

CES Press Release

Date Published: 29/08/2008



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Accord members enjoy the freedom to express their views, and we respect this right, but it is exasperating to read that they would deny others the freedom to continue to offer schools with a religious character or impede those of a particular faith from obtaining such an education.

There are over 6,000 schools with a religious character in this country, accounting for one third of all schools. They have proved their success both in terms of personal development and high academic standards and this is evident in their popularity. Faith in the System, published only a year ago, shows the Government's backing for faith schools, and the representatives of the faith school providers continue to come together to support one another and their ongoing contribution to schooling nationally. Their constituent faith communities made up of tax payers like any other continue to contribute financially to all the nation's schools.

Good faith schools help young people in many different ways, not least to know more about religion and its place in their lives. But just as our schools give pupils the opportunity to look to their inner self, they urge and accompany young people on the quest to know and appreciate others, both in their differences and in their similarities. The development of positive attitudes towards self and others found in faith schools helps to build cohesion across society, not division.

It is a shame that at a time when we should all want to focus on getting the new academic year off to a good start we are diverted by hoary old chestnuts, misleading about what faith schools are, who they are for, and what they do. In the Catholic sector we are going to continue putting our backs into working for the best possible outcomes for each pupil in our care and for the wellbeing of society; instead of distracting us from something that works well and benefits many, let us just get on with the job and respect our freedom and rights of equality.

ENDS

Oona Stannard

Chief Executive and Director

Catholic Education Service for England and Wales

To contact the CES please call 0207 901 4880.

Notes to Editors:

For more information about Faith in the System please visit the CES website www.cesew.org.uk/faithinthefsystem.

Faith in the System was published by DCSF and launched at the British Library on Monday 10th September 2007 by Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls. The Catholic Church was represented by: Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster; Archbishop Vincent Nichols, Chair of the Bishops' Conference Department for Education and Formation; Oona Stannard, Chief Executive of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales.

St Bonaventure's Catholic Comprehensive School, London Borough of Newham, is one of six case studies promoted in Faith in the System. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust awarded St Bonaventure's the Cultural Diversity Award 2006 and Ofsted has publicly commended the cultural diversity of the school and the richness of its partnerships.