partnerships – should not compartmentalise what is discussed in each. It was suggested that this could be discussed further at Primary Steering.
- Face to face training is ideal but one advantage of the Covid situation has been the ability for staff and governors to attend CPD online and this has allowed some staff / governors to attend when previously they might not have been able to due to distance etc. There is also the advantage that schools do not need to implement supply cover. In future, a blended offer of CPD was suggested. It was confirmed that the DES has already looked at this and a blended offer would continue.
- What schools need at the moment is the opportunity for headteachers to be able to get together e.g. at conferences, and teachers to get together in clusters etc.
- The wellbeing for headteachers can look very different from school to school. It is important for each headteacher to say what they really need. The idea of coaching and supporting each other as headteachers has been productive and useful for some. This allows the ability to talk through any fears and anxieties with someone else who is not in that particular school environment or indeed the locality. To address this the Education Service could look to create a 'community of coaches'. It was suggested to perhaps look internally (ie within the Diocese) first for this expertise.
- SCon said that Sr Judith Russi had run Spiritual Direction training which she had found very helpful and thought other headteachers would too. This was not the same as coaching but would complement it. MgrTB said that the Diocese is blessed with resources and individuals around spiritual direction. +RM said that Jon Harman and the Formation team are also looking to run an in-house Spiritual Direction course in the next year or so.
- Schools will need diocesan backing if they prioritise subjects and activities that will help children/young people after lockdown that are not related to performance related measures. This would also need to be taken into account for inspections.
- There was discussion on the principle of the Diocese providing an opportunity or forum for schools to provide reflection on the questions that have been discussed. St Mary's

University had carried out a survey. Wellbeing, for example, appeared prominently as a subject. JL was willing to provide the survey as a potential template, subject to agreement with his line manager. However, +RM and other Committee members highlighted that if this was provided, it would need to be done with extreme sensitivity (i.e. not be a burden to schools and therefore actually work against wellbeing).

5. Diocesan Education Service Updates

- a. Staff: The DES has welcomed the three part-time Primary and Secondary Advisers - Claire, Anna and Emma to the team. All are working excellently.
- b. CPD: training has been carried out online during the pandemic. The intention is for a blended approach from September.
- c. RSE: SF is in communication nationally on RSE; the advice to schools is to get in touch with the DES with any questions or queries. From the catch-up calls the DES has had with schools, the feedback is that there have been excellent responses from parents about the RSE programmes. Based on the current curriculum, SF is not aware of any parents that do not want their child involved with the RSE teaching and learning.
- d. CSI Inspections: the situation remains that the DES are not starting Catholic School Inspections until September. However, the DES is offering Catholic Life and RE ('CARE') visits to schools via Zoom that wish to take them up.
- e. Admissions: All schools have now sent the DES their 2022-23 determined admission arrangements.
- f. Place Planning - Secondary: with the high birth rates that are now working through, diocesan secondary schools remain extremely popular with high first preference numbers across the board. The DES is currently working the Surrey County Council and the school to expand St Andrew's in Leatherhead.
- g. Place Planning - Primary: Low birth rates are being felt generally in schools in all four local authorities. There are some significant surpluses. These are not everywhere but in pockets. Brighton & Hove is one of a number of examples. Related to this is a decline in baptism numbers. From 2003-2014, the average number of baptisms across the diocese was approximately 2,400. However, the average over the last five years has seen a 17% decline to approximately 2,000. The 2019 figure was 1,794. The question is whether this is solely around a lower birth rate or if there is an accompanying further drop in demand from Catholic parents. This is something to keep an eye on, particularly if Catholic parents have been 'lost' during the pandemic. MgrTB said this might be a

topic we need to come back to in the future and was a subject on the agenda of his governing body last night. +RM raised the fact that large numbers of housing are planned in areas such as Ifield near Crawley and north of Horsham.

6. Any Other Business

- i. SK: a recruitment campaign was about to start this week to fill the position of Deputy Director of the Education Service from September. A flyer and Candidate Pack, including the job description, would be posted on the diocesan website shortly.

7. To set dates for Committee meetings for Spring 2022

Following consultation with the Bishop's diary, the following meeting of the Committee has been scheduled:

Spring 2022: Wednesday 23rd March 2022 10.45am – 12.45pm